

# **PROVERBS**

**by Christine Walton**

**Grades 5-6  
Year 2  
Quarter 4**



# **WISDOM, part 1**

**Proverbs 1:1-9, 20-33; 8:1-36; 4:7; 16:16**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would learn what proverbs are, and the importance of wisdom.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 4:7** - “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

**Proverbs 16:16** - “How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding than silver!”

## **Lesson Background**

“A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” “A stitch in time saves nine.” Woven into almost every culture are proverbs, pithy sayings that encapsulate wisdom learned through the ages. These adages are generally short and practical, expressing truths that are seemingly obvious to anyone who has lived very long, but are often neglected in actual practice. The Bible also contains proverbs, mostly written and/or compiled by Solomon. But God’s sayings are more than practical maxims, for they express moral law rooted in His character.

The book of Proverbs speaks to many aspects of life, from friendship and family relationships to the use of the tongue, to anger, pride, sloth and even the pitfalls of adultery and drunkenness. The proverbs are generally not arranged by topic, although occasionally several verses about the same subject are grouped together, and there are a few extended passages. Proverbs looks at a cross-section of life with a cast of characters that includes the wise, the fool (one who is morally deficient, not a person of low I.Q.), the simple (one without moral foundation who is hence easily swayed to evil), the righteous, the wicked (one who is

inherently and deliberately evil), the adulteress, the sluggard, the mocker, the rich, the poor, the proud, and the drunkard.

Wisdom is one of the major themes of Proverbs. There are admonitions to get wisdom, explanations of the advantages of wisdom, advice on how to get wisdom, descriptions of how wise people act, and discussion of the relationship of wisdom to the fear of the Lord. The wise man is contrasted with the fool. Wisdom is even personified as a woman who speaks, inviting others to heed her advice and seeking those who will listen. Wisdom is not a hermit learned in abstract esoterica, but one who interacts with life; she does not hide in a corner, but makes her great value (more precious than rubies - Proverbs 8:10-11) known in the marketplace and at the gates of the city (1:20-21; 8:2-3). She calls out to all (Proverbs 8:4), but many refuse to listen, and so she laughs at the disaster fools bring upon themselves by their persistent obduracy (Proverbs 1:26). The Lord appointed wisdom as the first of His works (Proverbs 8:22), and wisdom was as a craftsman at the Creator's side as He made the universe (Proverbs 8:22-31). Today your class will study this personification of wisdom, as well as learning about proverbs in general. Next week you will learn about other aspects of this subject. May your study motivate you to seek the true wisdom found only in God Himself (Colossians 2:3; I Corinthians 1:24-25).

## Lesson Procedure

Introduce your lessons as follows. Ask your class if they have ever heard such expressions as "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched" or "Haste makes waste." Discuss what proverbs are and then play a proverb matching game. Divide the class into two teams and write the proverbs on slips of paper, which you lay on a table or attach to a board or wall. As you read the meaning of a proverb, a member of each team runs to the proverbs and selects one. The person who chooses the correct proverb first gets to keep it for his team, and the team with the most correct proverbs wins. Alternately, give each team a list of all the meanings (or slips of paper each with a meaning) and slips of paper with the proverbs written on them. The first team to match all the proverbs and their meanings correctly wins (this version of the game may also be done individually with slips of paper or as a worksheet).

Suggested proverbs:

- A penny saved is a penny earned.
- Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.
- A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
- A stitch in time saves nine.
- Look before you leap.
- Slow and steady wins the race.
- The early bird catches the worm.
- Time flies when you're having fun.
- Out of the frying pan into the fire.
- The pot calling the kettle black.
- Haste makes waste.
- The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.
- People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
- Don't despise someone until you've walked a mile in his shoes.

### Suggested meanings:

- If you don't spend your money, you won't have to work for more.
- You can't be sure of anything until it is done.
- It's better to stick with the sure thing you have than to go after something better you hope to get.
- It's better to catch a problem early than wait until it gets worse and worse.
- Investigate what's ahead before you venture to try something.
- If you want to do well, do things carefully, not quickly.
- The first person to do something gets the prize.
- Enjoyable times seem to speed by.
- Going from one bad thing to something even worse.
- Someone criticizing someone when he is just as bad himself.
- You will make a mess of something if you try to do it too quickly.
- Other people's circumstances always look better than yours.
- Don't attack someone verbally or otherwise if you yourself are vulnerable.
- Don't look down on someone unless you know what it is like to be in his situation.

Tell your class that the Bible also contains proverbs, but that God's proverbs are not just practical advice, but moral counsel based in His character. Tell your students about the book of Proverbs in general and then read Proverbs 1:1-9. Inform your students that you have a special guest to bring to the class today. Leave the room briefly and come back dressed in graduation robes and mortarboard (or similar attire; or actually bring in a woman "guest speaker" so garbed). Introduce yourself (or your guest) as "Wisdom" and dramatically read Proverbs 1:20-33 and Proverbs 8:1-36. Be very expressive, using arm gestures and walking about the room a bit. Then, thank the class for allowing you to visit, say you must go and tell others the importance of wisdom, and leave. Return (without Wisdom clothes) and discuss what they remember of what their visitor said. Explain what is meant by *personification* and how God used this literary technique in Proverbs to portray wisdom. Ask them who is the true source of wisdom. Read Colossians 2:3 and I Corinthians 1:24-25. Write Proverbs 4:7 and Proverbs 16:16 on the board and have the class read them aloud. Discuss their meaning and work on memorizing one or both of these verses.

### Questions on Proverbs 1:1-9

- Who wrote the book of Proverbs?
- Why did he write the proverbs [give several reasons]?
- Ironically, who are those who will learn from the proverbs?
- What is the beginning of knowledge?

### Questions on Proverbs 1:20-33

- Where does wisdom make herself known?
- How do the simple, mockers, and fools treat wisdom?
- How does wisdom then respond to them?
- What will be the result of their hatred of knowledge?

### Questions on Proverbs 8:1-36

- Again, where does wisdom make herself known? Does she do so unobtrusively?
- To whom does wisdom speak?
- What are wisdom's words like? How valuable are they?
- What does wisdom hate?

- Who will find wisdom?
- From where did wisdom come? When did she come into being?
- What were some of the acts of creation with which wisdom was involved?
- What are the benefits of finding wisdom?

## **Activity**

Choose activities from the Activity Book for this quarter. Various art projects, which can incorporate verses from Proverbs, work well in this unit of study. It would be beneficial for your students to make a Proverbs booklet in which they write their favorite proverbs for the quarter. Many proverbs lend themselves to pictorial representations that can be put in their booklets or made into individual artworks. Your class can make a mural (give each student a section on which to work) of these pictures, favorite verses and/or characterizations of characters from Proverbs (the fool, the sluggard, etc.).

## **WISDOM, part 2**

### **Lesson Aim**

That your students would learn the value of wisdom and the importance of fearing the Lord.

### **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 9:10** - “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

### **Lesson Background**

[Scriptures used: Proverbs 1:7,26-33; 2:1-11; 3:5-8,11-18; 4:20-22; 8:13,17-21,35-36; 9:10; 10:14; 12:1; 14:12,27; 15:31-33; 16:6; 23:27; 24:3-7,13-14; Colossians 2:2-3; James 2:5-8]

If one were to ask the average man on the street what he wanted from life, he would likely answer, “Money; I want to make lots and lots of money,” or “Good health; if you don’t have your health you don’t have anything,” or perhaps, “I just want to be happy - to have a good marriage, well-behaved kids and friends who care.” Solomon chose none of these options when God offered to give him whatever he wanted. He replied, “Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” (I Kings 3:9). God was pleased with Solomon’s choice and blessed him for it. Solomon realized the importance of wisdom, and his book of Proverbs centers around this theme.

God gave Solomon more than he asked for when he chose discernment above all things. Following wisdom will in itself bring blessings, many of them the same as those God gave Solomon. Advantages of

following wisdom include: general blessing, protection and lack of fear, health and long life, riches and honor, the Lord's favor and a future hope. God promises to give wisdom to those who seek for it with all their heart (Proverbs 2:1-9; see also Jeremiah 29:13). James promises that if we ask for wisdom, God will give it to us, but we must ask in faith (James 1:5-8). We must turn to Christ for wisdom, for in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Fear here is often described as *reverential awe*. This is true, but often people who choose this definition equate the fear of the Lord with mere respect. God is love (I John 4:8) and has loved His people with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), but He is also a God of wrath; it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). The fear of the Lord should have some element of terror in it. As Mr. Beaver says in describing Aslan, the character who represents Christ in C.S. Lewis' classic, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, "Of course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's the King, I tell you" (Lewis, C.S., Macmillan, 1950; p. 75-76). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10) and turns people from the snares of death (Proverbs 14:27). Through the fear of the Lord, a man avoids evil (Proverbs 16:6). Things he would be tempted to do otherwise, he avoids when he thinks of standing before a holy and righteous God. The fear of the Lord will keep a person from envying sinners when he realizes how great and wonderful God is, and that the treasures of evil are glass baubles, by comparison temporary and worthless (Proverbs 23:17). We should be zealous for the fear of God - both that others would reverence the Lord and that He would deepen our fear, awe, and wonder of who He is. May we choose to fear God (Proverbs 1:29).

Wise people act differently from those around them, and as we study the book of Proverbs we will see many ways in which this is so. Solomon states specifically that those who are wise will have certain characteristics. First of all, they will trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5-6). The wise person perceives that his own understanding is limited and that God must be a part of every aspect of his life. He must not seek his own ways, but give his whole life to God and rest in Him, recognizing that He knows what is best. If he turns to the Lord and acknowledges Him, God will take care of him, guiding his steps. Those who fear the Lord hate evil (Proverbs 8:13; 3:7). They abhor anything that is contrary to the character of their holy God, whether it is found in the society around them or in their own lives.

The wise are humble (Proverbs 8:13; 3:7; 15:33). Many who receive adulation for their sagacity become proud and arrogant, for the wrong kind of knowledge puffs up (I Corinthians 8:1). We should not be wise in our own eyes (Proverbs 3:7) or compare ourselves with other people. The more we fear the Lord and realize His transcendence, His greatness, majesty, and holiness, the more we will realize that we deserve nothing but His wrath and will be humbly grateful for all He gives us. The wise and humble person will be willing to accept rebuke and discipline (Proverbs 3:11-12; 12:1; 15:31-32), for he realizes that the Lord disciplines those He loves (Proverbs 3:11-12; see also Hebrews 12:5-6). He will heed human correction as well and meekly listen to those who rebuke him (Proverbs 15:32-33). The wise will also store up knowledge (Proverbs 10:14) and be wise in speech (Proverbs 8:13).

Today your students will study the advantages of wisdom, wisdom and the fear of the Lord, how to get wisdom, and wise actions. As you and your students study the book of Proverbs, may you grow in wisdom and the fear of the Lord. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17). That is our prayer as well.



## Lesson Procedure

“What would you ask for if you could have anything in the world? God actually offered to give King Solomon whatever he wanted. Do you know what he asked for? Solomon asked for a discerning heart to govern his people. God was pleased with his request and so, besides making him a wise man unlike any who ever lived before or since, God granted him riches, honor, and the promise of a long life if Solomon would obey him. Solomon knew the value of wisdom, and he wrote the book of Proverbs focused upon it. What are the advantages of being wise? Let’s look up some Scripture verses that speak of the blessings of being wise.”

Have the members of your class pair off to look up several of the following passages and report back to the class the results of their investigation (this may also be done individually or in small groups). Write or have them write their findings on the board.

Proverbs 1:26-33  
Proverbs 2:10-11  
Proverbs 3:13-18  
Proverbs 4:20-22  
Proverbs 8:17-21

Proverbs 8:35-36  
Proverbs 14:12  
Proverbs 24:3-7  
Proverbs 24:13-14

### The advantages of wisdom

- General blessing (2:10; 3:18; 24:13-14)
- Peace, safety, and lack of fear (2:11; 3:17)
- Health and long life (3:16; 4:22; 8:35-36; 14:2)
- Riches and honor (3:16; 8:18-21; 24:4; note that 24:4 may not just be material)
- The Lord’s favor and future hope (8:35-36; 24:13-14).

“How does wisdom bring about these blessings (give examples from the verses above)? Wisdom is obviously a desirable thing, but how do we get wisdom? Let’s read some more verses that answer this and other questions about wisdom.” As a class, read and discuss the following verses:

Colossians 2:2-3 - From where do all wisdom and knowledge come?

Proverbs 2:1-11 - How should one seek wisdom? What will you find if you seek it with all your heart? Again, what is the source of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding? What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

James 1:5-8 - What should one do if he lacks wisdom? What will be the result of his asking God for wisdom? In what way should he ask?

Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 2:5 - What is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom? What is meant by “the fear of the Lord”?

Proverbs 14:27 - Can you give some examples of how wisdom might do this? The next verse points to a reason why this verse is so.

Proverbs 16:6b - Why would a man who fears the Lord avoid evil?

Proverbs 1:29 - We must choose whether or not we will fear the Lord.

Proverbs 23:17 - Sin may look enticing, but if we fear the Lord we will see that its promises are empty, so there is no reason at all to desire what sinners have.

“We have seen the importance of wisdom and its source. What, though, are wise people like? Proverbs lists a few characteristics and we will see more next week as we study the fool, who is the opposite of the wise person. What qualities of a wise, God-fearing person can you find in the following verses?”

Proverbs 3:5-8 - He trusts in the Lord, not himself, and acknowledges Him.

Proverbs 10:14 - He stores up knowledge.

Proverbs 3:11-12; 12:1; 15:31-33 - He willingly, even eagerly, submits to the Lord’s discipline and rebuke from others.

Proverbs 8:13 - He hates evil, pride, arrogance, and perverse speech.

“Think to yourself and ask God if there are any areas in your life where you are not acting wisely and where you can ask God to change you. Perhaps you can write this down in your Proverbs notebook and pray about it this week.” Characteristics include: trust in the Lord - Proverbs 3:5-6; hating evil - Proverbs 8:13; 3:7; wise speech - Proverbs 8:13; humility - Proverbs 8:13; 3:7; 15:33; storing up knowledge - Proverbs 10:14; and accepting rebuke and discipline - Proverbs 3:11-12; 12:1; 15:31-32; you may wish to write these characteristics on the board. Discuss the different characteristics with your students, perhaps focusing on a specific area and sharing how the Lord has helped you here. Pray with your class that God will help you to be wise.

# **THE FOOL, part 1**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students will learn the consequences of foolishness, some characteristics of a fool, and how to deal with him.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 19:3** - "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord."

## **Lesson Background**

An oft-maligned but actually very significant member of almost every royal court in the Middle Ages was the king's jester or fool. He was in constant attendance upon the king, even in confidential meetings, and his job was to cheer his master when he was in despair, bear the brunt of his vexation, and entertain his guests. The fool was despised as having very little intelligence, and though he might know little of mathematics and statecraft, he was often a person who understood men's hearts and would be the one who could give wise advice to the king when he would accept it from no one else. The fool in the Old Testament, however, is someone quite different. The word used does not indicate a court jester or even a stupid or ignorant person, but rather someone who is morally deficient. He is not an average person with the sinful tendencies of us all, nor an evil man who hates God and whose entire course of life is set to destroy what is good. Rather, he is self-centered, arrogant, and easily angered - he is a fool.

The book of Proverbs contrasts the fool and the wise man. This is often done in the parallelism typical of Hebrew poetry (Proverbs is a poetical book; parallelism may be seen in verses such as Proverbs 10:1 - "A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother"). Proverbs states the many

dangerous consequences of being foolish as well as showing the many blessings of being wise. A foolish person brings grief to his parents (Proverbs 10:1; 17:21,25). He despises his mother (Proverbs 15:20), which certainly brings heartache to the one who had such loving expectations for him. Although he thinks himself better than others, he will actually be a servant to the wise (Proverbs 1:29). By his behavior, a fool will hurt those around him and eventually bring about his own destruction (Proverbs 16:22; 1:32; 19:29; 26:3).

Three major qualities characterize a fool - he is self-centered, he is proud, and he is easily angered. Although he has not the invidious malevolence of the wicked person, his heart is still inclined toward evil; he is drawn to it and takes pleasure in it (Proverbs 10:23; 13:19). He rarely truly repents (Proverbs 14:9), for he sees himself as always being in the right and cannot imagine that he needs to do so (Proverbs 12:15; 15:14). He is content in his own little self-managed, regulated world (Proverbs 1:32). He trusts in himself and takes no thought of the direction his life is taking (Proverbs 28:26; 26:12). Unlike the prudent person, the fool deceives himself and sometimes others (Proverbs 14:8). If he recognizes that there is a problem at all, he sees it as the other person's fault. He continually tells others how they should run their lives (Proverbs 18:2; 15:2).

The fool will not listen to correction (Proverbs 1:7; 15:5; 12:15; 17:10). He refuses to face the consequences of his sin and becomes incensed if someone confronts him with it or, indeed, if anything disturbs his self-satisfied world. He is quick-tempered (Proverbs 14:17,29), easily insulted (Proverbs 12:16), and swift to quarrel (Proverbs 20:3). The fool does not control his anger, but gives it full vent (Proverbs 29:11). He may calm down fairly readily, but will feel no remorse for his reactions; rather, he will justify himself (they deserved it; the other person "made" him angry). The fool is often hot-headed and reckless (Proverbs 14:16).

