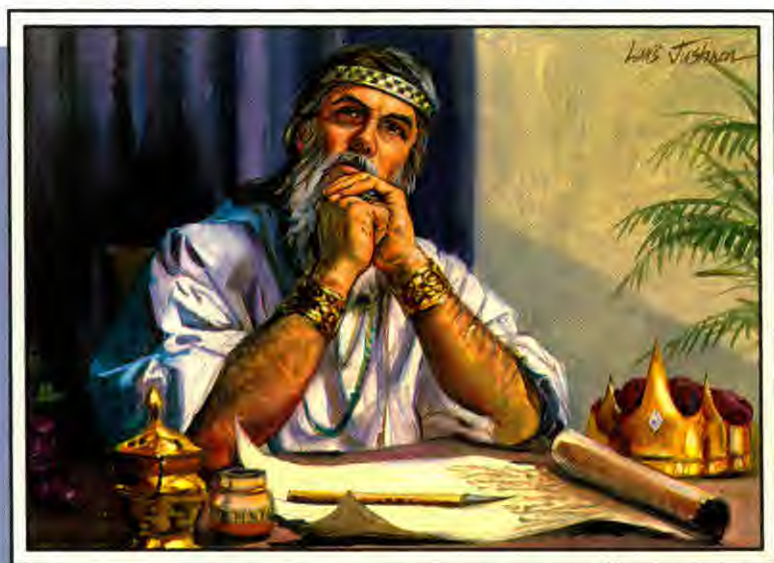




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SABBATH SCHOOL
LESSONS

Proverbs

Wisdom To Live By



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Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



Virginia Everett Davidson resembles the "virtuous woman" described in the book of Proverbs, on which she has written these lessons. She is a homemaker and mother living in Grand Junction, Colorado. She teaches an adult Sabbath School class and has led in cradle roll and youth Sabbath School departments.

She has taught Bible, English, and math in a self-supporting academy, has written articles for *Signs of the Times* and *Adventist Review*, and has developed a Bible curriculum using *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, and *The Desire of Ages*.

She operates a home business, "Davidson Originals," dealing with custom sewing and design. She is a graphic artist, interested in oil and watercolor painting, glass etching, stained glass, and needlework.

Her husband, Jim, is a health physics technician for Oak Ridge Laboratory. Together the Davidsons are developing "Theta Science Associates," an organization designed to glorify God and propound evidences of divine design in Creation. The Davidsons have two young daughters.

Check with your local Adventist Book Center for the companion book to the Sabbath School Lessons.

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs to Live By

The book of Proverbs was written primarily by Solomon, son of David, in the early part of his reign as king of Israel. "In the proverbs of Solomon are outlined principles of holy living and high endeavor, principles that are heaven-born and that lead to godliness, principles that should govern every act of life. It was the wide dissemination of these principles, and the recognition of God as the One to whom all praise and honor belong, that made Solomon's early reign a time of moral uplift as well as of material prosperity."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 33, 34.

The last two chapters of the book are attributed respectively to "Agur" and "Lemuel." Some scholars have assumed that these two names refer to Solomon. Others have concluded that they were unknown compilers or authors.

We know from 1 Kings 4:32 that Solomon "uttered three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five" (RSV). His fame spread abroad; the wisdom with which he was endowed was the wonder of the whole world. "And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind" (1 Kings 10:24, RSV).

A proverb is "a short, pithy saying in common use."—*Oxford English Dictionary*. A proverb "sums up in compact and easily remembered form an observation or judgment which is widely held to be true."—R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs: Ecclesiastes, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 3. The biblical proverbs were written in Hebrew poetic form.

The purpose of these lessons on Proverbs is to demonstrate that only as we have a living fellowship with God can we maintain purity of heart and conduct. Knowing God through Christ as Saviour and King affects every area of our lives. True religion is the power for moral and ethical purity. Proverbs is a book of practical religion designed to demonstrate the results of faith in action. It is a tool for the purpose of enabling believers to act wisely, to think about what they do and why they do it, and to be more sensible and sensitive citizens as a result of integrating learning and faith.

We are studying the book of Proverbs topically rather than verse by verse because the issues and themes raised in the book are not in any apparent order, and some of them recur a number of times.

The major purpose of education is the redemption of the individual; to impart God's character to those who are willing, so that their thoughts, words, and deeds are truly representative of Him. The proverbs and these lessons were designed: (1) to provide a view of our need; (2) to lead us to the Source of wisdom, power, and salvation; and (3) to furnish a practical guide for every major area of life. Hence the title—*Proverbs to Live By*.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

- I. Introduction, 1:1-7.
- II. The Wisdom Section, 1:8 to 9:18.
- III. A Collection of Proverbs, 10:1 to 22:16.
- IV. A Series of Maxims, 22:17 to 24:34.
- V. Proverbs Collected for Hezekiah, 25:1 to 29:27.
- VI. The Words of Agur and Lemuel, 30:1—31:31.

Lesson 1

September 29—October 5

What Are Your Priorities?

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LEARNING IS INTENDED TO MAKE US WISE. But what is wisdom? Education is often thought to be an absolute must for success in today's world. But we often become so absorbed in striving for temporal success that we lose sight of the purpose and the magnitude of true education. Sometimes we fail to reach the most important goals. Education becomes a frantic struggle for academic success with financial security as the ultimate goal.

"Our ideas of education take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man."—*Education*, p. 13.

William Cowper aptly stated, "Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one, have oftentimes no connection." Unless our learning acquaints us with the Source of all wisdom and righteousness, unless through His power we are being restored to His image, unless our sights are fixed on the far reaches of eternity and everything in this life is valued accordingly, all acquired knowledge, learning, and skill fall short of being true education, for they do not make us truly wise.

MEMORY TEXT: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

THEME: What are wisdom and righteousness? Why does the Lord invite us to seek them?

OUTLINE:

- I. What Is Wisdom? (Prov. 1:1-7; 2:10, 11).
- II. The Value of Wisdom (Prov. 4:5-7).
- III. How Is Wisdom Attained? (Prov. 2:1-6; James 1:5).
- IV. What Is Righteousness? (Prov. 2:7-10; 21:3).
- V. Righteousness and Wisdom (Prov. 2:1-6, 9).

Pray for 1,000 sets of Bible study lessons for laymen in the country of Togo in the Sahel Union. US \$2,000.

I. WHAT IS WISDOM? (Prov. 1:1-7; 2:10, 11).

The value of receiving God's wisdom forms the theme of the book of Proverbs. Solomon emphasizes that wisdom is to direct every area of our lives. Wisdom unites piety and the common duties of life. Wisdom is to think and act as God would in any situation of life.

1. What is a proverb? What does Solomon state as the purpose of his proverbs? Prov. 1:1-6.

Proverb defined. The Hebrew word translated *proverb* means "a similitude," "a parable." It usually comprises a brief statement of practical wisdom. The corresponding verb means "to be like," "to compare," "to represent." In a proverb, briefly expressed truth is illustrated by comparison or contrast. For example: "The tongue of the just is as choice silver; the heart of the wicked is little worth" (Prov. 10:20).

Most of the proverbs are in couplets or triplets, in which lines corresponding in structure and length are arranged for purposes of comparison and contrast. Sometimes proverbs illustrate truth through a short discourse or parable.

SUN **Solomon's target audience.** The simple, the young, and the wise are the target audience Solomon had in mind. Because the simple are inherently susceptible to enticement and deception, they can benefit from the prudence taught in the proverbs. The young, lacking years and experience, can profit from the wisdom of one who has traveled the path before them. They can gain knowledge and discretion from that individual's instruction.

2. What is wisdom? How is it related to knowledge? Prov. 1:7; 2:9, 10 (compare 15:21; 24:3-6).

Note: In these lessons the Bible references in parentheses provide additional material for those who wish to enrich their study. The references immediately following the questions are intended to provide the answers.

Many shades of meaning. *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* lists 13 different words from the original languages, which have been translated "wisdom." In the Old Testament, those having wisdom are not necessarily the "wise" of the book of Proverbs. They may be: (1) those who practice magic arts (Ex. 7:11; Isa. 47:9, 10); (2) those with special skills (Ex. 36:8; 2 Chron. 2:12); (3) those who are clever, sly, or cunning (2 Sam. 14:2); (4) those who have the practical wisdom to handle the perils of life (Prov. 6:6; 14:24); (5) cultured, educated people (1 Kings 4:29); (6) those who accept commandments and instruction (Prov. 3:1; 8:33).

In the book of Proverbs, the wisdom extolled is holiness of life resulting from a personal fellowship with God. There is no true wisdom apart from "the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). This is not referring to fear in the sense of being afraid. We fear God when we reverence and respect Him. (See Ex. 20:20.) The ability to act wisely in every situation of life stems from a heart union with God by which the humble believer becomes a sharer of His holy character.

3. To whom is wisdom available? Prov. 1:20-23; 8:1-5 (compare 9:1, 4; James 1:5).
-

The measure of the Spirit given is determined by our capacity to receive. This capacity is created by our willingness to lay aside selfishness, preconceived opinions, and private methods of coming to conclusions. Then we can accept the wisdom that comes from above.

4. Who is the source of true wisdom? Prov. 2:6; 9:10 (compare 3:19, 20; 8:22-31).
-

God is the fountain of all blessing. Whether physical, intellectual, or emotional development is desired, God gives strength and understanding that we might attain the highest good. "Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 9.

It is sad to note that much of what the world around us esteems as wisdom in reality is worthless. "Worldly wisdom is foolishness with God. Those who rely upon it will surely err."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 354.

In every age people have sacrificed to attain knowledge that was regarded as acceptable in their social situation. In some eras of history philosophical knowledge was given supreme value. In our age, scientific knowledge is regarded by many as of greater value than either philosophical or religious knowledge. The kind of knowledge that God invites us to receive is an experience in holiness. To know by experience Christ's saving grace opens for us the gates of the eternal city of God.