Some of the most strikingly vivid verses in Proverbs occur in chapter twenty-six where, for example, the fool's behavior is compared to a dog returning to its vomit, for he will not leave his disgusting folly but returns to it again and again (Proverbs 26:11). Honor is inappropriate to give to a fool; it is unexpected and may actually do harm, like snow in summer or rain in harvest (Proverbs 26:1). Proverbs 26:8 reiterates the point of the uselessness and danger of giving a fool honor, which it says is as imprudent and absurd as tying a stone in a sling. A proverb in the mouth of a fool is compared to a lame man's useless legs (Proverbs 26:7) and a thornbush in a drunkard's hand (Proverbs 26:9). Charles Bridges comments, "Never would a lame man shew his infirmity so much as if he were to pretend to feats of agility or strength. Never does a fool appear so ridiculous, as when making a show of wisdom" (*Proverbs*, p. 487-488). The fool's counsel is meaningless since it is not backed up by his life. His admonitions can actually be dangerous as well, for as he rails against others, like a drunkard madly swinging a thornbush, his barbs can sink deep, wounding those of tender conscience, and incidentally hurting himself as well. One should not send a message or indeed entrust any important task to the hands of a fool, for it has about as much chance of success as an archer shooting at random (Proverbs 26:10) and is as foolish and harmful as cutting off one's own feet (Proverbs 26:6).

Proverbs makes other observations about the ways of a fool. A fool may think himself wise (Proverbs 28:26; 26:12), but his actions make his foolishness obvious (Proverbs 13:16). The wise man recognizes wisdom when he finds it and treasures it, but the fool is constantly pursuing pleasure, even to the ends of the earth, so that he will not have to deal with the reality of his sin (Proverbs 17:24). Money only enables him to further his headlong path to destruction, deadening the voice of conscience with pleasures (Proverbs 17:16). Note the integral link between what the fool says and the state of his heart (Proverbs 15:7,14; 18:7). Jesus said, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34; see Matthew 12:33-37). Although a fool may cover over his sin and seem unaware of it, his behavior stems not from ingenuousness, but from deliberate self-centeredness overflowing from his deceitful, evil heart (Proverbs 24:9). His ultimate contention is not with those around him who disturb his plans, but with Almighty God against whom he rages when his own attitudes and behavior bring about his ruin (Proverbs

19:3). The only hope for the fool, as for all of us, is if God graciously allows him to see his sin, repent, and submit to the Lord.

How should one deal with a fool? His foolishness is so thoroughly bound up with his life, his course so set upon self-protection, and his arrogant refusal to change so profound that the task would seem impossible (Proverbs 14:7; 13:20; 17:12). It would be best to stay as far away from him as possible (Proverbs 22:15). Yet sometimes this is unfeasible. If the fool is a child there is hope, for the rod of discipline will drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15). To deal with an adult is another matter. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III, in their thought-provoking book *Bold Love* (Navpress, 1992), maintain that a fool needs to experience the consequences of his actions in order to change. Rather than merely condemning his behavior, which will only provoke anger and self-righteous justifications, our thoughtful response must expose his foolishness without allowing ourselves to get in the way of his anger. This can be done indirectly by not giving in to the fool's intimidation, or directly by confrontation rather than covering the fool's sin when it has been exposed in a blatant way by behavior that even the fool can see has gone too far. This requires great wisdom as to when to speak (Proverbs 26:5) and when to remain silent (Proverbs 23:9; 26:4), but the person who loves the fool will be a mirror to show him his own heart. For more insight, read chapter 11 from this excellent resource.

Do we have the characteristics of a fool (we need not have them all to qualify)? If one recognizes this, God has already done a significant work in his life. Remember that one of the attributes of a fool is his inability to listen to correction and to see his own sin. We should all ask God to reveal any sin in our lives and ask people close to us if they see the traits of a fool in us (all of us act in a foolish manner at times, but are the characteristics of a fool persistent and pervasive in our lives? Proverbs 26:11). If so, we need to repent to God and others, for only He can change us. Do we live with or have frequent contact with a fool? We need to ask God's wisdom for dealing with this person, to know how to act and what to say so that we will not support his folly, but love him and confront him with himself so that he might see his sin and turn to God for mercy.

## Lesson Procedure

Introduce your lesson as follows. You may wish to draw a jester as a visual aid to present the fool; if you do so, or if you use the jester to designate the fool for the class mural or posters, explain what a jester was and how he differed from a biblical definition of a fool.

“Do you know what the word *folly* means? It is another word for *foolishness*, *acting in a foolish manner*. What does it mean to be called a *fool*? Today the term usually refers to someone who is dull-witted or acts in such a way that others take advantage of him, but in the Old Testament a fool is someone who is morally deficient. He is the opposite of the wise person who wants to follow God. Solomon wrote, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.’”

Duplicate a copy of the verses below for each student. Have your students take turns reading the verses as you discuss each section and individual verses on which you choose to concentrate. The similes (a comparison of two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*) in Proverbs 26 may need extra explanation. Point out that the attributes of a fool are the opposite of those of the wise person discussed last week. Explain that a person need not have all the characteristics in these verses to be a fool, nor is a person a fool who exhibits them occasionally, although he is acting like one at the time. The fool is one who persistently exhibits most of these qualities. Have students star or underline verses that make a particular impact on them and attach the verse sheets to their Proverbs notebook.

As you go over these verses, ask your students to consider to themselves whether they ever act in a foolish manner (Proverbs 22:15 indicates that they probably do, and you can point out to your class that they can be thankful for their parents' discipline, or else they might grow up to be fools if they are not so already). Have them also consider whether or not they know anyone whom the Bible would characterize as a fool; your students should not name names, but should reflect on how they may lovingly but courageously relate to that person.

## **Activity**

Have your class work on the class mural of different characters and verses in Proverbs, and/or have them draw posters illustrating various verses about the fool. Verses that lend themselves to illustration are starred below. For example, one could draw a person fleeing away from a jester (the fool character) toward a ferocious bear to picture Proverbs 17:12. The verse should be written below the pictures unless you wish to use the pictures for a matching game (in which case the corresponding verses can be written on separate sheets of paper).

## **CONSEQUENCES OF BEING A FOOL**

### **The Fool is a Source of Grief to his Parents**

17:25 - A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.  
15:20 - A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother.  
(see also 10:1; 17:21)

### **The Destiny of a Fool**

1:32 - For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.  
16:22 - Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but folly brings punishment to fools.  
26:3 - A whip for the horse, a halter for the donkey, and a rod for the backs of fools!  
(see also 1:29; 10:8,10,14)

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A FOOL**

10:23 - A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.  
14:9 - Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.  
(see also 13:19; 15:21)

### **The Fool Thinks he is Always Right and Doesn't Listen to Advice or Correction**

1:7 - The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.  
17:10 - A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.  
12:15 - The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.  
28:26 - He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is safe.  
(see also 15:5; 1:32; 14:8; 26:12)

### **The Fool is Easily Angered**

14:29 - A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.  
12:16 - A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.  
20:3 - It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.  
29:11 - A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.  
14:16 - A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.  
(see also 14:17)

### **A Fool Sins with his Mouth**

10:8 - The wise in heart accepts commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.  
18:6 - A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating.  
15:2 - The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.  
15:14 - The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.  
15:7 - The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.  
19:1 - Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse.  
18:2 - A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.  
29:20 - Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.  
(see also 10:10,14; 14:3,7; 18:7; 24:7)

## **Other Facts about a Fool**

27:22\* - Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.

17:16 - Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom.

26:1 - Like snow in summer or rain in harvest, honor is not fitting for a fool.

26:8\* - Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool.

26:7\* - Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.

26:9\* - Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.

26:6\* - Like cutting off one's feet or drinking violence is the sending of a message by the hand of a fool.

26:10\* - Like an archer who wounds at random is he who hires a fool or any passer-by.

26:11\* - As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.

19:3 - A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.

(see also 13:16; 29:9; 17:24; 24:9)

## **HOW TO TREAT A FOOL**

### **Beware of the Fool**

14:7 - Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips.

13:20 - He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

17:12\* - Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly.

(see also 14:18,24)

### **Discipline a Child**

22:15 - Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

### **Other Advice on How to Treat a Fool**

23:9 - Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.

26:4 - Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

26:5 - Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.

- Since he doesn't listen (see above), admonishing him doesn't work.
- Avoid needlessly crossing a fool, for he is easily angered (see above).
- Don't follow a fool in his hot-headed, reckless course (see above) or take too seriously what he says in his anger.
- Weigh and do not believe all his loudly-aired opinions, for they generally do not come from wisdom (see above).
- Realize that since his foolishness is such a part of him (27:22), only God can change him.
- Don't give honor to a fool or depend on him to help you (see above).
- Don't let a fool scare you or discourage you with his anger or the mean things he says.
- When a fool acts so foolishly that even he can see it, lovingly help make his sin even more obvious and point out his sin (but be careful because he might get very angry). Do not do this to be mean and vengeful, but so he can see his sin and need of God.



## **THE FOOL, part 2**

### **Proverbs - various verses; I Samuel 25**

#### **Lesson Aim**

That your students will learn the consequences of foolishness, some characteristics of a fool, and how to deal with him.

#### **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 12:15** - “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.”

#### **Lesson Background**

“Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly” (Proverbs 17:12). Proverbs is emphatic about the dangers of encountering a foolish person. Sometimes, however, such interactions are unavoidable, and we need to know how to deal with such people as well as to recognize when we ourselves are acting in a foolish manner. Today your students will continue their study of the fool begun last week by seeing how what they learned applies to a real-life situation described in I Samuel 25.

Scripture gives a number of examples of foolish people, but I Samuel 25 tells of an individual so senseless that he was actually given a name that means *fool*. Nabal, a Calebite who lived in Carmel, was very wealthy (Proverbs 17:16) and had a beautiful, intelligent wife named Abigail. David, who at this time was hiding out from Saul, sent word to Nabal wishing him good health and asking for favor, since he and his followers were present for sheep-shearing, a festive time when one’s bounty would traditionally be shared with one’s neighbors. Nabal, rather than answering graciously, sent back this reply, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from

who knows where?” (I Samuel 25:10-11). At the very least, such a response was completely contrary to the strong tradition of hospitality for that culture. But Nabal knew very well who David was. David and his men had been protecting Nabal’s sheep from marauding bandits for a number of days when they could just as easily have harassed Nabal’s servants and stolen from them instead. Nabal was proud and ungrateful for what David had done. Even more significantly, he knew that David was running from Saul and presumably knew that Samuel had anointed David as God’s chosen king (I Samuel 15-16), but rather than bowing the knee to David as the king in exile, he hurled insults at him. Nabal lacked judgment (Proverbs 15:21), spoke foolishly (Proverbs 14:3; 18:2,6,7; 29:20; 15:2; 10:14), trusted in himself, not seeing his danger (Proverbs 28:26; 26:12), and provoked rather than avoided a quarrel (Proverbs 20:3).

When David found out about this he became incensed and set out to act foolishly himself by slaughtering all the males in Nabal’s household. His quick temper (Proverbs 14:29; 14:17), swiftness to quarrel (Proverbs 20:3), lack of self-control (Proverbs 29:11), and hot-headed, reckless behavior (Proverbs 14:6) almost brought about the destruction of a great many people. However, God provided a wise woman who was used to dealing with a fool to stop David’s headlong flight to ruin. When one of Nabal’s servants heard how Nabal had insulted David, he sent for Abigail. He did not turn to Nabal, for he realized that any advice he offered (especially coming from a mere servant) would only bring Nabal’s anger down upon his own head, for “He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him” (I Samuel 25:17; Proverbs 1:7; 12:15; 17:10). Abigail knew her husband’s disposition as well, so neither did she consult him (I Samuel 25:19), but quickly set about making plans to avoid calamity.

Abigail acted prudently to mirror to David his own sin. First she brought David a generous gift (I Samuel 25:18-19) and then humbly explained that she was not responsible for the contempt that had been shown to David (I Samuel 25:23-25). Such an action would certainly have given David pause as he compared Abigail’s liberality, humility, and gentleness with his own hot anger and hatred. She went on to show her concern, not just for the safety of her own household, but for righteousness and what the Lord would accomplish through His chosen king. She was concerned lest David’s sin hinder his effectiveness as an instrument of the Lord. Where Nabal had treated David with contempt, torn down his character, and questioned God’s plans for his life (I Samuel 25:10-11), Abigail praised David and affirmed that God was going to use him mightily despite what his flight from Saul seemed to indicate (I Samuel 25:28,30-31), all the while pointing out David’s sin and his need for repentance (I Samuel 25:29,31). Note how Abigail trusts that David will refrain from taking vengeance (I Samuel 25:26). David acted foolishly, but he was no fool, for he accepted Abigail’s rebuke (Proverbs 1:7; 12:15; 17:10) and repented of his sin (Proverbs 14:9), praising God for His mercy in sending Abigail to him (I Samuel 25:32).

Meanwhile Nabal, refusing to face the difficulties of life and the sinfulness of his own heart, sought escape in pleasure. “When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king” (I Samuel 25:36), completely unaware of the disaster that had nearly befallen him (Proverbs 1:32; 16:22). “He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing until daybreak” (I Samuel 25:36). Abigail knew when to remain silent (I Samuel 1:19; Proverbs 23:9; 26:4) and when to answer a fool according to his folly (Proverbs 26:5). She confronted Nabal in such a way that he was forced to see the foolishness of his behavior and either repent or further harden his heart. “Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died” (I Samuel 25:37-38).

This story gives us cameos of three people: Nabal, lying drunk while destruction was about to fall upon him, whose foolishness was so ingrained that nothing short of a miracle could remove it (Proverbs 27:22); David, hot-headed and reckless, but willing to repent when confronted with his sin; and Abigail, wise enough to know when to speak and when to remain silent, brave enough to confront sin no matter what the consequences. May God show us our foolish ways as He did David, sending us people who have the courage

to confront us with our sin; may He give us grace to repent when we are acting like fools; and may He give us the wisdom and courage to deal with the self-centered, quick-tempered, arrogant fools around us.

## Lesson Procedure

Review with your students what they learned last week about the fool. Ask them to tell you what they know about the consequences of being a fool, the characteristics of a fool, and how to deal with fools. They may turn to the Fool verse sheet in their Proverbs notebooks for help. Inform your class that the Bible speaks of a number of people who are fools, but that one actually had *fool* for a name (can they imagine growing up with such an appellation?). Ask if anyone knows who this person is and then read the story of Nabal, Abigail, and David, which is related in I Samuel 25.

### Questions on I Samuel 25

- What are some ways that Nabal lived up to the meaning of his name [he was proud, ungrateful, lacking in judgment; he trusted in himself, spoke foolishly, deliberately provoked a quarrel with David and was oblivious to the danger he had brought about]? See verse sheet or Lesson Background for specific verses in Proverbs that indicate these traits to be characteristic of a fool.
- Who else in this story acted in a foolish manner [David showed a quick temper, was quick to quarrel, lacked self-control, was hot-headed and reckless]?
- Was David a fool? Why or why not? [No. He acted very foolishly, but listened to Abigail's rebuke and repented of his sin.]
- How did Abigail do wisely in her dealings with foolish people [she avoided dealing with Nabal when possible and set out to mitigate the results of his foolishness as best she could (she does not seem to have been unsubmitive in doing this); she approached David humbly with a gift and explanation; she showed concern for righteousness and expected David to do likewise; she showed concern for David's welfare and position as God's anointed king; she praised David and boldly pointed out his sin in a winsome manner; she knew when to speak and when not to speak with a fool]?

## Activity

Have your students continue working on their Proverbs posters or class mural. You may also, as a class or individually, write a story about a fool. Give the fool in the story the characteristics noted in Proverbs; these should be evidenced in the way he treats other people. This will automatically create the conflict necessary in a story. The climax of the story could come by having something happen that makes the fool look obviously foolish, and the resolution occur when he considers and repents of his actions. Your story need not have this "happy ending," for the ruin of a chattering fool (Proverbs 10:8,10) may not come immediately or even in this life, and being caught out as a fool may only intensify the fool's anger and rebellion. Have your students choose characters and a situation where the fool goes "too far," for example, touching a chemistry experiment or computer while the teacher is out of the room (the computer could be in the middle of running an important program, unbeknownst to the student), or playing with firecrackers or a gun found in a friend's house or in the woods. Have your students decide what will be the consequences of the fool's sin and what will be the final result. Then, write action and dialogue that bring out the fool's character and lead to the story's climax.



# **THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED**

**Proverbs - various verses; I Kings 18-22**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would learn the consequences of being evil, the characteristics of an evil person, and how to deal with evil.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 15:9** - “The Lord detests the way of the wicked but he loves those who pursue righteousness.”

## **Lesson Background**

The book of Proverbs describes the wicked as those “who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways” (Proverbs 2:13-15). The evil man is not an ordinary sinner who lives for himself, many times ignoring God and the effect of his actions on other people. Nor is he the proud, irascible fool who blindly pursues his self-centered course, refusing to submit to others’ correction and admit his sin. The evil person is cold, hard, and hateful, not only seeking his own pleasures, but bent on destroying the righteous.

Dan Allender and Tremper Longman explain, “Evil is present when there is a profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness” (*Bold Love*, Navpress, 1994, p. 234). The evil person hates the righteous and gets pleasure from controlling and hurting others (Proverbs 29:10). He has no sorrow for his sin even when it is exposed. The wicked do not sin incidentally as they go about their own selfish pursuits, but they

actively seek to destroy. As Proverbs 4:16 says, “For they cannot sleep till they make someone fall. They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.” Evil is such a part of their lives that it is as their daily food, a complete part of them and necessary, so they think, to their survival.