What is of greater value to you, an education that the world respects or a personal union with Christ? If you are a parent, what are you more interested in your children having? Suppose they are confronted with a choice between achieving recognition in the world and obeying the commandments of God; how would you advise them?

II. THE VALUE OF WISDOM (Prov. 4:5-7).

5. How did Solomon describe the value of wisdom? Prov. 4:5-7; 3:14, 15.
-

Nothing can compare in value with the life that is "hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). When the old life of sin has been put away, and Christ has been given control of mind, body, emotions, motives, and plans, the ethical and moral practices of the believer will be wise. (See Col. 3:5-10.)

6. What are some of the advantages enjoyed by those who obtain true wisdom? Prov. 2:10-22; 4:6-13 (compare 8:14-16, 18; 9:10, 11).

Are you seeking the kind of wisdom that comes from God, or that which the world respects? How would you define the difference between these two kinds of wisdom?

III. HOW IS WISDOM ATTAINED? (Prov. 2:1-6; James 1:5).

7. In what manner should we seek for wisdom in order to find it? Prov. 2:1-6; James 1:5 (compare Prov. 8:34; Jer. 29:13).

Jesus' parable of the treasure hid in a field provides a classic illustration of the value of the heavenly treasure and the effort necessary to obtain it. (See Matt 13:44.) Spiritual wisdom is part of this treasure and while it is a gift of God, it is bestowed only on those who earnestly seek it.

8. How do we "buy" wisdom and truth (Prov. 23:23)? Prov. 9:6 (compare Rev. 3:17-19; Isa. 55:1).

"Jesus is going from door to door, standing in front of every soul temple, proclaiming, 'I stand at the door, and knock.' As a heavenly merchantman, He opens His treasures and cries, 'Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.' The gold that He offers is without alloy, more precious than that of Ophir; for it is faith and love. The white raiment He invites the soul to wear is His own robe of righteousness; and the oil for anointing is the oil of His grace, which will give spiritual eyesight to the soul in blindness and darkness, that he may distinguish between the workings of the Spirit of God and the spirit of the enemy. 'Open your doors,' says the great Merchantman, the possessor of spiritual riches, 'and transact your business with Me. It is I, your Redeemer, who counsels you to buy of Me.'"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 965, 966.

Time is money and life. Every day each of us spends time in trade for one kind of treasure or another. With whom are we doing our business? Of what character are our transactions? Have our priorities become confused as to what constitutes true wealth? What do we put

first each day? What influences do we allow to govern our decisions? What goals direct our conduct?

WED IV. WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS? (Prov. 2:7-10; 21:3).

9. Who are "the righteous"? Prov. 29:6, 7 (compare 11:30, 31; 12:3, 7, 26, 28).

Consistently with the Old Testament in general, the book of Proverbs speaks of the righteous as those who live righteous lives, those who perform righteous deeds, because of their heart union with God. The behavior of the righteous, including their thoughts, is righteous. A righteous person does not commit iniquity. (See Eze. 18:5-9.)

10. How do we become righteous? Prov. 2:7-10 (compare Isa. 32:15-17).

Righteousness is not an intangible quality that God pours upon us. The Bible never separates the believer's righteousness from Christ's dwelling in the heart. The covenant relationship with God, by which His Spirit reigns within, is the only source of righteousness. (See Rom. 8:9, 10; 10:6-10.) The power to think righteous thoughts and do righteous deeds is available only to the person who has friendship and fellowship with Christ.

Our only ground of hope. "So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 63.

11. What two kinds of activity are compared in Proverbs 21:3, and how does God relate to each? Compare Isa. 1:10-18.

"Who asked you to trample My courts? What is all this multitude of ceremonies for? And all these sacrifices—do you think I delight in the slaughter of animals? Come now, and let's reason together." Can't you almost hear the Lord's exasperation mingled with heartbreak for His wayward people?

"Come," He pleads, "let Me give you a solution to your situation. I can change your sinful heart. Sacrifices were intended to remind you of the Messiah to come, but only I can take away your sin. Even though your life is like crimson, I can make it as white as snow." (See Isa. 1:10-18; compare Amos 5:21-24.)

Unless the carnal mind is crucified, there is no salvation. (See Rom. 8:6.) Any kind of sacrifice with an unsundered heart is only a form of

godliness without the power. God rejects all rituals and human performances in the absences of His righteousness. This alone renders the heart right and just.

12. What can we learn from the book of Hebrews about what God really wants? Heb. 10:4; 11:6.

Jesus became human that He might reveal beyond all question what God is like and what He really wants of His people. Sacrifices? Offerings? Certainly not as they were misused by His Old Testament chosen people, and not at all now that the sacrifice toward which they pointed has been offered. The Lord declared, "Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7; see also Ps. 40:8). It was not merely to prove it could be done that Jesus lived a life of harmony and obedience. His life revealed what was in His heart. He offers this same experience to all who will receive it. (See Eze. 36:26; Heb. 8:10.)

As you examine your heart critically, on whose righteousness do you tend to depend: Christ's or your own? Do you feel accepted by God because of good things you do, or because of what Christ has done and is doing for you?

V. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM (Prov. 2:1-6, 9).

13. What is the relationship between righteousness and wisdom? Prov. 2:1-6, 9; 23:23, 24.

Wisdom and righteousness are not completely synonymous terms. The wisdom spoken of in the Old Testament cannot always be identified with righteousness. But the kind of wisdom that the book of Proverbs discusses is the righteousness that results from a covenant relationship with God. When the Lord has control of a mind through the power of His Spirit, that mind is a wise, righteous mind. In Proverbs 23:24 the "father of the righteous" is "he that begetteth a wise child."

The wisdom of the righteous person is manifested in a multitude of ways, many of which are spelled out in the book of Proverbs. The author is not saying that we become righteous in God's eyes when we act in a wise manner. Rather the message is that when we come to know the Lord, as it is our privilege to know Him, our thoughts, words, and deeds are wise because Christ has become our righteousness and wisdom. (See 1 Cor. 1:30.)

PERSONAL QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:

- Is the emphasis in my education on knowledge of facts, or on wisdom?
- How can I come to recognize God as the Source of all true wisdom? What am I doing about it?

- What am I buying with my time? Am I putting “first things first”?
- Am I being wise in my job and relationships?
- What is my attitude toward the sacrifice of Christ for me? Do I view

His work for me merely as a quick and easy way to take care of unpleasant happenings day by day, or does it provide hope and help for present and future victory?

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FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Study the following New Testament passages on the subject of wisdom: 1 Cor. 1:25-30; 2:6-16; 3:19.

“A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. . . . This knowledge is the essential preparation both for this life and for the life to come.”—*Ministry of Healing*, p. 409.

“The fear of the Lord lies at the very foundation of all progress; it is the beginning of wisdom. Your Heavenly Father has claims upon you; for without solicitation or merit on your part He gives you the bounties of His providence. . . . As you are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God, He requires that you make a right use of the privileges you enjoy. Your intellectual and moral faculties are God’s gifts, talents entrusted to you for wise improvement, and you are not at liberty to let them lie dormant for want of proper cultivation, or be crippled and dwarfed by inaction. It is for you to determine whether or not the weighty responsibilities that rest upon you shall be faithfully met, whether or not your efforts shall be well directed and your best.”—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 85, 86.

SUMMARY: The fear of the Lord—a relationship of reverence, admiration, and trust—puts the seeker for true wisdom in touch with its Source. Righteousness makes sense. It is more than a legal standing in the books of heaven. Righteousness enables the believer to live out the character of God. It empowers us to view life from the perspective of eternity and make decisions accordingly. The wisdom that comes from God ensures right use of knowledge and places its possessor in line for ultimate, eternal success.

A Star to Guide the Humble

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WHAT IS TRUST, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? Faith, the hand that lays hold upon the resources of Omnipotence, consists of more than just belief; trust is a vital component. But what is trust? How does it work?

Does trust belong in a compartment separate from daily life, preserved only for religion? Is it practical? Can it benefit anybody?

These are not rhetorical questions. They deserve answers. We need these answers in order to survive.

Trust includes willingness to commit oneself to the care of the one trusted. It is one thing to agree that a tightrope walker is capable of wheeling a person in a wheelbarrow on a rope strung over a thundering waterfall. It is quite another to volunteer to ride in the wheelbarrow.

A dictionary defines trust as complete assurance regarding the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. Trust involves placing confidence in someone, depending on him, committing oneself to his care, relying totally on his integrity.

Jesus is the One to be fully trusted. He is like a gleaming star on a clear night to whom each believing traveler may look for guidance and comfort.

MEMORY TEXT: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

THEME: The subject of trust—*what* it is, *what* it is *for*, and *whom* it is *for*—is the focus of this lesson.

OUTLINE:

- I. What Trust Is and Is Not (Prov. 22:17-19).
- II. Is Our Trust Misplaced? (Prov. 28:26).
- III. A Star to Guide the Humble (Prov. 3:5, 6).

I. WHAT TRUST IS AND IS NOT (Prov. 22:17-19).

1. How do we acquire trust? Prov 22:17-19 (compare Matt. 17:19-21; Luke 17:5).

Pray for 33 bicycles for pastors serving 8 to 14 churches in Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. US\$150 each.

It is impossible for us to make of ourselves faithful, trusting people. Trust in God is His gift to us that develops as we admit our weakness and submit to His enabling might. But God does not make us trust when we wish to doubt. True trust is based on intimate knowledge of the one trusted. Because we learn of and accept God's love and ability to sustain us, we trust Him. Willingness to trust God enables us to trust human beings whom we have discovered to be trustworthy.

SUN

Faith is given by the Holy Spirit. "While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them. And those who refuse to accept and obey God's word until every objection has been removed, and there is no longer an opportunity for doubt, will never come to the light.