The wicked man has no understanding of justice and uses the law, as he does everything and everyone else, for his own ends (Proverbs 28:5; 29:7; 19:28; 17:23). Some wicked people go through the outward forms of politeness and good works, but it is only to achieve their own ends. “The kindest acts of the wicked are cruel” (Proverbs 12:10). Jesus said, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” The writer of Proverbs agrees, stating, “The mouth of the wicked gushes evil” (Proverbs 15:28; see also 10:11). He uses his mouth as a weapon to persecute those around him, cutting them down with lies, rage, mockery and contempt (Proverbs 16:27; 12:5-6; 18:3). Interestingly, the wicked person also listens to those who are evil (Proverbs 17:4) and will actually be entrapped by his sinful talk (Proverbs 12:13).

The evil person refuses to do what is right (Proverbs 21:7) and despises the Lord rather than fearing him (Proverbs 14:2). In contrast, the righteous hate what is false (Proverbs 13:5) and care about others, even the needs of their animals (Proverbs 12:10). Although the wicked man puts up a bold front, he is paranoid and flees when no one pursues him; the upright man, however, gives thought to his ways and is as bold as a lion (Proverbs 21:29; 28:1). In fact, the evil man does have something to fear. Proverbs says that what he dreads will overtake him (Proverbs 10:24-25; 14:32) and his way leads to death (Proverbs 11:19). But the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day (Proverbs 4:18). Note how often the concept of *way/path* is used to describe the wicked or righteous in Proverbs, for the overflow of one’s heart not only evidences itself in one’s speech, but in one’s actions. The farther one travels along a path, the more committed he becomes to his course, the more difficult it becomes to change direction, and the more radical are the implications of his choice.

Wicked people not only bring judgment on themselves, but trouble to those around them. The evil person can bring pain and sorrow to his household for generations. “The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous” (Proverbs 3:33). The lot of a whole nation can hang on whether the wicked or righteous are in power. “When the righteous triumph, there is great elation, but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding” (Proverbs 28:12; also, 28:28; 29:2). “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). Yet God is in control and the wicked will not remain in the land forever (Proverbs 10:30; 29:16). We have hope because someday evil will be completely destroyed and Christ will reign over the earth in complete righteousness.

Therefore, we should not envy the wicked or fret when they have dominion, for they only continue because of the forbearance of God, who works everything for his own ends (Proverbs 24:1-2, 19-20; 16:4). God will guard and defend His people who walk in righteousness (Proverbs 10:2 says their very righteousness offers protection), and we can stand boldly in His name (Proverbs 18:10). God is a shield to those whose walk is blameless (Proverbs 2:7). They stand firm forever and even in death have a refuge (Proverbs 10:24-25; 14:32). The needs of the upright will be provided for (Proverbs 10:3), and God will bless his life with good things (Proverbs 11:28). “The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble” (Proverbs 11:28). This need not mean that if a person walks with God he will necessarily have great material wealth, but God will take care of his needs. However, no matter how much money the wicked person has he will never be content.

The Lord detests the way and thoughts of the wicked, but loves those who pursue righteousness, those who are not wishy-washy but follow hard after Him (Proverbs 15:9,26). He even hates the sacrifices of the wicked, particularly if brought with evil intent, but He loves the prayers and sacrifices of the upright (Proverbs 21:27; 15:8). God wants us to avoid evil and not consort with the wicked (Proverbs 4:14-15; 1:10-

19; 24:1-2). Moreover, He desires that we fight against evil and not give way to the wicked (Proverbs 28:4; 17:15; 25:26). This is not an easy task, but He will give us grace and reward our doing so.

## Lesson Procedure

If possible, draw a picture of an evil-looking mustachioed scoundrel tying a fair young thing to a railroad track with a train barreling down upon her (or show a short video clip of this sort of scenario). Ask your students to describe the rogue. Do such villains exist in actuality? Unhappily, the qualities of the dastardly knaves caricatured in melodrama have an all too real counterpart in the world. Ask your students to think of actual evil people and describe their characteristics. What are they like and how do they act? Write down student responses on the board. Proverbs has much to say about the wicked and the righteous. Duplicate the verses below for each member of your class and discuss them as you did with the verses on the Fool. Focus on the section entitled *The Characteristics of the Wicked and the Righteous*. To what extent did your class's description of an evil person match what the Bible has to say on the subject? Read *The Story of Ahab* and, as you do so, have your students point out ways in which the characteristics of the evil man spoken of in Proverbs are seen in Ahab's life (applicable verses from Proverbs are given in parentheses, but should, in general, not be read during the story). Conclude by emphasizing that there is hope for even the most evil person who puts his faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ (go over the Gospel message if appropriate).

## Activity

Have your students choose verses to write in their Proverbs notebooks, draw Proverbs posters or contribute to the class mural (verses that lend themselves to illustration are starred), and/or do another project from the Activity Booklet.

### The Story of Ahab

Have you ever met a truly evil person, not someone who sometimes does bad things, but someone whose heart was so wicked that he hated God and enjoyed hurting people, not caring about the consequences of his actions? Ahab son of Omri, who reigned over Israel for twenty-two years, was one such person. The Bible says that he "did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat [that is, the worship of golden calves], but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria (Proverbs 2:13-15). Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him" (I Kings 16:30-33; Proverbs 11:20; 15:9).

God decided to punish Ahab, and so He sent Elijah the Tishbite with this pronouncement: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." This, of course, was a terrible judgment, for without water animals would die, plants would die, and then people would die, for there would be nothing to eat or drink. By the third year of the drought, even Ahab did not have enough water. He seemed more concerned about keeping his horses and mules alive, however, than for the plight of his people (I Kings 18:5). Finally, God decided once again to send rain on the land and commissioned Elijah to inform Ahab. This took courage on Elijah's part, for Queen Jezebel had been killing the Lord's prophets and many of them had gone into hiding (I Kings 18:3-4; Proverbs 28:12,28; 25:26). When they met, Ahab did not show any sorrow for his sins, which had brought about the drought, but focused blame on Elijah! "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" he said (I Kings 18:17). But

Elijah knew how to stand up to evil and was not intimidated by Ahab's power. "I have not made trouble for Israel" Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals" (I Kings 18:18). Elijah then told Ahab to summon people from all over Israel to meet on Mount Carmel for a confrontation to see whether Baal or Jehovah was the one true God.

Elijah told the people to get two bulls, one for him and one for the prophets of Baal. Elijah and the Baal prophets would each ask their God to send fire to consume their sacrifice, and the one who answered would be shown to be the true God. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal prepared their animal first, and though they shouted, danced around the altar, and slashed themselves with swords and spears, no one answered ("perhaps your god is sleeping or has gone on a trip," Elijah taunted). Then Elijah prepared his sacrifice. "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again," Elijah prayed (I Kings 18:37). "Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord - he is God! The Lord - he is God!'" (I Kings 18:38-39). Then Elijah had the prophets of Baal killed, and a short time later a heavy storm came. Did all this affect Ahab? Did he turn from his worship of idols?

The first thing Ahab did after getting something to eat and drink (Elijah told him to do so, but can you imagine thinking about food after what had just happened?) was head off toward his capital in Jezreel and tell Queen Jezebel the news. Jezebel sent word to Elijah that she was going to have him killed, and Ahab apparently did nothing to try to stop her. God protected Elijah and later used him once again to confront Ahab. First, though, Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, attacked Israel. The Lord enabled Israel to defeat Aram, because He wanted to show the Arameans that He was stronger than their gods. However, after Israel's victory, rather than destroying Ben-Hadad as the Lord desired, Ahab formed an alliance with him. God sent a prophet to Ahab who said, "This is what the Lord says, 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people.' Sullen and angry, the king of Israel went to his palace in Samaria" (I Kings 20:42-43).

Sulking when he did not get his way seems to have been a pattern in Ahab's life. One time Ahab desired to buy a vineyard close to his palace so he could turn it into a vegetable garden. Naboth, its owner, knew that God had set up certain laws about keeping one's land in the family and so, wanting to be obedient to the Lord, he refused to sell. "So Ahab went home, sullen and angry, because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat" (I Kings 21:4). Queen Jezebel, who was, it seems, at least as evil as her husband, told him to cheer up, she would get him the vineyard (Proverbs 16:27). She got two scoundrels to lie about Naboth, accusing him of cursing God and the king. The people stoned Naboth to death for his supposed offense, leaving Ahab free to take possession of the vineyard (Proverbs 12:2-3; 4:16-19; 21:7; 29:10). Ahab cared more for himself, for his pleasure and convenience in having a vegetable garden, than for the very life of another person. Neither Ahab nor Jezebel showed any remorse for their sin.

So God once again sent Elijah to Ahab and told him to say to the king, "This is what the Lord says: 'Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' . . . This is what the Lord says: 'In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood - yes, yours!'" (I Kings 21:19; Proverbs 10:2-3,16; 15:6). Ahab again accused Elijah of being an enemy. Elijah told Ahab that God was going to cut off all his male descendants (Proverbs 3:33; 11:23). "And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country" (I Kings 21:23-24).

Yet there is hope even for someone as evil as Ahab. When Ahab heard Elijah's words, "he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly. Then the word of the



Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: ‘Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son’” (I Kings 21:27-29).

However, Ahab did not, apparently, turn to the Lord completely, for he kept around him false prophets who would tell him what he wanted to hear. For three years there was no war between Aram and Israel, but then Ahab asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to join him in attacking Aram to regain the territory of Ramoth Gilead. Jehoshaphat said that they should first seek the counsel of the Lord. Ahab’s false prophets said that they should attack, for they would be victorious. “But Jehoshaphat asked, ‘Is there not a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?’ (Proverbs 11:3). The king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, ‘There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah.’” (I Kings 22:7-8). When Ahab asked if he should go to war to take Ramoth Gilead, Micaiah sarcastically replied, “Attack and be victorious for the Lord will give it into the king’s hands” (I Kings 22:15). When Ahab pressed him to tell him the truth, Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘Didn’t I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?’” (I Kings 22:17-18). Then Micaiah told Ahab that a lying spirit was speaking through his false prophets, but Ahab refused to believe him (Proverbs 17:4), went off to fight, and had Micaiah put in prison.

Since the enemy would be most intent on trying to kill the leaders, Ahab thought he could protect himself by going into battle in disguise rather than in his royal robes as Jehoshaphat did (I Kings 22:30). But in God’s sovereignty, someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor (I Kings 22:34) and that evening he died (Proverbs 24:19-20). However, God protected good king Jehoshaphat (Proverbs 2:7; 11:21; 28:18; 14:32; 11:19).

Although he lived in a palace inlaid with ivory (I Kings 22:39) and ruled over a vast empire, Ahab’s life was one of ruin and destruction, for he was a wicked man who did not fear the Lord. Yet God can work in someone even as evil as Ahab. At one point in Ahab’s life, there was at least some sign of godly sorrow, and God relented from the full extent of the disaster He had planned. Paul told the Romans that it was while they were enemies of God that they were reconciled to Him. He wrote, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God will show His great love to us, no matter how evil we are, if we will believe Christ died for us and turn our lives over to Him in faith.



## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING WICKED**

### **Evil Brings Ruin to the Wicked Man and His Household**

5:22-23 - The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

10:9 - The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.  
(see also 13:6; 10:6,11)

10:30 - The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.

2:7 - He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless.  
(see also 22:8; 12:2-3; 2:21-22)

10:2-3 - Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

11:28 - Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

15:6 - The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.

13:22 - A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.

(see also 13:21,25\*; 21:21; 10:16,28)

3:33 - The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

10:7 - The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.  
(see also 14:22; 12:7; 17:13)

10:24-25 - What the wicked dreads will overtake him; what the righteous desire will be granted. When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.

14:32 - When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.

11:19 - The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.

(see also 11:3-8,21,23,31; 14:19\*; 21:18; 10:29; 28:18; 13:9; 3:21-26)

### **Evil Brings Ruin to a People**

28:12\* - When the righteous triumph, there is great elation; but when the wicked rise to power, men go into hiding.

29:16 - When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall.

14:34 - Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace (KJV reproach) to any people.

(see also 28:28; 29:2; 11:10-11; 25:5; 16:12; 20:26)

### **How the Lord Feels about the Wicked and the Righteous**

15:9 - The Lord detests the way of the wicked but he loves those who pursue righteousness.

15:26 - The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him.

15:8 - The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

21:27 - The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable - how much more so when brought with evil intent!

16:4 - The Lord works out everything for his own ends - even the wicked for a day of disaster.

(see also 11:20; 15:29; 28:9)

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS**

2:13-15 - [the wicked] who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

4:16-19 - [verses 14-15 talk about avoiding the path of the wicked] For they cannot sleep till they make someone fall. They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

21:7 - The violence of the wicked will drag them away for they refuse to do what is right.

29:10 - Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright.

29:7 - The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

19:28 - A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil.

17:23 - A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice.

(see also 29:6; 5:22-23; 14:2; 12:12; 17:11; 28:5)

12:5-6 - The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.

15:28 - The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

12:13 - An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk, but a righteous man escapes trouble.

17:4 - A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue.

16:27 - A scoundrel plots evil and his speech is like a scorching fire.

(see also 10:11; 18:3)

13:5 - The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.

12:10\* - A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

21:29 - A wicked man puts up a bold front, but an upright man gives thought to his ways.

28:1\* - The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

## **HOW TO TREAT THE WICKED**

4:14-15 - Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

1:10-19 - My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for someone's blood, let's waylay some harmless soul; let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse" - my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood (also 1:17-19).

2:11-12 - Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men.

16:6 - Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

18:10 - The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.

24:1-2 - Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.

24:19-20 - Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

9:7 - Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.

28:4 - Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law resist them.

17:15 - Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent - the Lord detests them both.

25:26 - Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked.

(see also 16:17; 3:31-32; 24:24-25; 18:5)

# **THE ADULTERESS AND THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN**

**Proverbs 6:20-35; 31:10-31**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your boys would learn the value of being faithfully married to a virtuous woman and your girls would learn the importance of being virtuous women.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 31:30** - "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

## **Lesson Background**

Today's lesson tackles an important subject, but one that will be difficult to deal with for fifth and sixth graders. Practically all fifth graders, to say nothing of most five-year-olds, in today's society are aware of unmarried people living together and of husbands leaving their wives for other women, although they may not be completely aware of the sexual implications of these actions. It is possible to present Proverbs' picture of the adulteress/wayward wife to your students with little or no discussion of the sexual aspects involved, but if you are uncomfortable speaking about the adulteress, if you feel your particular class is too young (fifth and sixth graders can vary widely in chronological age and sophistication), and/or you feel there may be parental objections, only deal with the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31.

Proverbs 6-7 contain a warning from Solomon to his son to avoid falling prey to the lure of an immoral woman. Her seduction may begin with a mere glance, giving rise to lust in the heart (Proverbs 6:25), but this will often lead to fornication, bringing ruin and even death (Proverbs 6:26,32-33; 7:26-27;

2:16-19; of course, Jesus said that even looking at a woman lustfully was sin - Matthew 5:27-28). A man might think that a little flirtation could do no harm, but doing so is “playing with fire” (Proverbs 6:27-28). Solomon compares the adulterer to a thief, saying that although both men are equally guilty of wrongdoing, people do not despise a starving man who steals in order to stay alive. He will, if caught, have to pay dearly for his transgression (Proverbs 6:31), for stealing is always sin (since God has forbidden it and can provide what is needed in other ways - Exodus 20:15; Psalm 37:25), but his fall is at least somewhat understandable. The adulterer, on the other hand, has no excuse. When he is found out, the husband will show no mercy nor accept any compensation (Proverbs 6:34-35). “Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away” (Proverbs 6:33). That this statement in some cases may not be evident in today’s society gives an indication of the depths of degradation to which we have fallen.

Proverbs speaks not only of the adulteress, but of the wife of noble character (Proverbs 31:10). Solomon says she is a rare creature, worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her. He can trust her completely because he knows her character, which is seen in her actions. Unlike the adulteress, she thinks not of her own pleasures, but of those of her husband, seeking his good all the days of her life. She is diligent (Proverbs 31:15,17,18,27) and works hard at various endeavors (Proverbs 31:13,19,22,24). She organizes her household well (Proverbs 31:15,27) and plans for the future, unafraid of interacting in the marketplace and venturing her earnings (Proverbs 31:16,24). She uses her profits wisely and shares her resources with the poor (Proverbs 31:20). Because of her preparation and trust in the Lord, the virtuous woman has no fear of the future (Proverbs 31:25,30). Because of her diligence and faithfulness to her husband, he has no cause for shame when he interacts with leaders and business associates and can give full attention to his professional concerns (Proverbs 31:23; the gate of a city was the site of governmental and business transactions). The woman of noble character also speaks with wisdom and faithfully instructs others. The source of this woman’s virtues lies not in herself, but in her relationship with the Lord. Proverbs 31 ends, “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise in the city gate” (Proverbs 31:30-31). May we see the value of following her example.

Proverbs 7 is a continuation of Proverbs 6, but because of its length and the explicit nature of the passage, it is probably best not included in this lesson. The following background material is included should you choose to do so, however.