"Distrust of God is the natural outgrowth of the unrenewed heart, which is at enmity with Him. *But faith is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it will flourish only as it is cherished.* No man can become strong in faith without a determined effort. Unbelief strengthens as it is encouraged; and if men, instead of dwelling upon the evidences which God has given to sustain their faith, permit themselves to question and cavil, they will find their doubts constantly becoming more confirmed."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 527. (Italics supplied.)

2. How does trust grow and become strong? What can you learn from the following passages?

Prov. 29:25 _____

Prov. 30:5 _____

Matt. 8:5-10 _____

Matt. 9:2 _____

James 1:2-8 _____

Faith increases as it is exercised. "You have to talk faith, you have to live faith, you have to act faith, that you may have an increase of faith; and thus exercising that living faith you will grow to strong men and women in Christ Jesus."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1121, 1122.

Friends of yours have just lost their baby son and their home in a hurricane. What could you say or do to help them trust in God?

II. IS OUR TRUST MISPLACED? (Prov. 28:26).

Faith is no problem to some people—they have faith in just about anything! But trust is worthless if not anchored in what is trustworthy.

3. What warning does Solomon sound in Proverbs 28:26?

Self-confidence in questions involving eternal salvation and the ability to overcome sin can be a sure passport to failure and ruin. (See John 15:5; Jer. 10:23; 2 Cor. 3:5.)

4. Who else besides ourselves is it unsafe to trust? Prov. 2:11-17; 13:20 (compare Jer. 17:5; Ps. 41:9).

We are invited in Scripture: "Have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22, NIV). Obviously such love involves a measure of trust. We trust those who trust the Lord—at least in regard to some things. We also trust unbelieving friends in regard to some things. But it would be a mistake to trust a brother or sister to keep us from falling into sin. They might help, but the ultimate deliverance comes only from Christ. Other human beings should never become the ultimate focus of our trust.

MON **The need is for a personal experience with God.** "If we mistake the wisdom of man for the wisdom of God we are led astray by the foolishness of man's wisdom. Here is the great danger of many. . . . They have not an experience for themselves. They have not been in the habit of prayerfully considering for themselves, with unprejudiced, unbiased judgment, questions and subjects that are new and that are ever liable to arise. They wait to see what others will think. . . . Unless these become sensible of their wavering character and correct it, they will all fail of everlasting life; they will be unable to cope with the perils of the last days. . . . Neither young nor old are excusable in trusting to another to have an experience for them. . . . A noble self-reliance is needed in the Christian experience and warfare."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 129, 130.

5. What is one thing that cannot be trusted to provide security? Prov. 11:4, 28; 23:4, 5 (compare Jer. 5:17; Ps. 20:7).

In this materialistic age the tendency is to rely upon things for security. The inspired counsel is that the Lord is our only security. He expects us to do what we can to provide for ourselves and our families, but ultimately our dependence must be totally upon Him. When it is no longer possible for believers to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17), they will know from past experience the value of trust in God.

How can you know with certainty that you are trusting in God and not in your prosperity?

6. List some other things that are unworthy of our trust:

Prov. 3:31 _____

Prov. 31:30 _____

Prov. 10:18 _____

7. What special blessings are given to those who trust in the Lord? Prov. 8:17, 18 (compare Eze. 33:13).
-

We are invited to trust in the Lord for the bestowal of His righteousness. Goodness, love, mercy, and wise counsel flow from the life of the one who constantly relies upon the Lord. Self-dependence, self-assurance in spiritual life is a snare that Satan has prepared to destroy God's people. Satan's studied purpose is to lead us to trust our own efforts and to respect our own goodness. If he were to succeed in this, we would become his victims; the life of victory would escape us.

How would you help a person who trusts in self rather than in God? Would you frankly point out the problem, or would you try in some indirect way to lead such a person to dependence upon Christ?

III. A STAR TO GUIDE THE HUMBLE (Prov. 3:5, 6).

8. Why does God want us to trust Him? Prov. 3:5, 6; Matt. 6:25-34.
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"If you have given yourself to God, to do His work, you have no need to be anxious for tomorrow. . . . When we take into our hands the management of things with which we have to do, and depend upon our own wisdom for success, we are taking a burden which God has not given us, and are trying to bear it without His aid. We are taking upon ourselves the responsibility that belongs to God, and thus are really putting ourselves in His place. We may well have anxiety and anticipate danger and loss, for it is certain to befall us. But when we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 100, 101.

9. Explain the principle that the apostle Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 12:10.
-

The apostle Paul did not enjoy pain and suffering but was glad he could share in the sufferings of Christ. In times of trial and pain he recognized more fully his total dependence upon the Lord. After he had prayed three times for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed (2 Cor. 12:7, 8), he was

the means by which I am led to rely more fully upon the Source of my power.”

WED

- 10. What are some prerequisites for answered prayer? Matt. 7:7; 1 John 3:22; 5:14, 15. Under what circumstances will God not answer our prayers? James 4:3; Ps. 66:18.**

Before we ask, we must realize our need. This is one of the first conditions of effective prayer. Cherished sin renders it impossible for God to answer our prayers. When we put away sin and trust the Lord to answer us, we can be assured that He will give us whatever is for our best good. The spirit of love and forgiveness in our hearts prepares us to receive God's blessing.

- 11. For what can we trust God? Phil. 4:19 (Ps. 37:4; 23:1).**

As shortsighted human beings we tend to ask for things that would do us more harm than good. The beautiful truth is that God may deny us what we have asked for, but in its place He will give us that which is best for us. Our faith should not fail when our prayers are not immediately answered. From His divine perspective the Lord is able to see perfectly the results for us of any course of action. He knows best where we should work, with whom we should associate closely, where we should live, and what influences are most likely to prepare us effectively to spend eternity with Him. Trust Him!

God supplies our needs. After accepting Christ and the advent message, a young man went to college to prepare for the ministry. Halfway through the year he realized that he did not have enough money to continue. Earnestly he shared with a religion teacher his deep conviction that he should be a minister. But how could he ever fulfill the Lord's will if he could not afford an education? The teacher encouraged the student to remain in college for two more weeks, and they both agreed to take the young man's financial need to the Lord every day. At the end of the two weeks the student received a letter containing a check for the amount he needed to continue in college. "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, NIV).

- 12. What special blessing can be claimed by those who trust in the Lord? Prov. 16:9 (compare Ps. 32:8).**

The various translations of Proverbs 16:9 enable us to grasp the full significance of the divine promise: "You may make your plans, but God directs your actions" (TEV). "A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps and makes them sure" (Amplified).

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Of course, there is a definite condition to such guidance. We can expect it when we are committed to Christ and, by His grace, doing His will. Proverbs 16:8 reads: "Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice" (Prov. 16:8, NIV).

THU 13. How only can we be assured that our plans in life will be successful? Prov. 16:3 (contrast 16:25; 19:3).

The Revised Standard Version translates the passage: "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." God's plans for our lives can be destroyed by our determination to have our own way. When our wills are merged in Christ's, His plans for us become our plans for ourselves. The Holy Spirit instructs us as to the best course to follow in every situation. By accepting His direction our work and our plans will be successful.

14. What figure of speech is used to describe God's work for those who put their trust in Him? Prov. 30:5 (compare 18:10; 21:31).

Self-preservation is one of the strongest human instincts. It motivates mankind to employ all manner of devices to provide protection from such feared events as accident, assault, lawsuit, disease, and death. Insurance of every kind is bought in the name of reducing risks. Although we are instructed to be careful custodians of all the Lord has committed to our care, apart from His intervention in our lives we have no lasting security.

In the difficult times preceding the second coming of Jesus, no human means of protection will be adequate. We must exercise complete trust in the Lord. (See Ps. 91:1-7.)

HOW IS MY "TQ" (TRUST QUOTIENT)?

- To what extent have I cooperated with God in the growth of my faith?
- How can I develop stronger faith in the Lord to direct me in the practical affairs of daily life?
- How can I resist those influences that threaten to destroy my trust in Christ?
- What personal testimony can I give to the Lord's guidance and blessing for those who put their complete trust in Him?

FRI **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** Consider the following counsel regarding the importance of trust in the Lord (Ps. 37:3, 5; 118:8; Isa. 26:4) and the danger of distrust (Jer. 5:17; 17:5; Isa. 30:1, 2).

“If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have—the great mercy and love of God—we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God.”—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 122.

“Jesus does not release us from the necessity of effort, but He teaches that we are to make Him first and last and best in everything. We are to engage in no business, follow no pursuit, seek no pleasure, that would hinder the outworking of His righteousness in our character and life.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 99.

SUMMARY: It is impossible for a proud heart to trust in God. But only He has the solutions for our personal and corporate problems. His blessings are available in abundance as we ask and submit ourselves to His perfect and gracious will.



Lesson 3

October 13-19

What I Am Versus What You Think I Am

SAB
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WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHARACTER AND REPUTATION? We have all heard that a good name is a precious thing. What is a "good name"? Is a good name the same as a good character? Is our good character destroyed when our good name is slandered? What can we learn from the relationship between character and reputation in human experience that will enable us to understand God's concern in the great controversy? And how will that understanding help us relate to the crises in our lives?

We will look for answers to these questions in the Word of God, and especially in the book of Proverbs.

MEMORY TEXT: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1).

THEME: It is more important to do what is right than to have a good reputation.

OUTLINE

- I. **Pride Goes Before a Fall (Prov. 16:18).**
- II. **The Value of a Good Name (Prov. 22:1).**

I. PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL (Prov. 16:18).

Pride versus self-worth. Self-esteem is a subject much talked and written about these days. As evidence that a person should love himself, Christian authors often cite Christ's words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is true that when one no longer doubts his own self-worth, he is more likely to love others. However, it seems that self-love and a sense of self-worth have become involved in a semantic tangle, in which precise meanings have become confused. Some authors extol the virtues of self-respect in a manner suggesting that personal pride is essential to achievement and success. Others regard self-respect as a humble recognition of self-worth, despite realistic awareness of one's weaknesses.

Pray for typewriters needed in the seminary in Beira, Mozambique. US\$1,500.

1. What did self-esteem do for Lucifer? Eze. 28:13-19 (compare Isa. 14:12-17).
-

When one's self-esteem blurs supreme love and respect for God, the result is self-idolatry. Awareness of our dependence upon the Creator for life, health, talent, wealth, and success in life preserves a realistic view of our own worth in relation to other created beings. Lucifer's self-esteem ceased to be a legitimate sense of self-worth; it became unholy self-love, the most insidious disease ever to afflict God's creation.

Give an example from your own experience that illustrates the truth found in Proverbs 16:18 and 18:12.

2. What results of pride are emphasized by the following passages?

Prov. 11:2 _____

Prov. 13:10, 18 _____

Prov. 15:25 _____

Prov. 17:19 _____

The results of pride illustrated:

● **Nebuchadnezzar** responded positively to Daniel's message (Dan. 2:47). He acknowledged that Daniel's God is the supreme Deity. When the three faithful Hebrews were unharmed in the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar commanded, "Servants of the most high God, come out!" (Dan. 3:26, NIV). He proclaimed, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. . . . For no other god can save in this way" (Dan. 3:28, 29, NIV).

Some time later Nebuchadnezzar forgot the true God and took to himself the credit for his prosperity and success as a ruler: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven . . . "Your royal authority has been taken from you" (Dan. 4:30, 31, NIV). For seven years he suffered a period of insanity.

● **Herod Agrippa I**, grandson of Herod the Great, was hailed by the people of Tyre and Sidon as a god (Acts 12:22). "Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died" (verse 23, NIV).

● **The disciples of Jesus** spent considerable time arguing "which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Luke 22:24, NIV). This desire for self-exaltation kept them spiritually weak and disqualified them for the test of their faith at the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

3. Why is pride so objectionable to God? Matt. 11:29; Prov. 6:16, 17 (compare Prov. 8:13; 16:5; 21:4).

“God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, . . . but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the eyes of God. . . . The drunkard is despised, and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character. . . . He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the blessings He came to give.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 30.

- 4. In what manner does pride often express itself? Prov. 20:6; 26:12 (compare Prov. 25:27; 27:2).**

“The Pharisee *proclaimed his goodness* at the corner of the streets; yes—even in the presence of his God. Such is the blindness of a self-deceiving heart! Lord! teach me to remember—‘that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God [Luke 16:15].’” —Bridges, *A Modern Study in the Book of Proverbs* (Michigan: Mott Media, 1978), p. 403.

- 5. In what ways do Christians sometimes ignore the counsel contained in Proverbs 25:6, 7? Compare Luke 14:7-11.**

In order to be honored by Heaven, we must be willing to sacrifice the honor of men. Love of worldly acclaim could have destroyed the work of some of the world's greatest leaders. Moses was noted for meekness, Daniel for dependence upon his God, and Paul for willingness to sacrifice position and honor for the cause of Jesus Christ.

To admit any “inferiority” is difficult for the average person. Yet, common sense should tell us that there is always someone, somewhere, who exceeds us in some way.

Pride, competition, and combativeness do sometimes “get things done,” but a far better way is to strive to be all that one can be for God. The honor of Heaven is of infinitely greater value than the plaudits of humanity.

- 6. What is another way in which pride is sometimes manifested? Prov. 31:30 (compare 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).**

Pride of appearance and love of display can destroy all that is lovely in character. Devotion to fashion sometimes so absorbs the mind and heart that no room is left for the important aspects of life. Fashion often dictates styles that are inappropriate for the refined, God-fearing, self-respecting person. “No Christian can conform to the demoralizing fashions of the

world without imperiling his soul's salvation."—*Child Guidance*, p. 433.

At the other extreme are persons who think it a virtue to dress in an untidy, tasteless manner. "When we lose taste for order and neatness in dress, we virtually leave the truth; for the truth never degrades but elevates."—*Child Guidance*, pp. 419, 420.

7. What truth stated in the book of Proverbs was illustrated by Jesus' life? Prov. 16:19; 22:4; Phil. 2:5-9.

Pride is dishonoring to God. So also is false humility. True humility recognizes need and fulfills God's purpose by accepting His grace and depending on His strength. False humility does not acknowledge one's ability or worth. Such an attitude effectively robs its possessor of the joy of knowing that he is loved and valued. False humility depreciates God-given talents. It leads an individual to the distorted idea that he or she is incapable of doing anything effectively. False humility robs God of the honor and service due Him.

In my attitudes to others, how do I sometimes demonstrate personal pride? How would my relationships with others be improved if, by Christ's grace, I learned to be humble? If pride is blinding, how does a person come to see his need? What internal work am I neglecting that allows pride to develop and manifest itself?

WED

II. THE VALUE OF A GOOD NAME (Prov. 22:1).

Reputation or wealth? Someone has said, "Given the choice between the name of a great company and its material assets, I would choose the name." Why? Without the name, the assets would remain at a fixed value or even depreciate, whereas the name itself could rebuild the assets lost, and then gain more.

8. What value did Solomon place on "a good name"? Prov. 22:1.

What is a good name? Hebrew poetry is known for parallelism and pun rather than for rhyme. In parallelism a statement is made twice, but expressed differently the second time. Besides adding interest, a deeper understanding of the subject is achieved by a comparison of the parallel phrases. For instance, in Proverbs 22:1 "great riches" is echoed in "silver and gold," and "a good name" finds its counterpart in "loving favour." Solomon was not referring to a business deal. He was extolling the excellence of a good character.

In Bible times a name was more than a mere title or identification. It represented reputation or character. It often told who you were, what you were like, what you had done, and even what you might become. (See Gen. 16:11; 17:5, 15; 32:28.) Some family names today reflect this:

Cooper made barrels, Fuller washed clothes, Smith made the anvil ring in the blacksmith shop and fashioned useful implements, and of course Johnson was the son of John.

“The Hebrews, like other ancient Near Eastern peoples, attached great significance to personal names. Their names had a literal meaning sometimes symbolic of the character and personality of the one it designated, and sometimes reflecting the moods or feelings of the one giving the name. . . .

“Perhaps the most popular type of name among the Israelites was one that contained some reference to the true God. Such a name was often a pious declaration of faith.”—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, article, “Name.”

So we find Joel (“Yahweh is God”), Elijah (“Yahweh is my God”), Nathanael (“God has given”), and Ishmael (“God hears”).

9. Why does the third commandment direct us to revere the name of God (Ex. 20:7)? Lev. 22:2 (compare Ex. 3:13-15; 34:5-7).

God’s name is a symbol of His infinitely holy character. When we misuse His name we depreciate His character. Using the Lord’s name carelessly or as an exclamation demonstrates lack of love and respect for Him as well as lack of trust in Him.

Do not dishonor God. “This commandment not only prohibits false oaths and common swearing, but it forbids us to use the name of God in a light or careless manner, without regard to its awful significance. By the thoughtless mention of God in common conversation, by appeals to Him in trivial matters, and by the frequent and thoughtless repetition of His name, we dishonor Him.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 306, 307.

10. In what other ways can God’s name be taken in vain? Prov. 30:9; 14:31.

When you become a Christian, you take Christ’s name. “God sends you into the world as His representative. In every act of life you are to make manifest the name of God. . . . You cannot hallow His name, you cannot represent Him to the world, unless in life and character you represent the very life and character of God. This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ.”

“It is because men take upon themselves the name of Christ, while in life they deny His character, that Christianity has so little power in the world.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 107, 137.

11. What statement does God make regarding His character? Mal. 3:6 (compare Heb. 13:8; James 1:17).

Character and reputation are not the same. God’s *character* is what

He is, demonstrated by how He thinks and acts toward those whom He has created. His perfectly holy character is changeless. As a transcript of His character His law is also perfect. To alter any feature of His character or His government would be to flaw it. This He *will* not do, and anyone else *cannot* do.

God's *reputation* is an entirely different matter. Lucifer gave God a bad reputation with some created beings by misrepresenting His character. Stirred by jealousy, he charged God with being arbitrary, harsh, unfair, and untruthful. He argued that if he himself were in control, things would be different.

In order to reveal the true nature of Satan's work, God must both allow sin to become fully developed, and demonstrate His own character in contrast to that of Satan. (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 495-497; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.)

The controversy begun in heaven continues here on earth. In each individual the battle rages. We are each given the freedom to choose whose character will be demonstrated in our life, God's or Satan's. The plan of salvation involves more than our personal redemption, although that is a wonderful aspect of it. God wants to do more than just proclaim us righteous (forgive our past sin), He wants to make us righteous (restore us). Through the grace and power that Jesus bought for us at Calvary, His character can be lived out in the life of the believer. Thus it is our privilege to reveal to angels and to men the glory of God's character. (See John 17:22.) Though others may give us a bad reputation, they can never give us a bad character.

12. What will symbolize our experience? Isa. 62:2 (compare Rev. 2:17; 3:12).

A young bridegroom, whose bride had willingly taken his name, gave her for a wedding present a small white stone inscribed with her new name. That name is symbolic of their experience. All her friends know her name. But the relationship, the precious and intimate friendship that she enjoys with her husband, can be known and understood by no other.

Each overcomer through Christ's grace will have just such a unique, personal relationship with Him. The relationship begins now as we daily come to know Him more fully and delight in reflecting His character to others.

EXERCISE IN PRIORITIES

Rank the following in order of importance to you:

- _____ What my neighbors think of me.
- _____ What my boss thinks of me.
- _____ What my children think of me.
- _____ What my spouse thinks of me.
- _____ What my parents think of me.
- _____ What my friends think of me.
- _____ What God thinks of me.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: On the importance of a good reputation, study: Rom. 1:8; 16:19; Heb. 11:2.