Proverbs 7 begins as did Proverbs 6, with a plea to the son to keep his father’s commands, for “they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words” (Proverbs 7:5). Solomon then pictures for his son a young man giving in to the seduction of an immoral woman, going to his doom like an ox to the slaughter, unaware of the fate that awaits him (Proverbs 7:22-23). The scene opens at twilight with the youth walking down the street in the direction of the woman’s house (Proverbs 7:8-9). Already he has shown his lack of judgment, for he has placed himself in the way of temptation even under circumstances (the time of day) that would facilitate his capitulation. The camera switches to the woman who comes out to meet the young man. She is anything but subtle. Her dress (Proverbs 7:10), loud and defiant speech (Proverbs 7:11), and actions (she never stays at home but lurks in wait for her prey; Proverbs 7:11-12) betray her heart. If those things were not clear enough, she takes hold of the man, kisses him and propositions him, describing the sensual delights of her bed (Proverbs 7:16-18). She assuages his guilt and fear, lulling his conscience by assuring him that her husband has gone away on a journey and will not be home for a long time (Proverbs 7:19), so he doesn’t have to worry about being caught. In all this, as Proverbs 30:20 so colorfully explains, she feels no remorse. Her smooth talk leads the youth astray. Solomon warns his son to not follow in the same path, for “her house is a highway to the grave leading down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:27; also 2:16-19). He further warns, “the mouth of the adulteress is a deep pit; he who is under the Lord’s wrath will fall into it.” Falling into sexual sin is both a cause and a consequence of God’s righteous anger (Romans 1:21-28).

## Lesson Procedure

Introduce your lesson with the following story. If you are not doing the section on the adulteress, skip to the Memory Verse below.

“Hey, did you hear about Mr. Jenkins?” Liz flopped down on the steps by Addie, Dina, and Renée.

“Uh, uh; no,” answered Addie and Renée, but Dina said, “Sure did; ain’t that something?”

“*Isn’t* that something,” said Addie.

“Since when did you become an English teacher. Okay, *isn’t* that something?”

“Ain’t, isn’t *what* something?” said Renée.

“Mr. Jenkins running off with that waitress from Bert’s diner. Left his wife and two little kids and headed off who knows where,” Dina answered.

“You’re kidding!” said Addie.

“No, she’s not,” Liz replied. “That’s what I came over to tell you. Apparently Mr. Jenkins would stop over Bert’s for coffee every morning before work and Shelley - that’s the waitress’ name - would bring it to him, and they started talking and she started paying special attention to him and well, before you could say ham and eggs, he was hooked.”

“That’s something, all right,” Addie agreed.

“Uh, should we be talking about all this stuff? I mean, aren’t we like gossiping or something? You know what Mrs. Peterson said about not gossiping.”

“Aw, come on, Renée, it’s not like no one knows or anything. It’s all over town.”

“Anyway, I really feel sorry for Mrs. Jenkins,” said Addie. “You know, maybe we could do something nice for her, like bake her some cookies or offer to babysit her kids.”

“What good would that do? It wouldn’t bring Mr. Jenkins back. It would probably just make her feel bad, embarrassed about the whole thing.”

“I don’t think so, Liz,” said Dina. “I think she’d see it as a kindness. It’s a great idea, Addie. Let’s do it.”

“Yeah,” said Renée. “You can come over my house to make the cookies.”

“Okay,” Liz agreed. “But still, ain’t, I mean, *isn’t* it a stinking situation?”

## Questions

- What were the girls talking about?
- Some people say, “It doesn’t matter what I do as long as I don’t hurt anyone.” Do you think this is true? Why or why not? Did Mr. Jenkins hurt anyone?
- What do you think about the girls’ response to the situation? Do you think what Renée said about gossiping was true?

“The Bible has a lot to say about Mr. Jenkins’ actions. Exodus 20:14 says, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ Do you know what that means?” Explain in whatever terms you feel appropriate, or do not ask the question and lead into your study in a different way. Continue your introduction. “You probably have a difficult time imagining yourself as married, never mind leaving your husband or wife. Yet following the Lord now, while you are young, and learning to put into practice the wise principles found in Proverbs, will help you continue to serve the Lord and remain faithful to your marriage partner, if indeed you do marry, when you are older (and help you in other relationships if you don’t).”

## Bible Story #1

Read Proverbs 6:20-35 and discuss. You may wish to ask the following questions:

- What do we learn about the immoral woman in verses 24-25?
- What is meant by the picture in verses 27-28?
- How can a man be hurt by his relationship with an immoral woman? (verse 24ff.).
- How is someone who takes another man's wife the same as and different from a thief [verses 30-35; both steal something of value; both are equally guilty of sin; sometimes a thief steals for legitimate need - although his stealing is never justified, see Lesson Background; the person robbed of his goods is hurt, but not usually irreparably, and will accept payment for his loss, while nothing can compensate for the damage done to the relationship ruined by adultery]?

You may also discuss any of the following verses if you feel they would be profitable to your class. Then go on to the Memory Verse and Proverbs 31.

### Other verses about adultery

Proverbs 7 - See Lesson Background.

Proverbs 2:16-19 - It [wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead.

Proverbs 22:14 - The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit; he who is under the Lord's wrath will fall into it (see also Proverbs 23:27-28).

Proverbs 30:20 - This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I've done nothing wrong."

Matthew 5:27 - You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

### Memory Verse

"In Proverbs 6:35, Solomon warns his son not to lust after the beauty of an immoral woman. What is the attitude of the world toward a woman's physical appearance? How do TV commercials show this to be true? Our memory verse for today, Proverbs 31:30, says, 'Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' Do you think the first part of this verse is true? Think of movie stars who were applauded for their beauty ten or twenty years ago. Do people feel the same way about them today? Does this mean that it is wrong to try to look beautiful [not in itself, but physical attractiveness can become an idol on which inordinate amounts of time and money are spent]? What about the second part of this verse? Why should we praise a woman who fears the Lord [Her beauty lasts forever; in what ways is she beautiful? Oftentimes her inward beauty does come out on the outside, not perhaps by the world's standards, but in the radiance of her countenance]? What is a woman who fears the Lord like? Proverbs 31 gives us some of her characteristics. This is the sort of woman girls can strive to become and boys can look for in a marriage partner."

## Bible Story #2

Read and discuss Proverbs 31:10-31. You may ask the following questions:

- To what valuable jewel is the wife of noble character compared (Proverbs 31:10)? Which would you rather have? How can Solomon possibly say this (he ought to know!)?



- In what ways can a woman bring her husband harm? In what ways can she bring him good (Proverbs 31:12)?

What are some of the characteristics of the noble woman? Which verses support what you are saying? See the Lesson Background. Discuss the verses in whatever order your class chooses to show the characteristics of the virtuous woman, but you may wish to include the following:

31:13 - How does a woman work with wool and flax? Most women do not do so today; what can this verse mean to us?

31:15 - Why did the woman bother working if she had servants [talk also about how modern conveniences have replaced much of the work that used to be done by servants]?

31:16 - How does this verse (and 31:18,24) speak to the issue of a woman working outside the home?

31:19 - What are a distaff and spindle used for [a distaff is a stick on which wool or flax is wound for use in spinning; the spindle is the rod for twisting into thread the fibers pulled from the material on the distaff]?

31:20 - What does this verse mean [she is kind to the poor and shares her resources with them]?

31:21-22 - Why are the colors mentioned here important [besides being beautiful, such dyes were difficult to obtain in ancient times and hence costly; she clothed her family in the best and provided well for them]?

31:23 - What was the significance of a city gate?

## **Activity**

Have your students write a tribute to a godly woman they know, listing qualities they appreciate about her. It may be in essay, letter, or poetic form, and could be given to the woman if your students desire. Alternately, invite a (preferably older) God-fearing woman into your class. Have her tell your students lessons she has learned about following the Lord or allow them to interview her (help them write questions ahead of time; be sure the woman knows what she is “getting into”).



# **FAMILY**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students will understand that God made the family, an image of the relationship He has with His people, and that we should follow His precepts for being family members, which will bring blessing.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 20:11** - “Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.”

## **Lesson Background**

God’s basic design for relationships is the family. “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him,’” (Genesis 2:18) and so God made Eve for Adam, and from their union came children to fulfill God’s purposes and bless their lives. However, after the Fall, Adam and Eve, like us, were sinners, and even in this first family hatred and strife arose, which led to fracturing of relationships, even to death. Families are the context in which we flesh out our commitment to God. It is in families where we are forced to confront our own sin more easily concealed from the outside world, and so see our desperate need for the Gospel.

Proverbs speaks about families, about the blessing of the marriage relationship (Proverbs 18:22), which can be turned to misery by sin (Proverbs 14:1; 19:13; 21:19), and about the duties of parents and children. There is practically nothing that brings a parent greater grief than a wayward son or daughter, nor more delight than seeing his child walking close to the Lord (Proverbs 23:24-25; 17:25). The writer of Proverbs therefore commands parents to train their children and discipline them, and implores children to listen to their parents’ instruction, receive their rebuke and not to despise them (Proverbs 23:22; 1:8-9; 13:1).

Proverbs lists a number of ways in which children can grieve their parents, including cursing (Proverbs 20:20 - to curse one's parents is to call down imprecations upon them, to desire ill for them, to wish them harm; one's *lamp* here refers to his very being [also Proverbs 13:9], probably his physical as well as spiritual life), mockery, disobedience (Proverbs 30:17 - an attitude that looks down on another can be seen in the eye and whole expression, as well as in words spoken and actions taken [even the words *look down* picture this]); note that the person described not only disparages his parents and disregards their instruction, but scorns the very idea of obeying them; obviously in this life the physical eyes of all mockers are not literally pecked out by ravens, but God will judge them if they do not repent), robbery, self-justification (Proverbs 19:26; 28:24 - the robbery here is presumably the quite literal taking of a parent's material goods, but there are also many subtle ways in which a child can steal; he can fail to take good care of possessions and waste resources; with selfish motivation, he can manipulate his parents into giving him things; he can rob them of time and peace by being unthankful and/or disobedient [time, in that it must be spent correcting the child]), and being a companion of gluttons (Proverbs 28:17 - a child's friends can have a profound influence on him; a glutton is one who takes a legitimate need and pursues it beyond ordinate bounds, selfishly overindulging his insatiable desires; gluttony generally refers to the idolatry of food, but the same principle can be expanded to materialistic pleasure-seeking of any kind).

Proverbs not only indicates sinful behavior and its consequences, but how a child should act. Proverbs 23:22; 1:8-9; 13:1; and 15:5 all point to the importance of respectfully listening to and heeding one's parents' instructions. Yet children are sinners and need more than verbal teaching and admonition to stay on the right path; they need the rod of discipline. The idea of corporal punishment is entirely contrary to this age's philosophy, because it regards children as inherently good creatures who will respond to what's best when given proper instruction. But the writer of Proverbs knew the reality of a child's heart, in which folly is so intricately bound (Proverbs 22:15). He knew that one cannot just leave a child to his own devices to make his own decisions (Proverbs 29:15; the privilege of making decisions should be gradually increased with growing chronological and spiritual maturity). The rod of discipline is necessary to drive folly from the child's heart and save his soul from death (Proverbs 22:15; 23:13-14). A parent who refuses to discipline his child corporally is not just exercising his options or being lazy, but actually hates his son (Proverbs 13:24).

There is a big difference between biblical discipline and child abuse. Proverbs 23:13 says, "if you punish him with the rod, he will not die." The blow given must never be excessive, but only giving sufficient pain to cause him to turn from his offenses. A child should never be struck vindictively or in anger, or because he has merely annoyed the parent. Rather, he should be disciplined in love for obvious sin and deliberate disobedience. A spanking should be given in the context of reasoned, loving discourse, in which the specifics of the sin committed are communicated to the child. Once the discipline has been meted out, the parent should offer complete forgiveness and the restoration of a loving relationship.

Not only do loving earthly parents discipline their children, but God Himself punishes everyone He accepts as a son (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12). Hebrews 12 says that hardships should be accepted as discipline, that we should not take them lightly or lose heart when the Lord rebukes us. All true sons receive such training. If we respected our human fathers - men who did the best job they could for temporal results - how much more should we trust our heavenly Father to do what is best for our eternal benefit. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). May we wisely instruct and discipline our children and listen to, obey, and submit to the discipline of our loving heavenly Father.

## Lesson Procedure

Ask your students what makes their parents happy. Does their relationship to their parents have anything to do with it? Read Proverbs 23:24-25 and Proverbs 17:25 to your students. Why do they think these things are true (if they do)? How can children bring grief to their parents? Proverbs records specific ways in which children bring sorrow: cursing (Proverbs 20:20), mockery, disobedience (Proverbs 30:17), robbery, self-justification (Proverbs 19:26; 28:24), and being a companion of gluttons (Proverbs 28:17). Discuss these verses, as well as Proverbs 11:29 and 20:11 (the memory verse) with your students.

### Questions

Proverbs 20:20 - What does it mean to curse one's father and mother? What is the *lamp* referred to in this verse? Have you ever heard a child say, "I hate my parents; I wish they were dead!" How does this verse speak to such statements and the feelings behind them?

Proverbs 30:17 - How can an eye mock? What do you think the second part of this verse means? Why is it important to respect your parents? What if their actions are not ones to earn respect?

Proverbs 19:26 and 28:24 - This verse probably refers to the literal taking of one's parents' material goods, but in what ways can a child rob his parents even if he never takes a penny from their pocketbook or wallet?

Proverbs 28:7 - What is gluttony? In what other ways can people make pleasure an idol besides overindulging in food? For what are you and your friends living? How are your friends influencing you?

Read and discuss Proverbs 23:22; 1:8-9; 13:1; 15:5 and Ephesians 6:1-4. Ask: "Do children always heed their parents' instructions (do you do so)? Is it a good thing for children to obey their parents? Then why do they not? What should parents do about this situation?" Explain that Proverbs has an answer to this question, but that you will first read them a story. Discuss the story and the verses in Proverbs that have to do with biblical discipline (Proverbs 22:6,15; 29:15,17; 23:13-14; 13:24; 3:12).

### Story

"... and we thank you for your goodness to us as a family, for providing for all our needs as well as for the blessing of this delicious food. Amen."

Bethany's dad looked up, passed her the green beans and asked, "So how was school today?"

"Okay, I guess. I got a B on my science test and Mr. Edwards moved me closer to the front of the class so I can see the board better."

"Please pass the cornbread," Bethany's little sister Amy interrupted.

"Oh, yeah, sure. Dad, there was one thing that happened that kind of upset me. We were talking about child abuse in social studies today. Ms. Serenski told us about kids whose parents beat them until they were black and blue, even breaking their bones, and about one mom who locked her kid in a closet and left her there for a whole day!"

"That certainly is a horrible thing."

"Yeah, but what upset me was she said that people who spank their kids are child abusers and that we should report any time we suspect abuse, like if we see a bruise on a kid's arm or something. But you've spanked me since I was little and Sarah gets punished all the time."

"Nuh uh, do not! You're just older and think you're so smart. Bet you've had just as many spankings as I have. You..."

"That's enough, Amy. You are interrupting Beth and saying unkind things. You can contribute to the conversation later, but now let your sister finish what she is saying. And no more cornbread until you've finished your beans."

"Okay, Dad. I'm sorry, Bethie."

“It’s all right. You’re right. I probably have had more spankings than you. But the point is, we’re not abused kids, are we? I mean, it’s not that I like spankings, but you kind of have to do it, don’t you. Like little Georgie Simpkins down the block. Mrs. Simpkins never punishes him. She just says, ‘Now Georgie, that was a naughty thing to do. We mustn’t hit other children. No, no Georgie, don’t bite or Mommy will be very angry.’ Well, Georgie’s turning into a real brat. He never listens and one day he’s going to get hit by a car or something because she’ll tell him to get out of the street and he won’t obey.”

“Why do you think Georgie doesn’t listen? Doesn’t he know that his mother just wants what is best for him? Doesn’t he understand that biting is antisocial behavior and that the other children won’t like him if he hits them?”

Bethany and Amy looked at their father in astonishment. “Of course not,” said Amy. He’s just a little kid.”

“I think it’s more than that, isn’t it, Dad,” said Bethany. “It’s that Georgie’s a sinner, like all of us. And if something doesn’t keep him from sinning or if God doesn’t change him, he’s just going to keep on being a brat, just a bigger one. So, I guess kids do need to be spanked.”

“That’s what God tells us in His Word. Proverbs says, ‘Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.’ Another verse says, ‘He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.’”

“That’s backwards from the way most people think. They say that if you hit a kid you hate him and if you don’t you love him.”

“That’s true, Beth. And notice how strong the language is. Not, ‘if you don’t spank your child you are not doing what’s in his best interest,’ or ‘you are being lazy and hurting your son,’ but ‘if you spare the rod, you *hate* him.’ God says that disciplining the child’s body can have consequences for his soul. Proverbs 23:13-14 says, ‘Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.’”

“But sometimes kids do die when their parents beat them. Ms. Serenski said so.”

“Well, what do you think the difference is between biblical discipline and some of the actual abuse cases Ms. Serenski was talking about?”

“Spanking sure hurts, but you never beat us till we’re bleeding or anything,” said Amy.

“Of course not, Amy,” said Bethany. “Dad loves us. And spanking’s like an event in our house. It doesn’t happen very often, in spite of what I said to you before, Amy, but when it does, it’s a serious thing. Joey Mafucci’s mom just hauls off and whacks at him any time she gets mad. He runs away from her and she yells at him and chases him; it’s almost funny watching them, but it’s sad, too. When we get spanked, Dad first sits down with us and has this long talk about do we realize what we did wrong, and why he has to spank us and stuff - that’s almost as bad as the spanking itself, because it makes you feel so bad about what you’ve done.”

“I like after a spanking, when Dad hugs me and sometimes tickles me and I know he’s not mad at me anymore,” said Amy.