“Banish no longer your self-respect; for I have bought you with the price of My own blood.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 520.

“Real greatness can dispense with outward show.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 242.

“A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to eternity. God gives you intelligence and a reasoning mind, whereby you may grasp His promises; and Jesus is ready to help you in forming a strong, symmetrical character. Those who possess such a character need never become discouraged because they have not success in worldly affairs. They ‘are the light of the world.’ Satan cannot destroy or make of none effect the light that shines forth from them.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 579.

SUMMARY: A good name is a priceless treasure. It increases the effectiveness of our witness. Reputation is easily destroyed by gossip or slander. But slander does not have to destroy character. The slander of God’s character by the evil one and those who follow him has in no way changed His perfect purity and infinitely loving disposition. What one really is, is more important than what anyone thinks. The character that Christ lives out through us will stand the test of time and eternity.



- **What is homosexuality?**
- **What are its causes?**
- **What do the Scriptures teach about homosexuality?**

Written by Ronald M. Springett, PhD., *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* examines the current discussion from an Adventist point of view.

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Even as righteousness involves much more than refraining from evil, so health is more than the absence of disease. It encompasses the well-being of all our capabilities. To gain everything the world has to offer at the expense of health is to trade life and happiness for things of inferior value. We should guard health as sacredly as character.

Physical and spiritual health can be destroyed in many different ways. By tempting us to many kinds of intemperance, Satan seeks to destroy our mental, moral, and physical powers. The crafty enemy used many temptations to entrap Jesus, but failed every time, because Jesus relied fully on His Father's strength. Even the masterful forms in which the temptations of appetite, presumption, and covetousness came to Him were totally unsuccessful.

The rest of humanity has been tragically responsive to evil. Noah sought refuge in strong drink, Abraham capitulated to dishonesty and self-dependence, David fell into immorality, Moses lost his temper, Peter contradicted his faith, the Corinthian Christians gave loyalty to men instead of to Christ, and the Galatians substituted a man-made gospel for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The bright side to the picture is that Satan is a defeated foe. When we unite our weakness to God's might, we are more than a match for the sophistries of the evil one.

MEMORY TEXT: "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul" (Proverbs 16:17).

THEME: Physical, mental, and spiritual health can be maintained as we practice temperance in all things, overcoming temptation through the power of Christ.

OUTLINE:

- I. Health and Temperance (Prov. 15:24).
- II. Temptation to Sexual Lust (Prov. 5:3-9).

Pray for an evangelism van to reach unentered areas in Sri Lanka. US\$5,000.

I. HEALTH AND TEMPERANCE (Prov. 15:24).

What is temperance? Temperance is to health as mortar is to a brick building. Without temperance one can neither build nor maintain health. In times long past, temperance was a term used to refer almost exclusively to total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. More recently we have understood that "true temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

1. What well-known reason does the apostle Paul give for taking care of one's body? 1 Cor. 6:19, 20 (compare 3:16, 17).

"From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the Divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of Heaven is fulfilled. God dwells in humanity, and through saving grace the heart of man becomes again His temple."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 161.

"Our very bodies are not our own, to treat as we please, to cripple by habits that lead to decay, making it impossible to render to God perfect service. Our lives and all our faculties belong to Him."—*Counsels on Diet and Food*, p. 56.

2. What close relationship between the mind and body is revealed in the following verses? Prov. 17:22; 18:14.

Modern science is discovering that the bonds between the mind and the body are much closer than previously thought. What affects the body affects the mind, and vice versa. Mental power is dependent on physical health, and physical well-being is fostered by a mind at peace. Spiritual power is related to both mental and physical health. As we realize that the brain is the only medium of communication between God and man, and that the mind is affected by the body, the importance of temperance comes into proper focus.

Health for God's sake. Health for the sake of health is at best temporary. Health in the framework of our relationship to God has implications bearing on eternity. To love the Lord with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30) puts us under obligation to keep each of these in the best condition possible. If we value our friendship with God we will not tolerate anything that will hinder or obstruct it. And if we truly trust and admire Him, we will want all our powers to be in the most efficient working order, that we might be effective representatives of His love and purity.

3. What lesson can we learn from the following verses? Prov. 25:16, 17, 27.
-

The New International Version translates Proverbs 25:27: "It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor." Real wisdom enhances every area of our lives. These passages of scripture illustrate the principle of moderation in that which is good. Whether in eating, playing, visiting, or in the exercise of personal ambition, the practice of moderation tends to health and good relations with one's neighbors.

4. What warnings regarding intemperance are emphasized in Proverbs 20:1; 23:20, 21, 29-32?
-

It is a well-documented fact that alcohol impairs both the mental and physical processes. It seems to the drinker that alcohol lifts him above the cares of reality into a world of happiness, strength, and intelligence. In truth the opposite is taking place!

Leaders are especially warned that alcohol will destroy their capacity to make good judgments and administer wisely. (See Prov. 31:4, 5.)

Intemperance a devilish design. "Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man's physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control."—*Temperance*, p. 12.

The example of Roger Williams. When Roger Williams escaped from the Massachusetts Bay Company and found asylum with the Indians, he set up his own colony of Rhode Island. One of the wisest laws he instituted was that regarding "fire water." The law forbade anyone except himself to give alcohol to the Indians, and he was allowed to dispense it only as medicine.

Seventh-day Adventists accept the standard of total abstinence from alcohol. "Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy, and goodness."—*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, 1989*, p. 7.

5. What results from choosing "the way of life"? Prov. 15:24.
-

A little alcohol destroys efficiency, a lot destroys life. "One ounce of

alcohol retards muscular reaction 17.4 percent; increases time required to make a decision 9.7 percent; increases errors due to lack of attention 35.3 percent, and due to lack of muscular coordination 59.7 percent.”—Paul Harvey.

“Drunkenness has killed more men than all of history’s wars.”—General Pershing.

“Drink is a cancer in human society, eating out its vitals and threatening its destruction.”—Abraham Lincoln.

“It is my judgment that because of the devastating problem that alcoholism has become in America, it is better for Christians to be teetotalers.”—Billy Graham.

Apply the message to yourself. Am I addicted to an intemperate habit that is keeping me from having a vital relationship with Christ? What steps must I take to cooperate with Christ’s overcoming power? (See 1 John 1:9; 1 John 5:2-5; Jude 24.)

II. TEMPTATION TO SEXUAL LUST (Prov. 5:3-9).

6. How can we protect ourselves from temptation to sexual immorality? Prov. 5:3-9 (compare 4:14, 15).

In the cities of the world today, sexual indulgence is brazenly advertised as a normal aspect of human existence. Television programs, films, magazines, newspapers, theatrical performances, and billboard ads capitalize on the human fascination with physical beauty and sexual satisfaction. For the masses of humanity, long gone is the biblical principle that sex is a gift of God to be exercised only within happy marriage. Long gone is the principle taught by Jesus that covetous thought regarding the opposite sex is sin.

How do you as a Christian cope with the sexual bombardment of the modern world? Do you find yourself unconsciously tolerating attitudes and practices that you cannot change? Do you give in to sexual indulgence or do you resist it? How would you suggest that a sexually motivated person control his or her natural appetites?

“It is not safe for us to linger to contemplate the advantages to be reaped through yielding to Satan’s suggestions. . . . If we venture on Satan’s ground we have no assurance of protection from his power. So far as in us lies, we should close every avenue by which the tempter may find access to us.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 118.

7. What is the first step toward going astray in the wrong paths? Prov. 7:5-25 (compare James 1:14).

Our own heart turns traitor and wars against us! And what person can

change the heart? Our imaginations, our physical, emotional, and psychological impulses urge us to foster desires that are impure and contrary to God's will. Not all the power of brain or brawn can transform our natural tendencies and render us able to resist the lure that leads to death. Only God can heal us.

8. According to Solomon, what delivers a person from evil? Prov. 16:6, 16, 17; 7:1-5 (compare 2:10-12, 16-20; 13:14; 14:16).

The power of faith. Fear is sometimes justified. A healthy respect for the danger ahead will lead a wise person to avoid it if at all possible. But in the final analysis victory over temptation to moral impurity is found only in heart fellowship with Christ. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). When confronted by almost overmastering temptation, we must ask Jesus for the victory. (See Matt. 7:7, 8.) He is always willing to give power to those who are tempted. Having asked, we must next praise Him for hearing and answering our prayer. "In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18). Praise demonstrates faith! After asking for power to overcome, we must immediately praise the Lord for answering. And He does answer!

"Keep my words as the daily means of life. Sir Matthew Hale told his children, 'If I omit reading a portion of Scripture in the morning, it never goes well with me through the day.' *Treasure* it up carefully, not on our shelves, but in our hearts. Let the whole Word of God be our precious treasure. Receive the promises from His grace with simple trust and *the commandments* from His holiness with ready obedience. Stand with your eye in the land of promise; but with your feet 'on level ground.' . . . If wisdom is not loved, lust will be indulged. The Bible therefore—not merely read, but the cherished object of familiar conversation—proves a sacred exorcist to expel the power of evil."—Charles Bridges, *The Book of Proverbs*, pp. 82, 83.

9. What counsel are we given concerning our associates? Prov. 14:7 (compare 16:29, 30; 22:24, 25).

No man is an island. We are influenced negatively or positively by our associates. Goethe stated, "We are shaped and fashioned by the things we love," and certainly that is true regarding the people we love. While we are not to be exclusive in our social lives, we should form our closest friendships with those who will be a help on our journey, rather than a hindrance. (See 2 Cor. 6:14.)

In a divided family or on the job with non-Christians it is not always possible to avoid situations to which we would rather not be exposed. With the Lord in our hearts, we can be guarded and our minds rendered impervious to wrong influences.