“Yeah,” said Bethany. “When it’s done, it’s done. It’s not like some families where the parents stay mad at the kids for weeks and won’t even talk to them.”

“Well, you two really seem to have a good idea of what biblical discipline is all about. I also try not to spank you when I am angry or just because you did something to annoy me, but for your good, to confront you with your sin so that you will repent and change. That’s the way God treats His children, too. Bethany, would you read Hebrews 12:5-11 for us, beginning at the quotation in verse five.”

“Sure, Dad. ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline

seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

“What a wonderful thing it is to have God for our Father! He loves His children even more than I love you girls (and I love you girls more than I could begin to tell you!). Yet, God says that because He loves us, He must discipline us. And because I love you, I must discipline you.”

“Dad, thanks for explaining all that stuff to us, but you know what?” said Amy. “I still don’t like spankings!”

“None of us does, Amy. None of us does.”

Do you think spanking is child abuse? What does the Bible have to say about this?

Proverbs 29:15 - What does it mean to leave a child to himself? Should a child be allowed to make decisions for himself? All decisions? Some decisions? Which ones? How can the rod impart wisdom?

Proverbs 22:15 - What does this verse say about a child’s heart? How can the rod drive folly away from him?

Proverbs 23:13-14 - What types of death do these verses compare? Which is the more significant type of death? How does the statement “he will not die” relate to child abuse?

Proverbs 13:24 - Many people today think that corporal punishment is cruel, that those who spank their children don’t love them. What does this verse mean by saying that a father who spares the rod hates his son? State at least two ways in which biblical discipline differs from child abuse.

Proverbs 3:12 - How does the Lord discipline His children (see also Hebrews 12:5-11)?

## **Family**

22:28 - Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.

17:1 - Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.

17:6 - Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.

(see also Proverbs 29:21)

## **Man and Wife**

18:22 - He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.

14:1 - A wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.

19:13 - A foolish son is his father’s ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping.

21:19\* - Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

(see also Proverbs 19:14; 12:4; 25:24)

## **Duties of Parents and Children**

17:25 - A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.

23:24-25 - The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice.

(see also Proverbs 10:1; 15:20; 17:21)

20:20 - If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

30:17 - The eye that mocks a father and scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.

(see also Proverbs 30:11)

19:26 - He who robs his father and drives out his mother is a son who brings shame and disgrace.

28:24 - He who robs his father or mother and says, “It’s not wrong” - he is partner to him who destroys.

11:29 - He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.  
28:7 - He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.

20:11 - Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.

23:22 - Listen to your father who gave you life and do not despise your mother when she is old.

1:8-9 - Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

13:1 - A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

15:5 - A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.

22:6 - Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

29:17 - Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.

29:15 - The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.

22:15 - Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

19:18 - Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

23:13-14 - Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

13:24 - He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

3:12 - Because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in.

(see also Hebrews 12:4-11 and Ephesians 6:1-4)



# **RELATIONSHIPS**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would understand the importance of following God’s directives for right relationships as seen in Proverbs.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 17:17** - “A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity.”

## **Lesson Background**

Proverbs speaks of the crucial importance of our relationship to God (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10), but it also gets down to the nitty gritty of everyday human associations. Being woken up by noisy neighbors (Proverbs 27:14) or dealing with guests who overstay their welcome (Proverbs 25:17) are the sort of practical issues people face constantly. Heeding the advice of the proverbs you will study today will not only help you and your students live better lives (for following God’s ways has beneficial consequences), but more importantly will honor the Lord.

This lesson’s proverbs address a number of issues such as quarrels, the use of the tongue, giving gifts, the use of financial resources, and friendship (the tongue and riches are covered more extensively in other lessons, as well). Sometimes these proverbs declare the way things are in the world without commenting on the moral implications of the situation, whether or not this state of affairs should exist. For example, Proverbs 19:6 states, “Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.” True friendship is not built on bribery and sycophancy (Proverbs 17:17; 27:5-6,9,17), but gifts do smooth the way in relationships (as Jacob realized when he returned home to his offended brother) and can

be given from the heart. Many proverbs do give advice, and moral implications can be drawn even from even those that don't. Today's proverbs are fairly straightforward and demand little explication (although, like so much of Scripture, putting them into practice takes a lifetime). Notes on some of the less obvious ones are given below:

26:21 - Charcoal and wood are fuel for fire, without which it will go out; likewise, strife will not continue or perhaps even start without the fuel of a quarrelsome person.

17:14 - A dam can hold back tons of water, but should one small hole arise, the force of the water will make the opening larger and larger until torrents flow through. So also, quarrels tend to escalate, so one should drop the matter quickly or it is likely only to get worse. This is not to say that disagreements should never be addressed, but that quarrels should be avoided when possible and, if conflict is necessary, it should be dealt with in a loving way.

25:21-22 - The enigmatic phrase "you will heap burning coals upon his head" is the difficulty here. Its meaning is unclear, but it is usually interpreted to mean that the kind actions will make the person feel guilty. This passage is quoted by Paul in Romans 12:20 as he admonishes his readers to bless those who persecute them and not repay evil for evil (Romans 12:17).

25:18 - A club, sword, and sharp arrow all inflict injury and cause great pain. So does a person who falsely testifies against his neighbor. The liar does injury to the man's reputation, causing him pain as others look down on him for no fault of his own. There may also be the pain of betrayal if the false testifier was a friend. The wound may eventually heal, but it will probably take a long time to do so.

27:21 - Fire is often used as a metaphor for trials, but in this verse something pleasant is compared with it. Heating silver and gold to high temperatures separates the pure metal from impurities. Praise can reveal the impurities of pride and self-seeking in one's heart.

25:14 - Both clouds and wind and an expected gift bring anticipation of blessing and disappointment when the promise is not fulfilled (remember, although we do not always relish it, rain is a gift, which was easily recognized in an agricultural society).

18:24 - There are a number reasons why a man of many companions could come to ruin. Such relationships tend to be superficial and one has less opportunity to ascertain the character of his acquaintances, some of whom may be a bad influence. Often it is harder to stand up to a group of people than to a few individuals (although the companions in this verse are not necessarily associated with each other). It is difficult to form deep friendships when one is trying to maintain many relationships, and the time, energy, and monetary expenditure necessary to do so may in itself bring ruin.

26:17 - Both individuals are asking for unnecessary trouble.

26:18-19 - Both the madman and the man who deceives his neighbor may think they are only joking, but the consequences of their actions are just as deadly. They are both likely to shoot at random and hit a vulnerable spot.

27:1 - Compare with James 4:13-16.

## Lesson Procedure

Many of today's verses are about friendship. Begin your lesson by having your students talk about their companions and what they like about them; what are the qualities of a good friendship? Tell them about what you appreciate about one of your friends and those things that have strengthened that relationship. Ask how their friends have influenced them. Then have your students read and discuss the verses below. They should share examples of situations in their lives to which these verses relate as long as what they say does not involve slander or gossip. Explain the meaning of terms that may be unfamiliar to your students (e.g., 26:21 - *kindling strife*; 15:18 - *dissension*; 22:25 - *ensnared*; 27:21 - *crucible*). Ask your students how the two things being compared are alike in the verses that are metaphors. See Lesson Background for information on more difficult verses. You also may wish to ask:

27:2 - Why shouldn't we say good things about ourselves? Does this mean we should not tell our good qualities on an application for college, a job, or an award?

19:7 - Why would a person shun a poor man [perhaps he feels superior to him or thinks he will ask him for money]?

3:27-28 - Why might a man tell his neighbor to "come back later" [he's putting him off, hoping the neighbor will forget or ask the favor from someone else; he's busy and doesn't want to stop what he's doing]?

27:14 - Why would blessing a neighbor, saying or perhaps even doing nice things for him, be taken as a curse?

27:10 - Does this verse mean you should never ask your brother for help? What does it mean?

27:5-6 - Why would a person hide his love? Why would a friend wound you? What does it mean for an enemy to multiply kisses and why would he do so?

27:17 - How does one man sharpen another?

## Activity

Personal advice letters ("Dear Abby" type) are given below. The situations presented relate to various proverbs studied today in class. Have each student take one or more letters, find the proverb(s) concerned, and pen a reply to the letter writer. They should then share what they have written with the class. The proverbs generally pertain to the situation rather than the advice to be given, but the proverbs can be included in the reply.

## Relationships

26:21\* - As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

15:18 - A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

22:24-25 - Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

17:14 - Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

25:21-22\* - If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

24:28-29 - Do not testify against your neighbor without cause or use your lips to deceive. Do not say, "I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did."

25:18 - Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor.

27:2 - Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.

27:21 - The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.

15:17\* - Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.

27:4 - Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

18:16\* - A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.

19:6 - Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.

25:14 - Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.

25:6-7 - Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.

19:4 - Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him.

19:7\* - A poor man is shunned by all his relatives - how much more do his friends avoid him!

14:21 - He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

3:27-28\* - Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow" - when you have it with you.

25:17\* - Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house - too much of you and he will hate you.

27:14\* - If a man loudly blesses his neighbor in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

18:24 - A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

27:10 - Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you - better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

17:17\* - A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

27:9 - Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

27:5-6 - Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

25:20\* - Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day or like vinegar poured on soda is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

24:21-22 - Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?

26:17\* - Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.

26:18-19\* - Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I was only joking!"

27:1 - Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

For other verses on relationships, see: Proverbs 17:18; 22:26-27; 6:1-5; 16:29-30; 25:7-10; 18:16-19; 27:18; 25:13,19; 30:10; 26:24-28.

For other verses on gossip and the tongue, see: Proverbs 11:9; 16:28; 26:20,22; 20:19; 18:13; 15:1,23; 25:15; James 4:1-3 (quarrels); James 4:1-12 (slander).

Dear Miss Wisdom,

My friend hurt me a lot and I never want to speak to him again. He told me that I stink and should take a shower. He said that's why some of the kids don't hang around with me. Kevin's always been real nice to me and never said anything mean before. Why would he say that and make me feel so bad?

Sincerely,  
Brad

Dear Miss Wisdom,

This girl in my class named Stacey is real popular. She has the coolest clothes and lives in this big house with a swimming pool and Jacuzzi and huge-screen TV and all kinds of stuff. She's pretty nice to me, but she really looks down on the Spanish kids, especially the migrant workers, cause they're poor. She says they're stupid, but that's not true. How can they be expected to learn if they have to move all the time? The other day, Roberto asked to borrow her calculator to do his homework, and she said she'd left it at home, even though I saw her doing her math homework with it at lunchtime. What do you think of Stacey? How should I act toward her? What can I do to help Roberto and the other kids?

Thank you for your help,  
Concerned

Dear Miss Wisdom,

I got this friend B.J. I got lots of friends, but B.J., he's different. He's so funny, he always makes me laugh and he's got guts, too. Last week, he put a mouse in Ms. Callaway's desk. Man, did she jump when she opened that drawer! It's a good thing she never found out who did it, 'cause B.J.'s in trouble lots (he talks back to the teachers and sometimes won't do what they say) and they'd really nail him if they knew. Anyway, I like B.J., but he gets mad real easy and when he does, look out! You better be nowhere near, 'cause you might get your head busted. How can I protect myself and still be his friend?

Yours truly,  
Rashiq

Dear Miss Wisdom,

How can I help my friend Ben? Two weeks ago his sister was killed by a drunk driver. He just walks around in a daze. Some of the kids try to joke around with him and get him to "snap out of it," but that just seems to make it seem worse. What should we do?

Sincerely,  
Steven

Dear Miss Wisdom,

I hope you can help me. Janelle is all upset at me just because I played a little joke on her. The girl's got no sense of humor. Janelle is so smart, it's not funny! She's always getting 100s with maybe a 98 or even a 96 thrown in. So I told her that when I was up asking Miss Murray a question, that I saw her Language Arts test sitting on the desk and that there was a big red F on it! You should have seen the expression on her face. It was so funny! But then she ran out of the room crying! Someone that smart should have known I was just kidding around. Duh, it was just a little joke. Why does she have to make such a big deal of it? Do you think she's being too touchy? I like Janelle and want to be friends again. What should I do?

Not joking,  
Monique

Dear Miss Wisdom,

There's this girl who's driving me nuts. She is always coming over my house or calling me up. She's kind of awkward and doesn't have any friends, so I tried to be nice to her instead of teasing her like some of the other kids do, and now she won't leave me alone. What do you suggest I do?

Going crazy,  
Cathy

Dear Miss Wisdom,

I am so mad! I flunked a math test today and all because of my bratty little brother! Mr. Garcia told us we had to bring our own protractors, that he didn't have enough to hand out, so I made sure to put mine in my backpack. Well Joey, the stupid idiot, borrowed it without even asking to draw patterns for his art project and then he didn't return it! At first I thought maybe the protractor had fallen out of my backpack, so when I got home I asked Joey if he'd seen it. He actually *admitted* having taken it! I should have known! He said he was sorry he hadn't returned it, but I said, "Yeah, right, a lot of good sorry does me, you jerk." Then he said what was I getting all upset about, it was only a little hunk of plastic, and I told him his brain was a hunk of plastic. He said he wondered if I even had a brain and that my I.Q. must be about negative twenty. I said I was smart enough to know he was a dirty little thief. Well, things just got worse and worse and it was amazing that we didn't hit each other, but just went storming off to our rooms swearing we'd never talk to each other again. I still feel like screaming whenever I think of how he made me fail that test, but he is my brother and I guess I have to live with him. What should I do now?

Still boiling,  
Robyn

# **ANGER, PRIDE, AND DRUNKENNESS**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would realize the dangers of anger, pride, and drunkenness and, by God's grace, turn from these sins.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 29:11** - "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

**Proverbs 16:5** - "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: they will not go unpunished."

## **Lesson Background**

The hostility in the world is something that even non-Christians lament, but where does strife come from? James says, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:1-2). Hostility arises from our sinful desires and a failure to trust in God's love and sovereignty. We pridefully think we are better than others and deserve to be treated well (Proverbs 13:10 says, "Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice"). When other people or even circumstances do not conform to our desires (Aargh! Why should I have to suffer a broken shoelace or red light when I am late and have important things to do!), we become angry (Proverbs 30:33 says that anger produces strife). Those who consume alcoholic beverages to excess lose much of their ability to control their anger and quarrels erupt ("Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise" - Proverbs 20:1). Although the sins of pride,

anger, and drunkenness are different in many ways and can occur separately in peoples' lives, they are all extremely destructive. Studying what Scripture has to say about these sins should give us a desire to turn to the Lord so that He can free us from them.

Pride is a most insidious sin; those who are the most proud are perhaps the most unaware of its presence in their lives (although they may condemn pride in the lives of others). A proud person sees himself at the center of the universe. He thinks that he is superior to other people and wants them to recognize his preeminence. The proud person despises those he considers his inferiors. Your students may look down on those who come from a different socioeconomic background than they, on those who are not as skilled in schoolwork or athletics, or on those they view as physically unattractive or socially awkward. Proud people want to control people and circumstances for their best comfort and advantage. The proud person even feels that God should bring His plans into line with his will. If he loses his job, faces heartbreak in a relationship, or becomes ill, he becomes embittered against the Lord; even daily annoyances threaten to destroy his peace. In his heart, he doesn't see himself as a creature dependent upon God for his very existence, but as somehow being on equal footing with God.

Frequently, a proud person feels threatened by the abilities and accomplishments of others. He wants to dominate other people and becomes angry when another is honored or surpasses him in any way. Rather than rejoicing in the victory of God's people over their enemies, Saul was furious when the Israelites sang, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands" (I Samuel 18:6-9). His jealousy became an all-consuming passion that eventually destroyed his family and his own life. Your students may become angry when their classmates surpass them in athletic or academic pursuits. Proud people usually look down on others, but they also desire their adulation. They want others to recognize their good qualities and accomplishments. The proud justify themselves and minimize their failings. Pride usually blinds people to their own sin. Since proud people look down on others and feel they are always in the right, they refuse to accept correction. On several occasions Samuel and Jonathan spoke to Saul of his foolishness, but the king obstinately continued in his sinful ways. Pride keeps us from loving other people and from loving God because, when we focus on our glory - when we make our plans paramount, when we view everyone else as a means to accomplish our ends of bringing happiness, comfort, peace, prosperity, and exaltation to ourselves and those close to us - others, who do not bow to us, become our enemies.

God hates pride. Proverbs 16:5 says, "The Lord detests all the proud of heart; be sure of this: they will not go unpunished." Yet God is amazingly merciful. The Lord warned King Nebuchadnezzar through a dream that he would be driven insane for a time and live like an animal if he refused to turn from his wicked ways and acknowledge the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the warning, but continued on in his proud and rebellious ways. A year after Daniel had interpreted the dream for the king, Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of his royal palace, glorying in his accomplishments (Daniel 4:30), when a voice spoke to him from heaven:

"This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken away from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird (Daniel 4:31-33).

This judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar was richly deserved. What is astonishing is that after seven years, the Lord turned Nebuchadnezzar's heart toward Himself and his sanity was restored. God's judgment and



subsequent restoration of Nebuchadnezzar was a great mercy. Yet how much better it is when we humbly turn to the Lord without His chastening hand.

“The Lord detests all the proud of heart” (Proverbs 16:5). Does this mean that we should be Caspar Milquetoasts, bland, simpering folk with no enthusiasm, drive or aspiration, doormats to everyone’s desires, or Uriah Heeps who grovel at people’s feet? Hardly. Humility consists not so much in thinking little of oneself, but in not thinking of oneself, instead focusing on the Lord and His glory. It recognizes that yes, in God’s sight we are worms who deserve nothing but death and hell, but we are redeemed worms, those who have been raised to be joint-heirs with the Son of God. Humility recognizes that all we have is from the Lord. It distrusts its own abilities, goodness and efforts, but has a profound confidence in God’s power, mercy and grace. Humility leads to great love of God, for it grasps what He has done and leads to a love for other people because it recognizes its common bond of sinfulness and dependency and desires to share God’s goodness with them. May God give us humble hearts.

We have seen how pride often leads to anger. If a person regards himself as the center of the universe, if he looks at his desires, feelings, and happiness as supreme, he will become angry when his will is thwarted in any way. There is such a thing as righteous anger. When the Lord Jesus overturned the moneychangers’ tables in the Temple, He wasn’t being temperamental. God pours out His wrath on sinners (Ephesians 2:3; 5:6). Righteous anger hates sin; it is concerned for God’s glory and for people’s ultimate good. Proverbs, however, deals with the unrighteous anger with which we are all too familiar, the kind that demands that people and circumstances bring satisfaction now if an explosion is to be avoided. The angry person wants control and turns to rage when his dependency is exposed. The writer of Proverbs warns that we should avoid such people, for they are fools who only produce strife (Proverbs 21:19; 30:33; 14:17,29; 22:24-25). Rather than becoming angry, a person should control his temper (Proverbs 16:32), overlook offenses (Proverbs 19:11; 12:16), and be gentle in speech (Proverbs 15:1). James summarizes these thoughts: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19-20).

Anger can bring terrible hurt into people’s lives, and the consequences can be devastating when it is combined with excessive consumption of alcohol. Of course, the abuse of alcohol can be extremely harmful even in cases where anger is not a severe problem. Scripture roundly condemns drunkenness and offers cautions about drinking alcohol, but it does not prohibit its use entirely. In fact, the Bible actually speaks of wine as a blessing (Psalm 104:14-15; Jeremiah 31:11-14). Jesus turned water into wine when the supply ran out at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. It is important to note, however, that wine in Bible times was much weaker in alcoholic content than the alcoholic beverages sold today. Proverbs notes that poverty and strife generally attend drinking (Proverbs 23:20-21 and Proverbs 20:1). King Lemuel says that one should “give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish,” but that rulers should refuse to partake lest they become fuzzy-headed and “forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights” (Proverbs 31:4-7). Although we cannot biblically condemn the consumption of alcoholic beverages per se, we can issue strong warning of the dangers attendant upon them and note necessary precautions (e.g., drinking only minimally, not drinking and driving). May we heed Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5:18 - “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” It is also only by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we can be freed from pride and anger. May we seek His mercy in these areas.

## Lesson Procedure

Since today's lesson contains so much material, you may want to pick one area on which to concentrate, covering the other two only briefly. Anger was discussed to some extent this quarter in Lesson 4 on the fool. Duplicate the sheet of verses below on pride, anger, and drunkenness to hand out to your students.

### Pride

#### Story

"That does it!" fumed Denny, pulling off his helmet and flopping on the bench.

"What's the matter?" said Jared.

"Carter James, that's what's the matter," Denny replied, "Old Mr. Hot Shot himself, thinks he's so great 'cause he's the quarterback and all. Well, let me tell you, he's not the whole team! Where'd he be if we didn't block for him so he could get the pass off, or what if we just all up and quit; then where'd he be?"

"Hey, cool it, Denny, I know Carter thinks he owns the world or something, but the quarterback's gotta call the shots."

"Yeah, but he doesn't have to be so bossy about it. I'm just as good as he is. I'd show him how to play quarterback if Mr. Walters would only give me a chance. It's unfair, that's what it is. But you just wait. I'll get even somehow. Maybe somehow we could put glue on the ball and just let a few of the guys on the other team get past us. See how Superboy likes that!"

### Questions

- What does it mean to be proud?
- Who in the previous story shows a prideful attitude?
- Let's see what Proverbs has to say about the results of being proud [Read Proverbs 13:10; 21:24; 11:2; and 18:12]. Usually we think of proud people as those who are honored, but Proverbs 18:12 says this is not so.
- How does God feel about pride? [Read Proverbs 21:4; 13:34; James 4:6; Proverbs 15:25].

"But wait a minute, I thought it was good to be proud, to have good self-esteem and all that. Well, that's not what the Bible says. You should feel pleased when you paint a beautiful picture, write a good poem, kick a soccer goal, do well in school, memorize your Bible verses, or help someone who is hurting. God wants you to be happy that you can do these things. But realize, these abilities, like every other good thing, come from Him and He should be praised for enabling you to do them. He should get the glory for our successes, not us. Is this easy? No, it is very, very difficult. In fact, it is impossible without His grace. We want to be at the center, on the throne of the universe and we want everyone, even God, to worship us! You would probably not put it that way, but when you really think about it, that is what we do. We must ask God continually to help us to exalt Him, so that He would be first and get all the worship and praise He deserves. Because, you see, He does deserve it. A sixth grade girl once said, 'You know, I think God is kind of "stuck-up."' Does her statement bother or upset you? Why? If God were a human being this would be true, but He is the creator of the universe, the one to whom we owe our very existence and who holds all things together by His power. He is holy, just, merciful, and good. Such a Person merits all our worship and our very lives. Let's read what Proverbs has to say about characteristics of a proud person" (read Proverbs 27:1-2,21; 28:26).

"How else does a proud person act [see Lesson Background]. A proud person thinks a lot about and of himself. He looks down on others. In what areas might he do this [e.g., athletic ability, other abilities -

music, art, drama, skilled labor, academics/education, speech patterns, vocation, socioeconomic status, spirituality - time spent in disciplines, Bible knowledge, good works]? The proud person often puts others down - verbally or by his actions - and builds himself up. Sometimes those who seem to have “low self-esteem” are really proud people; they keep putting themselves down so others will feel sorry for them and say good things about them - ‘No, that’s not true, you really are pretty.’ Proud people are always trying to look good in the eyes of others. Are you proud? Do you look down on others (what others)? Do you put others down verbally or by actions to make yourself look good?”

“Are you humble? Do you trust God rather than yourself and your abilities? Are you willing to serve God in little ways (are you just as willing to pick up trash for your teacher as run messages to the office)? When possible, do you turn others’ praise of you to God rather than yourself (although sometimes saying something like “well, it wasn’t me, it was God” sounds insincerely “super-spiritual” or can actually be prideful; many compliments should just be accepted gracefully as was the giver’s intent)? Are you willing to associate with lowly people, the poor, ugly, overweight, socially awkward, adults or kids rejected by others in your class? Are you willing to ask others for help or give people jobs they may not do as well as you would have done? Are you willing to take correction and advice from other people? God can help you with your pride.”

Read or tell the story of Daniel 4 and discuss Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and God’s mercy to him. “Who is our best example of humility?” Read Philippians 2:5-11 and discuss.

## **Anger**

“In the story we read at the beginning of this lesson, Denny was angry. How do you know this and, in general, how can you tell if someone is angry? Have you ever felt ‘so angry you could scream’? What sort of things make you angry? Is it wrong to be angry? Is God ever angry?” Have your students read the verses on the sheet below and discuss; bring out the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger (see Lesson Background).

## **Questions**

- Many of these verses speak of a hot-tempered, impatient man. What should we do if we have to deal with someone like this?
- What should we do if we are hot-tempered and impatient? What should we do if someone insults or offends us (Proverbs 19:11; 12:16; 15:1)? Role-play such a situation.
- Ephesians 4:26; 2:3; 5:6; James 1:19-20 - Do we have a right to become angry? Under what circumstances would this be right or wrong? Does God have a right to be angry?

## Drunkenness

### Story

“Mary, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing’s the matter,” Mary replied, turning away and wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.”

“Yeah, right, nothing’s the matter. You think you can hide something from me, Johanna Cartwright, your best friend? Look at me, Mary. It’s your Mom again, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, okay, you’re right, she came home drunk again; usually she goes to bed and I can keep Bethie from seeing her like that, but last night she fell down right in the middle of the living room floor and wouldn’t get up. Usually she’s pretty nice, but when she’s had too much to drink, she goes sort of crazy, yelling at us and stuff. I try to protect Beth and take care of the house and all, but things have been terrible ever since Dad died and they are getting worse. I’m scared my mom’s gonna do something stupid - I don’t know, like leave a pot on the stove or something - or get killed driving home sometime.”

“Mary, I really think you ought to talk to Pastor Bill about this. Maybe he can help.”

“I don’t know. Maybe I will. Maybe I can talk to my mom when she’s not drinking and get her to come and see him. Why did God ever make alcohol in the first place? All it does is cause problems!”

“Why did God ever make alcohol? Do you agree with Mary that all it does is cause problems? What does the Bible say?” Have your students read Psalm 104:14-15 and Jeremiah 31:11-14. In these verses wine is seen as a blessing. One time when Jesus was at a wedding, He turned water into wine when the supply ran out (John 2). Yet we are all familiar with the harm caused by drinking alcohol. How can the Bible speak in such positive terms of something that can cause such grief? One reason is that wine in Bible times was not nearly as strong as the wine and other alcoholic beverages people drink today, because people would add large quantities of water to their wine rather than drinking it “straight”; people back then would have to drink a number of glasses to consume the same amount of alcohol as in one small glass today. And while the Bible does not say a person should never drink alcohol, it gives a number of cautions and strongly condemns drunkenness.

Read and discuss Proverbs 20:1; 31:4-7; 23:20-21; Proverbs 23:29-35; and Ephesians 5:18; you may wish to use the questions below; also discuss the addictive nature of alcohol, drunk driving, and how your students should handle situations involving alcohol - e.g., if they are offered a drink, if they are offered a ride by someone who has been drinking, if they have close contact with someone who is an alcoholic - obviously these situations can only be touched upon at this time.

Proverbs 20:1 - Why does the verse call wine a mocker and beer a brawler (a fighter)?

Proverbs 31:4-7 - Why do the verses say kings shouldn’t drink wine or beer? Who do the verses say should be allowed to drink [compare this with those with severe illness being given pain-killers]?

Proverbs 23:20-21 - Why do these verses say one shouldn’t join in with drunkards? Why does a drunkard become poor?

Proverbs 23:29-35 - How do these verses describe a drunkard?

Ephesians 5:18 - Paul contrasts being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit (see also Acts 2:13-15). How are these things the same and different?

## **Pride**

13:10 - Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.  
21:24 - The proud and arrogant man - "Mocker" is his name; he behaves with overweening pride.  
11:2 - When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.  
18:12 - Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor.  
21:4 - Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!  
16:5 - The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.  
13:34 - He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble (see also James 4:6).  
15:25 - The Lord tears down the proud man's house but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.  
27:21 - The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives.  
27:1-2 - Do not boast about tomorrow for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.  
28:26 - He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.  
(see also Luke 18:9-14)

## **Anger**

21:19\* - Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.  
30:33\* - For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.  
14:29 - A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.  
14:17 - A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.  
29:11 - A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.  
16:32 - Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.  
  
19:19 - A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.  
22:24-25 - Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.  
  
19:11 - A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.  
12:16 - A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult  
15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Ephesians 4:26 - "In your anger do not sin." Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.  
Ephesians 2:3 - Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.  
Ephesians 5:6 - Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.  
James 1:19-20 - My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

## **Wine**

20:1 - Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.  
23:20-21 - Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.  
(see also 23:29-35; 31:4-7)  
Ephesians 5:18 - Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.



# **THE TONGUE, part 1**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would understand the importance of using their tongues in a God-honoring way.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 18:21** - “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

## **Lesson Background**

“The tongue is . . . a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6). What an ominous description of something to which we give such little thought! God wants us to know, however, what destruction can be wrought by our speech, and also how we can use our tongues in blessing. Proverbs 18:21 says, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” [i.e., those who use it frequently will reap either good or bad results depending on what they say]. In the book of Proverbs, the Lord gives a number of admonitions about the dangers of using our tongues for evil, specific speech patterns we should avoid, and how to honor Him by what we say. This week your class will study James 3 and verses in Proverbs about the use of the tongue in general, how speech can hurt others (Proverbs 18:21; 27:14; 11:9; 12:6; 11:12) and oneself (Proverbs 1:23), using the tongue to spread knowledge (Proverbs 16:23; 15:7; 10:21), the value of kind words (Proverbs 15:1; 16:24; 25:15), and silence and restraint in speech (Proverbs 23:9; 17:27-28; 18:13; 15:28; 13:3; 29:20; 12:18; 10:19). Next week you will focus on corrupt speech, lying, mockery, and gossip. The meaning of most of the verses in today’s lesson is fairly clear (although difficult to put into practice!), but some comments and explanations are given in the Lesson

Procedure. Charles Bridges, in his commentary on Proverbs, says: “Born as we are for eternity, no utterance of our tongue can be called trifling.” May the Lord have control of this most defiant part of our bodies.

## Lesson Procedure

Begin your lesson by having your students try to say some tongue twisters. Examples are given below. Each sentence should be repeated a number of times as rapidly as possible.

She sells sea shells by the sea shore.  
Red rubber baby buggy bumpers.  
Toy boat, toy boat, toy boat.  
Six thousand thistle sifters sifting thistles.  
Unique New York, unique New York, unique New York.

Continue as follows: “It’s fun getting your tongue tangled saying silly things like that, but the use of the tongue is a serious matter. We can use our tongues for good or evil. Can you give some examples of how we can do so?” List examples as they are given by your students. Be sure that you include corrupt talk, lying, and mocking. “Even though it is a small part of the body, the tongue is very powerful. Words can be life-changing. Sometimes even one or two words said to us can brighten our day immeasurably or hurt us very deeply. They can encourage us to obey God or draw us away from Him. Would any of you tell us about a time when this was true for you (if you are giving a negative example, it may be best not to mention who was involved)? James knew how powerful our speech can be. Listen to what he has to say about the tongue.” Read James 3:1-12 and discuss; sample questions are given below.

### Questions on James 3:1-12

- To what two things does James compare the tongue at the beginning of this passage? How is the tongue like a bit and rudder?
- To what else does James compare the tongue? How are they alike? How do you think the tongue can do the things James says in verse 6?
- Explain what James means by the comparison he makes between speech and water and trees.

### Proverbs

“James showed us how a very small part of our body can change the whole direction of our lives like a rudder directs the course of a ship. Proverbs also shows how very, very powerful the tongue can be, and talks about good and bad speech. Proverbs 18:21 says, ‘The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.’ Imagine that you are a judge who can decide whether the person standing before you will be killed or will be released from prison. What might and authority and what a responsibility to do what’s right! The Bible says that the tongue has that kind of power. Most of us will not sentence criminals, so what does this verse mean? Who are those who love the tongue [they are those who like to talk!]? How do they ‘eat the fruit’ of what they say? Let’s read more about what God’s Word says about the tongue.” Distribute the sheets of Proverbs that you have duplicated and discuss the verses; you may use the questions and comments on selected verses below.



## Questions on Selected Proverbs

27:14 - Why would this be so?

11:9 - How can one person destroy another with his tongue [we will discuss lying, gossip and mockery in more detail next week]?

12:6 - How do the lips of the wicked lie in wait for blood? Give an example of how a righteous person could rescue himself by his speech [specific instances, but also the fact that an upright person's generally gracious and truthful speech will encourage people to trust him].

11:12 - Does this mean a person should never say anything negative to his neighbor? When might it be appropriate to do so? Do you put down others in your class?

1:23 - In what ways can the tongue bring calamity?

15:7 - Can you think of ways in which you could spread knowledge? What sort of knowledge?

23:9 - When we studied the fool, we found out that he was self-centered, proud, and easily angered; such a person will only despise you and not listen to what you have to say.

“Speaking in haste can both hurt other people and yourself. The next two verses speak of this.”

13:3 - How can speaking rashly bring about one's ruin?

29:20 - Can you think of a time when you have spoken quickly without thinking and afterwards regretted it?

12:18 - Give an example of how words could cut as deeply as a sword thrust. How might a wise person bring healing in this situation?

25:11-12 - What does the verse mean by “a word aptly spoken”? How are such words or the rebuke of a wise man like objects of gold [both are very valuable; they fit and bring beauty]?

15:1 - [Have one student make a request or ask a question of two students; tell the first student to give a harsh answer and the second a gentle answer to illustrate this verse; you may do this more than once].

16:24 - Give examples of pleasant words. How often do you use words like *please*, *thank you*, *may I*, and words that praise others?

25:15 - What do you think it means that “a gentle tongue can break a bone” [perhaps that in situations where one would think only violence could accomplish what is desired, kind persuasive speech can have the same result]?

10:19 - Are you a person of many words? Think back over this week. Were there words you spoke that you should not have? On the other hand, were there words that you should have spoken, perhaps to help someone or to stand up for what is right, that you did not speak?

## Activity

This week concentrate on how you and others use your (their) tongue(s). Ask God to help you use your tongue in a way that will glorify Him.

1. Read Proverbs 16:24. Think of pleasant words you can use and try to do so as much as possible this week. For fun, perhaps at one meal you could see how many times you could say *please* and *thank you*, but then seriously try to use those words more as well. This may be a “little thing,” but even little things can make a difference in our lives.
2. Read Proverbs 10:19. Are you a person of many words? Sometimes we are so busy talking that we do not listen to God, to what people are saying, and to what is going on around us. If we care about others we will want to listen to them. Monks in the Middle Ages (and even some people today) sometimes took a vow of silence where they would not speak for a period of time, perhaps even years. No one is suggesting you do this! But perhaps sometime this week you could stop speaking for a half hour (or even ten minutes) and concentrate on listening. Tell those you are with what you are doing or they may think something is wrong with you or that you are upset with them.
3. Several proverbs spoke of the value of apt words that instruct others. Can you think of someone you might help this week by what you say? Perhaps your counsel could help someone who has difficulties in a relationship. Perhaps you could encourage someone who is going through a rough time. Maybe your tongue could even be used to give practical instruction, like telling someone how to do math problems, helping him with his homework, teaching him how to kick a soccer ball, or reading a recipe so she could make dinner more easily.