WED

10. What is the meaning of "lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13)? James 1:2, 3, 13-15.

"Temptation is enticement to sin, and this does not proceed from God, but from Satan and from the evil of our own hearts. . . . He [God] permits us to encounter obstacles, persecution, and hardships, not as a curse, but as the greatest blessing of our lives. Every temptation resisted, every trial bravely borne, gives us a new experience and advances us in the work of character building. The soul that through divine power resists temptation reveals to the world and to the heavenly universe the efficiency of the grace of Christ. . . .

"We should pray that God will not permit us to be brought where we shall be drawn away by the desires of our own evil hearts. In offering the prayer that Christ has given, we surrender ourselves to the guidance of God, asking Him to lead us in safe paths. We cannot offer this prayer in sincerity, and yet decide to walk in any way of our own choosing."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 116-118.

The Lord promises to deliver the tempted one (1 Cor. 10:13). "When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. . . . It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. . . . We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

11. How does Proverbs 23:17 portray the constant communion between the true believer and his Lord?

The secret of a radiant Christian life is constant awareness of Christ's presence. Jesus promised to be with us always (Matt. 28:20), and He always keeps His promises. In the rush of daily life, amid the unholy confusion of a world of sin, we may know that our Lord walks beside us and dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Unspoken communion as well as spoken communion with Him is a great source of strength.

THU

12. What results from keeping one's "way"? Prov. 16:17; 13:14.

The word *soul* used in Proverbs 16:17 comes from the Hebrew *nephesh*, which refers to a living being in totality, including the physical self. The

preservation of life, in the ultimate sense of living with God for eternity, is undoubtedly what Solomon had in mind. Yet even in this present world, "to depart from evil" leads to greater happiness and prosperity—and even to the preservation of this mortal life.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO ME?

- How can I better "glorify God" in my body?
- To what extent am I aware of the relationship between my mind and my body?
- Have I allowed intemperance in any line, such as eating, drinking, study, work, play, or sex, to rob me of my fullest potential?
- When was the last time I avoided temptation?
- Have I determined, by the power of God, to defeat the next temptation that comes to me?
- Do I understand the practical necessity for a "faith that works," in the context of the great controversy?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: On the power of Christ to overcome sin in our lives study Ps. 44:5; Rom. 6:11-13; 8:37; 2 Cor. 10:5; Jude 24; Rev. 12:11.

"In all ages, temptations appealing to the physical nature have been most effectual in corrupting and degrading mankind. Through intemperance, Satan works to destroy the mental and moral powers that God gave to man as a priceless endowment. Thus it becomes impossible for men to appreciate things of eternal worth. Through sensual indulgence, Satan seeks to blot from the soul every likeness to God."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 122. (See also p. 125; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 92; *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.)

SUMMARY: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." This is true in the physical world; it is true also in the spiritual realm. It is easier (and more comfortable) to live temperately and stay healthy, than to regain health once it is lost. Likewise, it is less complicated to avoid or resist temptation to evil deeds than to endeavor to extricate oneself, and everyone else who may be involved, from the trauma resulting from yielding to temptation.

Lesson 5

October 27—November 2

Your Choices Determine Your Destiny

SAB
PM

GOD'S LAW IS BINDING UPON ALL CREATION. Being such a practical book, Proverbs tends to deal with absolutes and ultimates. In effect it says to us, "This is what will happen if you do that." We see this in its references to the great theme of law. The guidelines for human life, as well as the principles governing matter and energy, are in accordance with laws given by the Creator.

Of course there are always some who choose to disregard law—Solomon calls them "fools." In their supposed quest for freedom, they become victims and captives. God's law cannot be broken with impunity. Because it stands forever, the results of disregarding it are inevitable.

MEMORY TEXT: "Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly" (Proverbs 15:21).

THEME: The salvation or eternal loss of each individual ultimately depends upon his willingness or unwillingness to enter into fellowship with God that results in conformity to His holy law.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Divine Standard (Prov. 3:1-7).
- II. The Folly of Lawlessness (Prov. 15:21).
- III. Reaping Time (Prov. 22:8).

I. THE DIVINE STANDARD (Prov. 3:1-7).

What is law? The term *law* evokes different mental images in different people. Some envision row upon row of massive bound volumes in an attorney's library, while others imagine a law enforcement officer behind them with lights swirling and siren screaming. To others it brings to mind discussions regarding the laws in the Bible, whether moral or ceremonial. Still others are fascinated by the laws that govern the natural world.

Which of these are the laws of God? To which are we rightfully amenable?

Pray for the translation of program helps and teaching aids adapted to the French culture in parts of the Inter-American Division. US\$2,000.

1. According to the book of Proverbs, why is it important to live by God's law? By what means can we obey it?

Prov. 3:1-7 _____

Prov. 4:2-4 _____

Prov. 6:20-23 _____

Prov. 7:1-4 _____

Prov. 13:13-15 _____

Our Father expresses His concern. In the book of Proverbs we are listening to a wise father teaching his child about the law of God. He desires to bring his child into right relation with God and neighbors. (Compare Deut. 6:3-9.) Mothers are included as teachers of the law in Proverbs, as are all adults in Israel. Through such teaching the great truths of God's Word are impressed upon the minds of the young, never to be erased.

Obedience by faith. "He that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov. 29:18). Some Bible students have concluded that the Old Testament presents law as the means of salvation, while the New Testament presents grace. Such a distinction is artificial and unbiblical. God's holy law that is extolled in Proverbs 3:1-4 can be obeyed only by "trust in the Lord" (verse 5). As the believer acknowledges the Lord in all his or her ways, "he shall direct thy paths" (verse 6). Only the one who fears the Lord is able to "depart from evil" (verse 7). Fear of the Lord (reverence for Him) is the kind of living faith of which the New Testament speaks. It results in obedience to God's law. (See Rom. 3:31.)

2. What attributes of the law of God does Paul mention in Romans 7:12, 14?

All of God's laws work in harmony with each other and reveal His character of love and the order in His kingdom. The laws of nature are the laws of God as verily as is the Decalogue. Obviously, they were in operation long before man was fully aware of their existence. Sir Isaac Newton discovered and explained the great laws of motion by which our world operates. But we remember the Creator, the all-wise and all-powerful God, who is the Originator of all such laws. No conflict exists between true religion and true science, for God is the Author of both.

3. How is the working of God's law illustrated? Ps. 19:1-3, 7 (compare 40:26).

The glory of God's character is revealed in His handiwork, both in the

tangible objects of His creation and in the laws of their operation. As it was originally intended to function, nature reflects the infinite love of God.

“The whole natural world is designed to be an interpreter of the things of God. . . .

“In the natural world, God has placed in the hands of the children of men the key to the treasure house of His word. The unseen is illustrated by the seen; divine wisdom, eternal truth, infinite grace, are understood by the things that God has made.”—*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, pp. 186, 187.

“We would do well to read often the nineteenth psalm that we may understand how the Lord binds up His law with His created works.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1143.

4. Describe the law found in Romans 6:23.

To choose sin is to choose death. Here we see that just as a thistle lies dormant in its seed, so death is inherently bound up in sin. The declaration “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze. 18:4) is not a threat of punishment, but a warning of natural consequences come to full fruit. While God desires obedience born of love rather than of fear, at the same time He wants us to be able to make choices intelligently. He tells us what will be the ultimate consequence of obedience and disobedience, and leaves us free to decide between the two.

5. What has God placed as a protection around His faithful children? Isa. 5:1, 2; Matt. 21:33.

Song of the vineyard. Both the song and the parable tell of a vineyard planted with choice vines and endowed with every provision that it might flourish and prosper. Hedge and wall protected it from destruction by wild or domestic grazing animals. The wall undoubtedly had been built of the abundant field stones. Removal of the hedge and breaking down of the wall would expose the vineyard to the raids of enemies and destruction by wild animals.

The vineyard represented God’s chosen people, Israel. “To this people were committed the oracles of God. They were hedged about by the precepts of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience to these principles was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 287, 288.

“That law of ten precepts of the greatest love that can be presented to man is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise, ‘This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan.’ There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus. It is DO, and Live.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105.

6. What provision has God made that we may be able to live according to His laws? Heb. 8:10; Eze. 36:26.

God is not arbitrary, vengeful, and severe. His love no less than His justice demands a consistent operation of law. Only against this background can we see in Proverbs an accurate picture of how sowing and reaping really operate.

What is your attitude to God? Do you believe that your happiness and success are very important to Him? When things don't go your way, do you tend to feel that God has withdrawn His love from you? In the light of the message of Proverbs, how can you change such negative feelings?

TUE II. THE FOLLY OF LAWLESSNESS (Prov. 15:21).

The abundance of fools. The book of Proverbs refers to fools, folly, and foolishness in 84 verses. This is 9 percent of the 915 verses in the book. Considering their emphasis, the authors of the Proverbs must have been impressed with the seriousness of being a fool.

7. How does the fool relate to wisdom and understanding? Prov. 17:16, 24 (compare 19:21; 23:9; 24:7).

The New International Version translates Proverbs 17:16: "Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?"

"In the gate he does not open his mouth" (Prov. 24:7, RSV). The wise men and judges sat in counsel in the city gates, where business was made legal and public matters were discussed. The fool would have nothing to contribute.

"'Silence is the virtue of fools.' It is also a virtue of the wise (see 17:27). So a silent fool and a wise man can very seldom be told apart. As long as a fool keeps quiet and nods wisely now and again, he can enjoy the esteem held out to a wise man of sound judgment and few words (17:28). But if the fool picked up this pearl of wisdom in a rare moment of attention in the classroom, we should not be too hopeful that he will keep his mouth shut. He could not possibly conceive that it applied to him. In any case, he has a happy knack of picking up words of wisdom and letting them drop at all the wrong times and places. He thinks he is being very clever when he can come out with a pithy saying, but it invariably falls flat on its face (26:7) and makes not the slightest impact (26:9). So even if the fool says something wise, his sense of timing will usually give him away.'"—Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 98, 99.