## **The Tongue - Part 1**

18:21 - The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

27:14 - If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

11:9 - With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous escape.

12:6 - The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.

11:12 - A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

21:23 - He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

16:23 - A wise man's heart guards his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.

15:7 - The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.

10:21 - The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment.

23:9 - Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.

17:27 - A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.

17:28 - Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

18:13 - He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame.

15:28\* - The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

13:3 - He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

29:20 - Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

12:18\* - Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

16:24\* - Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

25:15 - Through patience a ruler can be persuaded and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

15:23 - A man finds joy in giving an apt reply - and how good is a timely word!

25:11-12\* - A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.

10:19 - When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.



## **THE TONGUE, part 2**

### **Lesson Aim**

That your students would understand the importance of using their tongues in a God-honoring way.

### **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 12:18** - “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

### **Lesson Background**

“‘Woe is me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips’” (Isaiah 6:5). If that was true for Isaiah, it is certainly true for us and the people in our day. Coarse language, blasphemy, lying, mocking, and gossip abound. Today you and your students will examine what God has to say in the book of Proverbs about these sins.

Proverbs 10:31-32 and 4:23-24 speak of keeping perverse, corrupt talk far from our lips. Perversity is an obstinate deviation from what is right and proper. God has created the universe in a particular way, and if in speech or action we turn from this, we will only bring destruction to ourselves and others. These verses are expanded upon in Ephesians 5:4 - “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Corrupt speech can occur through blasphemy (using the Lord’s name in an empty, meaningless way - Exodus 20:7), profanity (using religious terms - e.g., hell, damnation - in a frivolous manner), or obscenity (using coarse terms to speak of sexual or other bodily functions). God’s name is holy (Psalm 33:21; 103:1; 105:3; 145:21), and to use it as an interjection or in some other light manner brings great dishonor to His holy person and character. Even to take His precious name on our lips

in praise is an inestimable privilege (Jewish people never say the covenantal name, *Yahweh*, lest they use it in an improper way), and to hear His name bandied about as if one were talking about windshield wipers or candy bars ought to bring grief to our hearts. God will vindicate His name, whether it is dishonored in tongue or deed (Ezekiel 20:39; 36:20-22; 39:7). Christians ought also use words relating to our faith with the utmost seriousness.

The issue of obscenity is less clear-cut, but one of which the smallest child has an innate understanding (“Ooh, Joey said a bad word . . .”). What makes a word obscene is largely determined by society. Why the word *excrement* is an acceptable term and certain synonyms are not lies in the denotations and connotations a culture has ascribed to a particular pattern of sounds. In Victorian times, the word *leg* was considered extremely vulgar. There may be words that you deem inappropriate that your students find perfectly acceptable. There will, however, be few of these. You should tell your students that if they have any qualms about using a word or think the people with whom they are speaking might, they should not do so. The obscenity of a word is also defined by its use (this is also true with words about our faith). One should not use words tritely, as angry expletives, or to curse people, wishing them harm.

Another issue to consider is that of circumlocutions, replacing blasphemous or obscene words with less offensive ones. *Gosh, golly, geez, darn, and doggone it* are all substitutions for the Lord’s name or Christian words. Many times people have no idea of the origin of a term. The word *bloody* is considered blasphemous in Great Britain because it actually refers to the precious blood of Christ. How should a Christian deal with circumlocutions? Although believers have different convictions about these matters, it would seem that if the circumlocution is associated in the mind of the speaker and hearer with the actual blasphemy or obscenity, it should not be used. However, one should not be too harsh with those who see nothing wrong with the practice. Some actually view circumlocutions positively, feeling that by substituting such words for the actual ones, unbelievers will respect them. Others may not even know the connection to God-dishonoring words. By the way, as you teach this lesson, please don’t register shock if your students verbalize corrupt words in their efforts to discuss the issue. If they are trying to shock you or impress their fellow students, your horror only achieves their objective (you should calmly tell them that they do not need to say the words to discuss them, and then deal with the separate issue of their motivation), and if they are just innocently asking the meaning of a word or why it is wrong, your shock will hurt them for what was a well-intentioned error. One final problem to consider about the whole area of corrupt speech is whether or not a believer can ever read, write, act in, or watch a work in which the Lord’s name is used in vain or where obscene speech is used. This is a difficult and complicated issue that cannot be discussed here, but you may wish at least to touch upon it with your students to get them thinking.

Your students are probably all too familiar with mockery as certain members of their class make fun of those who, for one reason or another, have procured their scorn. An individual who mocks is a proud person (Proverbs 21:24) who refuses to listen to instruction or accept rebuke (Proverbs 13:1; 15:12). Since he will not listen to truth, he will not obtain wisdom even if he searches for it (Proverbs 14:6). Seeing himself as the center of the universe, he even mocks at God-ordained authorities and does not care if justice is done as long as he obtains his own ends (Proverbs 19:28). Why do people mock others? Sometimes it is because they are jealous or even hate the objects of their derision. Often they put others down to make themselves look good, but their actions, while perhaps producing immediate approval, bring about their ultimate harm (Proverbs 9:12; 24:9; 17:5; 19:29; 3:34). It is important that those in authority deal with mockers, removing them from situations where they can do harm or punishing them in other ways appropriate to the situation (Proverbs 22:10; 19:25). This will not generally convict the mocker of his sin (Proverbs 9:7-8), but will warn those who might be tempted to follow in his footsteps (Proverbs 21:11; 19:25). Your students need to understand that while the Bible commands us to try to make amends to those with whom we are at odds, correcting the mocker only invites insult (Proverbs 9:7-8), for he is only interested in justifying himself (Proverbs 13:1). By refusing to associate with a persistent mocker, a group of students

may be able to deal effectively with the problems he causes. Sometimes, however, it may be necessary for them to approach an authority to deal with the situation.

Lying is another misuse of our tongues. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). People generally lie either to protect themselves or to gain an advantage over another. Both of these are selfish motives. They may also lie because they hate another person and wish to do him harm (Proverbs 26:28). Proverbs speaks of the importance of being a truthful witness (Proverbs 12:17; 14:5,25; 21:28). A truthful witness will speak what is right in spite of any inducement to do to the contrary, but a false witness “pours out lies” (Proverbs 14:5). A person could falsify his witness not only by direct untruths, but also by misrepresenting or concealing matters so as to give a false impression. One can be a witness not only in a court of law, but also in everyday circumstances as he speaks of what he knows about different people and situations. He can even testify falsely by speaking against the truths of the Bible and hence helping to bring about not only earthly (e.g., Proverbs 14:25 which could occur literally in a court of law), but also eternal destruction (Proverbs 21:28).

A false witness will often speak harmful untruths about other people, but another type of deception involves speaking positively, though untruthfully. Flattery builds others up with false compliments in an effort to win friendship or to gain favors. Again the motivation is selfish. At best it is a smoothing over of one’s neighbor’s faults rather than giving him a realistic evaluation of himself or showing him the need to repent of his sins for his ultimate good. At worst, it is a means whereby one person can prey upon and manipulate another to gain whatever advantage that person’s good will can bestow.

The Bible mentions other situations in which people lie and the harm that results from them. Some people lie by using shady business practices - not giving proper value for the cost of an item, cheating on taxes, using false advertising and the like (Proverbs 21:6). Prosperity is ultimately from God, and if He so desires He can make a fortune “take wings” as a fleeting vapor. Sometimes people use deception to joke with another person, usually telling him that something bad has happened and later saying that they were only fooling. This, however, is as dangerous as “shooting firebrands or deadly arrows” (Proverbs 26:18-19). Proverbs notes how important it is for kings to be honest (Proverbs 17:7; 16:13). Interestingly, it says that liars tend to listen to others who pour out falsehood (Proverbs 17:4). How important it is for us to be honest in all our speech and actions, for “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Proverbs 12:22).

One sin of the tongue that often includes lying is gossip. It can be caused by hatred, jealousy, curiosity, and even good intentions. Ruining another person’s reputation by gossip is an easy way to get revenge. Often, however, the rumor-spreader does not harbor deep animosity toward his victim, but does feel superiority if he is not inclined toward or has not suffered the sins or circumstances related; the very act of passing on information makes him feel important. On the receiving end, ordinary curiosity may encourage gossip. Gossip may even be disguised as prayer. A very thin line lies between genuine concern and gossip, and we need to check our motivations and ask for God’s wisdom to discern who has a legitimate “need to know.” May God keep our hearts and tongues pure, free from gossip, lying, mockery, and corrupt speech, to bring forth life and honor Him.

## Lesson Procedure

### Story

“Hey, did you see that movie they showed on cable last night?” A.J. said, taking a long swig of his soda and cockily eyeing his friends.

“What movie?” Micah inquired.

“I forget the name of it, but you wouldn’t even have to ask ‘what movie?’ if you’d seen it. Let’s just say, it wasn’t *Bambi*. It was rated ‘R,’ but it should have been ‘double X.’”

“My parents don’t let me watch that kind of thing,” Scott complained.

“What are you? A baby? There are ways to get around parents.”

“Yeah, I saw part of it,” Kevin said. “My dad was watching, and I don’t think he would have let me, but I told him I was going to do my homework and then I snuck down and sat halfway down the stairs where I can see the TV screen and not be noticed. Did you see that part where the girl was in the Jacuzzi and then that guy . . .”

“Oh, yeah, did she have a gorgeous body or what! They sure left nothing to the imagination. She had . . .”

“Uh, guys,” Micah interrupted, “I don’t think we should be talking about stuff like that.”

“What’s the matter, baby, hasn’t your mama ever taught you about the birds and the bees?”

“It’s just that God says in the Bible that we shouldn’t use obscenity or joke about things like that.”

A.J. swore. “Not only a mama’s boy, but a blankety-blank preacher. But you’re not a mama’s boy, are you? You don’t have a mama, do you? Your mama went off with some guy, didn’t she?”

“That’s not true, A.J. You take that back or I’ll . . . I’m gonna . . .”

“You’re gonna what, baby?”

“Aw, forget it,” cried Micah, and stormed away.

“Man, you were awfully hard on him, A.J.” Scott said.

“Aw, he’s such a dweeb.” [substitute current slang]

“And that’s not true about his mother. She had to go away to a hospital for a while. She didn’t run away with anyone.”

“Well, that’s what everybody says.”

“Scott’s right, A.J. Micah can be a little different sometimes, talking about God and all, but he’s an alright guy and you had no cause to be mean to him even if he was being a prude.”

“Oh, all right,” said A.J. “I’ll tell ‘Holy boy’ later that I’m sorry about what I said about his mother. Now let me tell you some more about that flick.”

Some of the boys in this story displeased God in a number of ways. Can you tell me how they sinned with their tongues? Today we will discuss corrupt speech, lying, mocking, and gossip and see what God’s Word has to say about these sins in the book of Proverbs [Because of time constraints, you may wish to limit your discussion to only one or two of these areas].

### Corrupt Talk

Pass out the verse sheets, have your class read the verses from Proverbs on corrupt talk, and then discuss. You may include the explanation of Proverbs 10:32 and ask the questions below if you wish.

10:32 - A righteous person speaks what is appropriate to the moment and what coincides with what is right. Perversity involves stubbornly deviating from the proper course. God has made the universe in a particular way, but a perverse person rebelliously twists his words and ways into a pattern that is against God, which will only bring misery to himself and others. It is like a child trying to push a puzzle piece in upside-down.



- What is meant in these verses by perverse speech [in your discussion bring out the difference between obscenity and blasphemy and also read Ephesians 5:4 and Exodus 20:7]?
- Why is it wrong to use God's name in an empty way?
- Why is it wrong to use obscenity?
- What makes a word obscene?
- How do we know what words are bad to use? Is it all right to use words like *gosh* that substitute for other words (*God*)?
- Is it wrong for a Christian to read a book or watch a movie or TV show that uses bad language? Do you think it is wrong for a Christian to write a book or act in a play that uses bad language? Under what circumstances and conditions, if any, might any of these things be allowable?

## Mockery

“Has anyone ever made fun of you? How did you feel when they did this? Have you ever taken part in mocking someone? Why do you think you did this? People usually mock others to put them down and make themselves look good. This backfires, however, for although others may laugh with the mocker and make him feel good for the moment, in the long run people do not respect a mocker (Proverbs 24:9). Perhaps you did not want to hurt the person being ridiculed, but you were afraid to stand up to your peers. What does God say about mockery?” [Read and discuss the verses on mockery in three sections: What a mocker is like, God's judgment of mockers, and how to deal with mockers. Comments on several verses are given below.]

21:24 - Mockers are usually proud people. They do not judge life by God's standards, but by their own. They think that whoever does not dress the way they dress, talk the way they talk, do the things they do, think what they think, and like what they like must necessarily be inferior.

13:1; 15:12 - Why is it wise to listen to and submit to those in authority over us? Why do you think mockers refuse to do so?

14:6 - Why might it be difficult for a mocker to find wisdom?

17:5 - How does mocking the poor show contempt for God?

9:7-8 - Why would a person who corrects a mocker be likely to incur abuse?

21:11; 19:25; 22:10 - How do these verses differ from Proverbs 9:7-8? What is a simple person? How might he learn from the punishment of mockers? What do you think the best plan is to deal with a mocker (remember, a mocker is someone who persistently mocks, not one who does so once or twice, although, of course, that is not good either)?

## Lying

“Why do people lie? Usually it is to protect themselves or to gain some sort of advantage they feel they could not otherwise obtain. Can you give examples of situations in which a person might be tempted to lie, or even a time when you yourself did so [e.g., lying to a parent about what one did or did not do in order to protect oneself; cheating on schoolwork; lying about age, education, sports ability, or money (such as being ostentatious)]?”

12:17; 14:5; 14:25; 21:28 - Why is being a truthful witness so important? To what things are you witness?

21:6; 19:22 - In what ways could a fortune be made by a lying tongue [e.g., insurance scam; selling a product of less quality than advertised]? Why is money made in this way “a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare”? Why is it better to be poor than a liar?

17:7; 16:23 - Why is it especially bad for a ruler to lie? Why would a king value a truthful person?

15:4 - How might a deceitful tongue crush someone's spirit?

26:18-19 - How are the things being compared in these verses alike? Can you give an example of a situation where a person might deceive a neighbor and consider it a joke [telling a classmate that he got a lower grade on a test than he did; telling a guy that his girlfriend is romantically involved with someone else]?

26:28; 29:5 - Why do people flatter others [to get others to like them or to gain something from them; because it is easier than telling the truth]? In what ways can a flattering mouth work ruin [the flatterer can manipulate a person to gain advantage for himself; the person flattered will get an unrealistic picture of himself and his abilities, leading to pride, difficulty in recognizing sin, overconfidence and disappointment, discouragement, and/or disillusionment when he is confronted by reality]?

### **Gossip**

“What is gossip? Can you give some fictitious examples? What are some reasons why people gossip?”

16:28 - How can gossip separate close friends? If you have gossiped about your friend, how can you make things right? If your friend has gossiped about you, what should you do? If you hear gossip about your friend, what should you do?

18:8; 26:22 - What do these verses mean?

10:18 - What is slander? Why is a person who spreads slander a fool?

20:19 - Why might much talking lead to gossip?

26:20 - How does gossip inflame a quarrel?

### **Corrupt Talk**

18:6 - A fool's lips bring him strife, and his mouth invites a beating.

10:32 - The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.

10:31 - The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out.

4:23-24 - Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Ephesians 5:4 - Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

Exodus 20:7 - You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

(see also Proverbs 18:4; 15:2; 18:7; 10:11,20; 6:12; 16:1)

## Mockery

- 21:24 - The proud and arrogant man - “Mocker” is his name; he behaves with overweening pride.  
13:1 - A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.  
15:12 - A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise.  
14:6 - A mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning.  
19:28 - A corrupt witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down evil.  
9:12 - If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.  
24:9 - The schemes of folly are sin, and men detest a mocker.  
17:5 - He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.  
19:29 - Penalties are prepared for mockers, and beatings for the backs of fools.  
3:34 - He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.
- 29:8 - Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger.  
9:7-8 - Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.  
21:11 - When a mocker is punished the simple gain wisdom; when a wise man is instructed, he gets knowledge.  
19:25 - Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke a discerning man, and he will gain knowledge.  
22:10 - Drive out a mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.  
(see also Proverbs 19:25,28; 29:8)

## Lying

- 12:17 - A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies.  
14:5 - A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.  
14:25 - A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.  
21:28 - A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.  
21:6 - A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.  
19:22 - What a man desires is unfailing love; better to be poor than a liar.
- 17:4 - A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue.  
17:7 - Arrogant lips are unsuited to a fool - how much worse lying lips to a ruler!  
16:13 - Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.  
12:22 - The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.  
15:4 - The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.
- 26:18-19\* - Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbor and says, “I was only joking!”
- 26:28 - A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.  
29:5 - Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.
- Psalm 34:13 - Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.  
(see also Proverbs 8:7-8; 17:20; 19:5,19; 12:5,19)

## **Gossip**

11:13 - A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

16:28 - A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.

18:8\*and 26:22\* - The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

10:18 - He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

20:19 - A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

26:20 - Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip, a quarrel dies down.

# **RICHERS**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students may understand that riches are blessings from the Lord that we should not covet, but thankfully use to help others and honor Him.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 11:28** - “Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.”

**Proverbs 19:17** - “He who is kind lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

## **Lesson Background**

“If I were a rich man . . .” sings Tevye in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, as he contemplates all he would do if God were to grant him wealth. Few people consider themselves rich, but in comparison to most of the world almost everyone residing in the United States is fantastically wealthy. How should we view these riches? How should we treat those who are poor? Attempting to solve complex economic problems may be beyond our abilities, but God has given us commandments and principles to govern our lives so that we may please Him in the use of our resources.

All the good things we have come because of the Lord’s blessing. We should, therefore, give our lives and possessions back to Him and use our wealth to glorify Him (Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:6-12). God has promised to bless the righteous in material as well as other ways. This does not necessarily mean that if a person is suffering or poor according to our standards, he is not following the Lord (Job’s comforters’

mistake), for God has promised to supply all His people's needs (Philippians 4:19; Proverbs 10:3). Our responsibility is to be kind to the poor (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5; 14:21; 19:17) and not treat them like the world does (Proverbs 14:20; 19:4,7). Proverbs contends, however, that a correlation does exist between material prosperity and obedience to the Lord (Proverbs 3:9-10; 10:22). When a person follows wise and honest principles (Proverbs 8:18-21; 15:27; 11:24-25; 13:11,18; 20:10), God will bless him. The wicked may seem to be doing well for a while, but their lives are filled with trouble and eventually their fortunes will vanish (Proverbs 15:6; 21:6).

Although we should be thankful for God's material blessings, "wealth is worthless in the day of wrath" (Proverbs 11:4) and we should never trust in riches (Proverbs 11:28). Scripture contains severe warnings about the dangers of riches (Matthew 19:23-24; James 5:1-6; I Timothy 6:6-10), but few today heed them. America has become a society where greed is glorified and people feel entitled to luxury. Advertisers (and according to the *New York Times* the average person is exposed to some sort of advertisement 3500 times per day) seek to create needs and to encourage people to achieve illusory bliss by the pursuit of novelty and pleasure. Your students live amidst a culture of consumerism where worth is determined by ownership of the latest and best, and where values such as patience, contentedness, self-denial, and generosity appear outmoded and absurd. May we not be sleepily lulled to accept and live according to such a worldview. Rather, may we live in imitation of our Lord, who for our sakes became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich (II Corinthians 8:9).

**For further reading:** *The Golden Cow* (White, John; IVP, 1979); *Why the Devil Takes Visa* (Clapp, Rodney; *Christianity Today*, Vol.40, #2, 10/7/96).

## Lesson Procedure

"Suppose I were to give you a check for a million dollars. What do you think you would do with the money? How would it change your life? If I gave you a million dollars, you would probably think yourself rich. Do you consider yourself rich now? Compared to most of the people in this world you are. Let's list some of the material blessings God has given you. Does God have anything to say about how you use your riches? Read the first section of verses to find out."

Read and discuss the verses on the handout sheet. Scripture has much to say on the subject of riches that may cut sharply across you students' ideas and way of life. The topic is too broad to cover in any sense adequately in one lesson, so you should decide whether you wish to examine the Proverbs verses in detail (questions are given below) or whether you wish to consider the subject more generally, utilizing other Scripture and some of the *For Further Thought* topics below. Do not try to cover everything.

### Questions

3:9-10 - You and your family are probably not farmers. How can you apply this verse to your life?

8:18-21 - How might wisdom bring about wealth?

13:7 - Why might someone pretend to have more or less money than he actually has?

15:6; 10:22 - How might the income of the wicked bring trouble?

14:20; 19:4,7 - Why do you think people shun and avoid the poor?

13:8; 11:4 - Explain the meaning of these verses.

11:28 - In what ways do people trust in their riches. What evidence might there be that a person was or was not doing this? Do you feel tempted to do this?

14:21,31; 17:5; 19:17 - How might a person oppress the poor? How can you be kind to poor people? As a class, try to think of at least one practical suggestion and carry it out.

15:27 - Why do you think the two halves of this verse are put together? What things might tempt you to greed?

13:18 - How is this so? Next week we will learn more about this.

20:10,14 - What dishonest business practices do these verses discuss? Can you give any examples of this?

21:6 - Why might a dishonestly-made fortune be a deadly snare and easily disappear?

### **For Further Thought**

Is it all right to buy whatever we want as long as it is not something evil and we have enough money to do so? One author said, "I'm convinced that if we were to gain God's perspective, even for a moment, and were to look at the way we go through life accumulating and hoarding and displaying things, we would have the same feeling of horror and pity that any sane person has when he views people in a mental asylum endlessly beating their heads against the wall" [Randy Alcorn, *People of Destiny*, 3/4 1991, p.16; citation does not imply agreement with the theology of the author]. Comment on whether or not you think this statement is true and how you feel about what he says.

Read I Timothy 6:6-10. What do these verses say about being content? Verse 10 is a very strong statement, but we know it is true because it is God's Word. In what ways do you think the love of money could be the root of all kinds of evil?

What do you think about advertising? What are advertisers trying to do? What do you think is right or wrong about advertising? Do we really need all the products they are selling? Do you think you buy things because of advertising? Do you buy things that you don't need or don't even want because of it? The *New York Times* says that the average person is exposed to some sort of advertising, even if it is only seeing a product's name, 3500 times per day. How do you think this affects you?

Do you treat people differently depending on whether they are rich or poor? What does James have to say about this (read James 2:1-9)? How do you feel about those who are poor? Why are people poor? Do you think that it is their fault (always? never? sometimes?)? How does God feel about the poor? What are some practical ways you can help those who are poor?

What are some ways in which you waste money or resources God has given you (in today's lesson we have talked mostly of material things, but you can also waste time)? Try to think of at least one specific way you can improve in this area if this is a problem for you, and let's ask God to help us this week.

Proverbs 11:28 says, "He who trusts in his riches will fall . . ." Do you think you find your security more in the resources you have (including your home, parents' jobs, etc.) or in God? How can we learn to trust God more?

## Activity

What are some ways kids can earn money [e.g., doing extra chores for parents or friends, housecleaning chores, washing cars, shoveling snow, running errands, babysitting, having a garage sale]? Do you have a regular source of income, an allowance given you by your parents or a job or chores by which you earn money? This week (or even better, for at least this month), write down in a notebook or on a piece of paper each time you receive or spend money. Do you tithe your money (give at least 10% to the church)? Do you use any of your money to help other people? Do you save some of your money? On what do you spend most of your money? Do you think you should change any of the way in which you use your money?



## Riches and Poverty

3:9-10 - Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.

8:18-21 - With me [wisdom] are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.

10:3 - The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

13:7 - One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.

15:6 - The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.

10:22 - The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.

(see also Proverbs 10:16; Malachi 3:6-12)

10:15 - The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor.

14:20 - The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.

(see also Proverbs 19:4,7)

13:8 - A man's riches may ransom his life, but a poor man hears no threat.

11:4 - Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

11:28 - Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.

14:31 - He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

17:5 - He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.

19:17 - He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.

14:21 - He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

11:24 - One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

15:27 - A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.

(see also Proverbs 11:25; I Timothy 6:6-10)

16:8 - Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

13:11 - Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.

13:18 - He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

16:26 - The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on.

(see also Proverbs 20:21; 13:23; 14:24)

20:10 - Differing weights and differing measures - the Lord detests them both.

20:14 - "It's no good, it's no good!" says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase.

19:1 - Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse.

19:22 - What a man desires is unfailing love [or a man's greed is his shame]; better to be poor than a liar.

21:6 - A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.

(see also Proverbs 16:11; 18:23)

II Corinthians 8:9 - For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

(see also James 5:1-6; I Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 19:23-24; Malachi 3:6-12; James 2:1-9; Philippians. 2:6-7)



# **THE SLUGGARD**

**Proverbs 24:30-34; 6:6-11; and other verses**

## **Lesson Aim**

That your students would learn the value of diligence and work with all their hearts, serving the Lord.

## **Memory Verse**

**Proverbs 18:9** - "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys."

## **Lesson Background**

Work is a blessing from God. It is not always regarded as such. The Greeks and Romans considered work to be a burden, and today many see work as an evil to be endured for the sake of the weekend. But this is not the Lord's view. God worked for six days to create the world and continues to work, sustaining all things by His powerful word (Hebrews 1:3). God has commanded us to work, as well as to rest one day in seven (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). We work to bring glory to God and blessing to others. Work brings about production and achievement, provision for our needs, service to others, and a sense of satisfaction. We serve God in our work, by our work, by how we work, and as a vehicle to witness to His grace in our lives.

People sin against God's Fourth Commandment by going to one of two extremes. Workaholics feel that everything depends upon them. They may be motivated by greed, but are more often animated by a sense of responsibility or power. They tend to be driven, intense, competitive, demanding much of self and others, and are those who find it difficult to trust in God. More people today, however, seem to be at the other end of the spectrum, those whose lives revolve around their leisure. Rest has been commanded by God. Wisely chosen leisure activities can be of great benefit, enabling a person to recover from fatigue, to grow

personally, to contemplate God's goodness and works, and to build relationships with others. Yet leisure must not become the goal of our lives. And when we do work, we should work with all our might.

Scripture roundly condemns those who avoid work, the lazy person whom the book of Proverbs calls a sluggard. The author vividly describes a sluggard's characteristics. He does not plow in season, and hence his land will not produce a crop; if for some reason it does, the sluggard will sleep through the harvest (Proverbs 20:4; 10:5) and go hungry (Proverbs 19:15). Moreover, even if food is put right in front of him, he is too lazy to eat it! (Proverbs 19:24; 26:15). Such indolence will lead to slave labor, but diligent hands will rule and be fully satisfied (Proverbs 12:24; 13:4). The sluggard may use fear as an excuse for his failure to venture to do the job to which he has been called (Proverbs 22:13; 26:13). Depending on a sluggard will only bring one trouble (Proverbs 10:26). In fact, his lack of diligence can bring about such harm that Proverbs calls him "the brother of one who destroys" (Proverbs 18:9). We can see this in the two extended passages on sloth in Proverbs 6:6-11 and 24:30-34.

In Proverbs 6, the sluggard, who is wise in his own eyes (Proverbs 26:16), is told that he should learn a lesson from the ant. Even this little creature has enough sense to plan ahead and work hard without anyone forcing it to do so. The passage depicts well the attitude of the sluggard: a *little* sleep, a *little* slumber, a *little* folding of the hands to rest. Often the sluggard doesn't intend not to work, but he procrastinates. "I'll do it later," he thinks, "just let me rest a bit first," but "later" never comes or it is too late, and poverty catches him suddenly unawares, like the attack of a bandit.

The second passage presents the picture of a run-down field. At one time it may have been flourishing, but the man who had the responsibility of taking care of it neglected it. Like the unprofitable servant of Matthew 25, he didn't take advantage of the opportunities he had been given and use God's gifts wisely. So the ground yielded weeds, not food and drink. With the wall in disrepair, the boundaries became blurred and there was no longer any protection from intruders. Even at this stage, the sluggard could have gotten to work and reversed the desolation, though as time went on it would be more difficult because of the worsening situation (one should deal with weeds when they are small) and the sluggard's increasing lethargy. But the proud sluggard seemed to see no problem and this passage ends as did Proverbs 6:6-11, with scarcity coming upon him like an armed man.

Laziness is endemic in our society. Few people strive for excellence, and if they do it is usually for a sense of personal satisfaction rather than to glorify God and serve others (being pleased with our work should be a by-product, not the goal of our work). In one survey, only one-fourth of workers felt they were working at full capacity (Ryken). Sloth is an especial danger for young people, whom Leland Ryken dubs "the new leisure class." With almost no responsibilities, many feel a sense of entitlement with little desire to sacrifice. Since they have not had to work hard for them, they often fail to appreciate the gifts they have been given, are wasteful, and take little care of their possessions (Proverbs 12:27).

What may be even worse is how sloth has infiltrated the church. We are content with mediocrity, like the sluggard satisfied with just owning the field. But without work, ground returns to its natural state. We fail to provide for the future, hoping to reap where we have not sown. We neglect to cultivate our relationship with God, water it with Scripture and prayer, or weed out sin. Unlike Nehemiah, we don't repair the wall and leave the way open for enemies of God's kingdom. We fail to see that the fields are ripe unto harvest and to reap what God has caused to grow. Whether from a love of present ease or a fear of risk, we settle for less than God's will in church work, evangelism, relationships, and spiritual disciplines. As one man said, the lazy man deceives himself by the smallness of his sacrifices, not by overt abandonment but by subtle abdication of his responsibilities, by a failure to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Do you try to work hard at all you do? If so, is your motivation to please God or for your own glory? May we follow Paul's admonition to the Colossians, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working

for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

**For Further Reading** - *Work and Leisure* (Leland Ryken, Multnomah, 1987).

## Lesson Procedure

Ask your students if they like to work. If they answer in the negative, which is likely, ask them why this is so. Discuss the difficult aspects of work, such as the meaninglessness of a task, its prosaic nature and lack of room for creative input, its tedium and/or repetitive nature, its being done in isolation, and/or the stress inherent because of time constraints, the size of the task, and/or the perfection required. Explain that work is really a blessing and why this is so. Ask them why we work, what is good about work, and what they like about work. Tell your students that God wants us to work hard and that Proverbs has much to say about the person who does not do so, who is called a sluggard.

Have students whom you have asked ahead of time act out the verses about the sluggard being too lazy to eat, being afraid of a lion, and being like a door, and have the rest of the class watch and explain their actions. Then have your students read the appropriate proverbs. Read and discuss the other proverbs about sloth, concentrating on the two longer passages. Show that in contrast to some of the ideas discussed last week, the sluggard’s poverty is his own fault. Emphasize the dangers of procrastination. Ask what the difference is between work and play, and if there is anything wrong with the latter. What are some good ways in which to spend leisure time? How do they do so? Also discuss the verses in Colossians and focus in on our motivation to work. Is it to serve God and others or for our own glory and satisfaction? Cover, too, the idea of being a spiritual sluggard.

## Questions

19:24; 26:15 - These are extreme examples of being a sluggard. Can you think of other examples where a person may have just what he needs put before him and he is too lazy to do the little required to benefit from it [e.g., reading the Bible, listening to a sermon, being taught in school, free food or medical care offered]?

22:13; 26:13 - Generally speaking, what excuse does the sluggard give here for not doing his job [fear]?

26:14 - A door can have a lot of motion, but it doesn’t make much progress.

6:6-11 - What lesson should the sluggard learn from the ant? What is the sluggard’s attitude? Does he plan not to work? What will happen to the sluggard?

24:30-34 - Why did the sluggard lack judgment? Do you think his field always looked like this?

What should the sluggard do about the situation? [Note: It would have been a lot less work for the sluggard to deal with the weeds while they were small; it is a lot easier to get help at the first sign of academic struggles than to not do one’s work and let the problem snowball.] What is the significance of the wall?

20:4; 10:5 - You are probably not a farmer. How can you apply these verses to your life?

21:25-26 - In what way will the sluggard’s craving be the death of him? Why can the righteous give without sparing?

12:27 - Why do you think a diligent man prizes (and hence takes care of) his possessions?

12:24 - Why do you think diligent hands will rule?

10:26 - Explain the comparison made in this verse.

18:9 - In what way is he who is slack in his work brother to one who destroys? Give examples of how this is true.

26:16 - Why might a sluggard be wise in his own eyes?

12:1 - Does the sluggard love discipline? Why do you think not?

12:14 - Name different ways in which the work of one's hands rewards him.

22:29 - Why is it good to be skilled in one's work? How does one become so?

### **Further Discussion and Activity**

Do you do what needs to be done when it needs to be done? In what areas do you find it difficult to work hard? Chores? Homework? Spiritual disciplines? How can you improve in these? Change begins with one's attitude. Ask God to help you do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to Him and working with all your heart for the Lord, not men. Then make practical plans as to how you can do your work better. What specifically makes your work difficult? Are there any ways you could make your jobs more enjoyable? As Mary Poppins said, "In every job that must be done there is an element of fun, you find the fun and snap! the job's a game" (*A Spoonful of Sugar*, Wonderland Music, 1963). Are academic subjects hard for you? Perhaps you should get someone to help before you fall too far behind. Do you leave things until the last minute so that you are hastily scribbling your homework the period before it's due and never do seem to fit devotions, or perhaps music practice, into your day. Look at your day and week. Last week you were asked to keep a record of how you spent your money and to see how improvements could be made. This week write down how you spend your time. Prayerfully figure out where your priorities should change and how you might use wasted time to fulfill your responsibilities better.

## The Sluggard

19:24\* - The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!

26:15\* - The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.

22:13\* - The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!" or "I will be murdered in the streets!"

26:13\* - The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!"

26:14\* - As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.

6:6-11 - Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

24:30-34 - I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

13:4 - The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

20:4 - A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

10:5 - He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.

15:19 - The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

19:15 - Laziness brings on deep sleep and the shiftless man goes hungry.

21:25-26 - The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.

20:13 - Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare.

10:4 - Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

12:27 - The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions.

12:24 - Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.

10:26 - As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.

18:9 - One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

26:16 - The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly.

12:1 - Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

12:14 - From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.

22:29 - Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.

Colossians 3:17 - And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:23-24 - Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.