8. Several things are mentioned as inappropriate for a fool. List the ones found in these verses: Prov. 19:10; 26:1, 7-9.
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Why would delight not be seemly for a fool? The Hebrew for "delight" is also translated "luxury" or "daintiness." The RSV translates Proverbs 19:10: "It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury." A fool evidently cannot resist the corrupting influence of delicate living. A fool takes delight in evil conduct. (See Prov. 10:23; 15:21; 18:2.) Prosperity is a catalyst for foolish behavior.

9. What kind of "reward" is implied as being in store for the fool? Prov. 5:22, 23.
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The man who is wise in his own conceit cannot be told anything, however desperate the situation. His tendencies are graphically described in Proverbs. (See Prov. 17:12, 21; 26:6, 11, 12; 27:3.) He is beyond helping. Because the fool rejects God's love and law, there is no way for him to enjoy eternity with the righteous. When the Lord gives "every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12), the fool, being "an abomination," will be shut out from the kingdom of glory. (See Rev. 21:27.)

Obviously foolishness comes in many different forms. One characteristic shared by all fools is the tendency to substitute their own way for God's way. How would you work for a fool? What approaches would you use to wean a foolish person away from folly to the service of God?

III. REAPING TIME (Prov. 22:8).

Two distinct pictures: can they be harmonized? In the book of Proverbs we find evidence for two distinct views of judgment theology. One places the responsibility for destruction on God; the other places the responsibility on the sinner himself. Could it be that Solomon and the other writers of the Proverbs are presenting two sides of the same coin?

10. What sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked is typically drawn in Proverbs?

Prov. 10:24, 25 _____

Prov. 10:27-30 _____

Prov. 11:6 _____

Contrasting consequences. God is the ultimate source of truth, righteousness, and continuing life. To commit oneself to His principles, to choose righteousness as a way of life, to follow His directions for success

and live with Him in a fellowship of trust and admiration, is to connect one's soul with the Infinite One and share in His life. On the other hand, to choose a lifestyle opposed to the principles of life, to despise righteousness and live for self, is to cut off one's soul from its source, a choice which ultimately can end only in destruction.

11. What does an evil person seek? Why is this so serious? Prov. 17:11; 1 Sam. 15:23.
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Resistance to God's authority takes us out of the orbit of His protective grace. Whatever is not "of faith"—anything that is not in harmony with an intelligent, admiring, trusting relationship with God—is sin, and can only result in damage to one's character and relationships. (See Rom. 14:23.)

- THU 12. By what are all men judged, and according to what are they rewarded? Why? Prov. 12:14; 24:12 (compare James 2:12; Rev. 22:12).
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We are saved by grace, not by works of the law. (See Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10.) But the experience of salvation by grace results in obedience to God's law. (See Rom. 8:1-4.) Works of faith demonstrate that Christ's grace is operating in the life to bring us into accord with the righteous principles of His law. We are judged by the law, the great standard of righteousness, because Christ's grace has been made available as the power to obey it. Our works are judged because grace makes possible works that are acceptable to God.

"The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness. If eternal life were granted on any condition short of this, then the happiness of the whole universe would be imperiled. The way would be open for sin, with all its train of woe and misery, to be immortalized. . . .

"We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. . . . If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

"More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 62, 63.

13. Who destroys the wicked? Prov. 11:3; 15:25 (compare 21:12).

It is in mercy to the universe that God will finally destroy the rejecters of His grace. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 543.) In the final destruction of the wicked, God gives them over to the ultimate goal of their foolishness, the annihilation of self. They themselves must bear the ultimate responsibility for their destruction. God Himself will punish them for their ways (2 Thess. 1:7, 8), and then by His own act He justly gives them the ultimate curse of death (Rev. 20:9).

Sin becomes unpardonable only because the sinner refuses pardon.

With every knock on the heart's door, unheeded, the inclination to open the door becomes weaker. The impressions of the Holy Spirit, disregarded, will not be as easily distinguished the next time. The heart becomes less and less impressionable.

Finally, God must say, "He is joined to his idols; let him go." But His heart of love cries, "Oh, how can I give him up! How can I let him go!" (See Hosea 4:17; 11:8.)

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- What kind of seed am I sowing from day to day? Will I be happy to reap the harvest?
- Are my eyes "in the ends of the earth" (Prov. 17:24) like those of a fool, or have I set wisdom before me?
- Is the judgment a frightful prospect to me? Or is judgment the happy prospect of vindication by Christ's grace?

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: On the retribution given to the wicked see: Prov. 6:12-15; 11:31; 29:1.

"This standard [harmony with God, perfect righteousness] is not one to which we cannot attain. In every command or injunction that God gives there is a promise, the most positive, underlying the command. God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.

SUMMARY: While God is the Designer of the laws that govern all matter, energy, and life, He is not responsible for the harvest I reap. I sow the seed of my choice; I am the arbiter of my own destiny. If I opt to be a fool, I will not be condemned for my weakness, but for refusing the help that is available. Or I can choose to live in harmony with the laws of life, and receive the necessary power from God to choose the harvest unto eternal life.

Live Within Your Means

SAB
PM

MANAGERS OF THE LORD'S GOODS. How we handle our money and the way we live are closely related; similar principles govern both. In fact, "stewardship" is not merely a matter of finances; it relates also to the whole scope of life—time, talent, energy, and influence.

Undergirding and enabling the true stewardship of life is the understanding that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). We are not owners, but managers of the Lord's goods. As Christians, we have accepted the responsibility of acting in the Master's stead, doing as He would do were He presiding directly over His own goods. As stewards, then, we should be interested to hear the counsel of the Owner, to learn what are His priorities, what methods bring most permanent benefit, and how best to represent Him in all our dealings.

MEMORY TEXT: "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9, 10).

THEME: When our business enterprises and the management of our personal affairs are governed by the principles of the Word of God, we have the approval and blessing of the Lord.

OUTLINE:

- I. Honor the Lord (Prov. 3:9, 10).
- II. Love of Money (Prov. 11:28).
- III. Generosity and Contentment (Prov. 11:24, 25).
- IV. Work and Plan Ahead (Prov. 14:15; 22:3).
- V. Debt and "Surety" (Prov. 22:7; 6:1-5).

I. HONOR THE LORD (Prov. 3:9, 10).

"Religion and business are not two separate things; they are one. Bible religion is to be interwoven with all we do or say. Divine and human agencies are to combine in temporal as well as in spiritual achievements. They are to be united in all human pursuits, in mechanical and agricultural labors, in mercantile and scientific enterprises."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 349, 350.

Pray for a Bible study video in the setting of the native culture of North American Indians. US\$5,000.

1. What is one way we can honor the Lord? Prov. 3:9. What results does God promise? Prov. 3:10; 10:3 (compare Mal. 3:10, 11).

“[God’s] glory must be the motive of all who are laborers together with Him. All our work is to be done from love to God and in accordance with His will. . . .

“But God will not accept the greatest talents or the most splendid service unless self is laid upon the altar.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 350.

Many and varied are the blessings that God pours out upon those who honor and trust Him. Sometimes He gives temporal prosperity; sometimes, for reasons that we do not understand, He withholds it. He always bestows upon His faithful children protection from the forces of evil and offers assurance of eternal life.

Knowing “them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19), God allows the devil to tempt His children in order to demonstrate to both sides of the onlooking universe the genuineness of their trust.

If you have little or nothing of this world’s goods, how can you follow the instruction to “honour the Lord with thy substance” (Prov. 3:9)?

SUN

II. LOVE OF MONEY (Prov. 11:28).

2. In what sense is the love of money “the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10)? Prov. 28:20, 22.

Not money itself, but the love of money is the root of all evil. The material status of an individual does not necessarily indicate the direction of his affections. A poor man can love money as dearly as a rich man—perhaps even more so. The danger lies in misplaced priorities, often leading to unscrupulous means of acquiring more money.

What kinds of activity in your life demonstrate the love of money?

3. What principle, applied to business, shields a person from “making haste to be rich”? Prov. 13:11, 12, 19.

It is rarely easy to be patient! It is not fun to wait for the fulfillment of one’s dreams. But far better to make progress slowly than to damage one’s character by sinful, hasty acquisition.

“It is abomination to fools to depart from evil” (Prov. 13:19). “The very idea that he [the fool] should behave in any other way is unthinkable to him, quite abhorrent in fact (13:19); for he thinks it would spoil his fun (10:23) and make life very drab (15:21).”—Kenneth T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 100.

4. What is the ultimate end of him who trusts in riches? Prov. 11:28 (compare 23:4, 5; 27:20).
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Jesus' teaching. To many of Jesus' hearers, the present life was all that existed, and providing for its temporal needs was all that mattered. As something strange and new, the words of Jesus fell on the ears of the wondering multitude. (See Matt. 6:24-34.) He taught that even as this earth offers no permanent safety for material possessions, so it can provide no eternal refuge for the soul. Our hearts will be where our treasure is. In view of this fact, Jesus recommended we store up our treasure in heaven, seek first God's kingdom, and not be anxious about our needs.

In your view, why does the Lord allow some people to be more wealthy than others? What is the responsibility of the rich believer in Christ to his poorer brothers and sisters? Should he give them all his money? What is the responsibility of the poor believer to the rich? Should he regard himself as inferior?

MON III. GENEROSITY AND CONTENTMENT (Prov. 11:24, 25).

5. Why is it important to share? Prov. 11:24, 25 (compare 22:9; 28:27).
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The New International Version translates Proverbs 11:24, 25: "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

Oppression of others is self-defeating. "He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty" (Prov. 22:16, NIV). Jesus taught that we should not favor the rich for the sake of social acceptance. We have a responsibility to minister to the poor. (See Luke 14:12-14.)

What does it mean to be a Christian? "It is to be Christlike, to do others good, to be divested of all selfishness, and to have our lives marked with acts of disinterested benevolence [free from self-interest]. Our Redeemer throws souls into the arms of the church, for them to care for unselfishly and train for heaven, and thus be co-workers with Him. But the church too often thrusts them away, upon the devil's battlefield. . . . Can not God return into their granaries and increase their flocks, so that instead of loss there shall be increase?"—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 331.

6. What else besides tangible, material goods can we share? Prov. 25:25; 31:9.
-

Be generous and giving with what you have—even if it is only good news, or a smile and a greeting! Try to understand the inner need of the individual; look beneath the surface. Ask for divine help that you may strengthen and cheer and help the needy one to the best of your ability and according to his or her need. Help others help themselves if possible. William Booth offered “soup, soap, and salvation,” in that order.

Plead the cause of the needy to those who may be better able to assist. And above all, deal with them in such a manner as to represent the Father in heaven: with genuine caring, mercy, and justice.

TUE

7. How can a person be contented even though obliged to live in poverty? Prov. 28:6 (compare 15:16; 16:8; Heb. 13:5).

It was generally believed among the Jews of Jesus' time that sin is punished in this life and that any calamity, financial or physical, was the penalty for wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. (See John 9:1-4.) Thus such a one had the added burden of guilt, of being regarded as a great sinner and under the curse of God.

Conversely, wealth, by whatever means it was acquired, appeared to be the manifest blessing of God and, as such, wielded extraordinary influence. Hence the question of the disciples, “Who then can be saved?” in response to Jesus' statement that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (See Matt. 19:24, 25.)

The best things of life are free! It is better to want what you have, and not want what you do not have, than turn it the other way around. The most important things of life—truth, love, happiness, a close fellowship with God—are not dependent on monetary possessions.

A grateful, positive attitude, whatever the circumstances of our lives, is a source of health and happiness. (See Prov. 15:15; 30:7-9.) Gratitude and love transform the humblest meal into a feast, the poorest home into a palace.

Can you testify to the manifold blessings of the Lord in times when you have been poor? Can you testify to the joy you experienced as you gave to someone more needy than yourself?

IV. WORK AND PLAN AHEAD (Prov. 14:15; 22:3).

8. What is the source of lasting profit? Prov. 14:23; 13:11.

“What human power can do divine power is not summoned to do. God does not dispense with man's aid. He strengthens him, cooperating with him as he uses the powers and capabilities given him.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 535.

9. What basic principle is depicted in Proverbs 27:18? (Compare James 5:4.)

“Every laborer is to receive his or her just due. It may be thought to be a good plan to allow persons to give talent and earnest labor to the work of God, while they draw nothing from the treasury. But this is making a difference, and selfishly withholding from such workers their due. God will not put His sanction on any such plan.”—*Evangelism*, p. 491.

10. How does a wise person relate to the future? Prov. 14:15; 22:3.

The Revised Standard Version translates Proverbs 14:15: “The simple believes everything, but the prudent looks where he is going.”

There is wisdom in planning for the future. To put aside savings to take care of future expenses is not contrary to God’s will. Insofar as this is possible, it is the prudent thing to do.

The counsel given to one person applies, in principle, to each of us: “Every week you should lay by in some secure place five or ten dollars not to be used up unless in case of sickness. With economy you may place something at interest. With wise management you can save something after paying your debts.”—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 329.

We are not assured there will be a tomorrow for us. (See Prov. 27:1, 23, 24.) Today is the day to do our best and endeavor to follow the will of God. There will be no further opportunity in the grave to which we are going, we know not when.

11. What warnings are we given about wrong methods of earning money? Prov. 28:8.

Usury is lending money at interest. Today it sometimes refers to lending at a rate of interest that is excessive or unlawfully high.

The practice in Israel. “Contrary to modern practice, God’s people were forbidden to collect interest (KJV ‘usury’) on a loan to a poor Israelite (Ex 22:25), but this prohibition was not always heeded (Jer 15:10; Eze 18:13). Collection of interest was permitted when the loan was to a foreigner (Deut 23:20).”—*SDA Bible Dictionary*, article, “Loan.”

“The Israelites lived in a simple state of society, and hence they were encouraged to lend to each other in a friendly way, without any hope of gain. But the case was different with foreigners, who, engaged in trade and commerce, borrowed to enlarge their capital, and might reasonably be expected to pay interest on their loans. Besides, the distinction was admirably conducive to keeping the Israelites separate from the rest of the world.”—Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 136.

How can we apply God's counsel to Israel regarding usury to our financial practices today?

“Am I my brother's keeper?” Speaking of Sabbath keepers in 1865, Ellen White wrote that God was displeased with them for their avaricious spirit. Their desire to acquire wealth was so strong that they took “advantage of poor, unfortunate brethren in their distress and have added to their own already abundant means, while these poorer brethren have suffered for the same means. ‘Am I my brother's keeper?’ is the language of their hearts.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 535.

THU

12. What is the meaning of Proverbs 20:25? What warning are we given regarding not keeping our vows to God? Prov. 20:25 (compare Deut. 23:21, 22; Eccl. 5:5).

The New International Version translates Prov. 20:25: “It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows.”

Don't use the Lord's money for secular purposes. “It is no better than sacrilege for a man to take from God's treasury in order to serve himself or to serve others in their secular business. . . . Let no one, when brought into a strait place, take money consecrated to religious purposes, and use it for his advantage, soothing his conscience by saying that he will repay it at some future time. Far better to cut down the expenses to correspond with the income, to restrict the wants, and live within the means, than to use the Lord's money for secular purposes.”—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 79.

V. DEBT AND “SURETY” (Prov. 22:7; 6:1-5).

13. Why do you think “the borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov. 22:7)?

Debt is a trap, attractive, subtle, and destructive. In a letter written in 1877, Ellen White counseled an individual, “Be determined never to incur another debt. Deny yourself a thousand things rather than run in debt. . . . Avoid it as you would the smallpox.”—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 257. This is a call for us to live within our means!

14. What counsel does the wise man give regarding the risk involved in acceptance of legal responsibility for someone else's debt? Prov. 6:1-5 (compare 11:15; 17:18).

A surety is someone who has become legally liable for another person's debt, responsible for guaranteed payment even if he must take it out of his

own pocket. This can become a dangerous snare, especially in the case of guaranteeing payment on behalf of a stranger. While we are to "bear one another's burdens," the Lord does not expect us to be responsible for someone else's folly.

INDICATE WHETHER EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS TRUE (T) OR FALSE (F):

- _____ My money and all my possessions are my own to be used as I see fit.
- _____ Money is only as valuable as it is useful for good purposes.
- _____ The security of treasure on earth is no valid indicator of where one's priorities should be placed.
- _____ To share what I have with someone in need will not necessarily deplete my own resources.
- _____ Work was designed by God to be a blessing to humanity.
- _____ Planning ahead is equal to "boasting thyself of tomorrow."
- _____ Debt is sometimes necessary and justifiable.

FRI

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Compare with the teaching of Proverbs the following passages from the New Testament: 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:10; 2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 6:9, 17, 18; James 2:1-6; Rev. 2:9; 3:17.

Read the sections titled "Money" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 351, 352; "Usury," *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 534-536; and "Business Integrity," *The Adventist Home*, pp. 391-394.

SUMMARY: God is not only owner of all, but also is our wise and loving Father. He wants us to prosper and enjoy good health. We honor Him, as well as protect our own interests when, as wise stewards of our resources, we follow His directions.

Lesson 7

November 10-16

As the Needle to the Pole

SAB
PM

INTEGRITY IS A MATTER OF THE HEART. The book of Proverbs speaks of those who reverence the Lord as righteous. Because such people have entered into covenant fellowship with Him, God has bestowed His righteousness upon them. The person who fears (reverences) the Lord has true knowledge, wisdom, and righteousness (Prov. 2:1-9). Hence, when we read such statements as "The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way. . . . The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them" (Prov. 11:5, 6), we should not conclude that we are saved by our own independent righteousness. That would be righteousness by works. God is telling us that *His* righteousness, made our own, will deliver us and direct our way. (Compare Isa. 64:6; Jer. 33:16; Phil. 3:9.)

Those who receive the righteousness of God by faith possess the characteristics of righteousness; they are merciful, just, and honest. It is possible to be an outwardly *nice* person without the power of Christ, but only He can give us hearts that are humble, gentle, and courteous.

"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is *as true to duty as the needle to the pole*, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."—*Education*, p. 57 (italics supplied).

MEMORY TEXT: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them; but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" (Proverbs 11:3).

THEME: A personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ makes a person merciful, just, and honest.

OUTLINE:

- I. The King—the Model for His People (Prov. 29:2).
- II. Mercy or Revenge? (Prov. 11:17).
- III. Justice or Injustice? (Prov. 21:15).
- IV. Honesty or Deceit? (Prov. 20:17).

Pray for budgets for pioneer workers in unentered areas of South America. US\$5,000 each.

I. THE KING—THE MODEL FOR HIS PEOPLE (Prov. 29:2).

In Bible times, both in Israel and other nations, kings were supreme judges. The author of most of the proverbs was a king whose wise judgments were recorded for future generations. But Solomon was not always wise. Tragically he wandered away from God's ideal of just and faithful kingship.

The practices of the king usually became those of his people. He either set a pattern of purity, truth, justice, and honesty, or he led his people down the path of disloyalty to God, to impurity, idolatry, injustice, and dishonesty.

1. In what kind of king do his subjects rejoice? Prov. 29:2.

Of course, none of us are kings. But each of us can appreciate a just ruler. Moreover, each of us is given some responsibility, some important trust for which we are accountable to the Master. In the advice given for long-ago rulers, we will discover valuable gems that can enable us to deal fairly with those whose lives we touch.

Servant or lord? "Christ was establishing a kingdom on different principles. He called men, not to authority, but to service, the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak. Power, position, talent, education, placed their possessor under greater obligation to serve his fellows."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 550.

2. By what is the king preserved? Prov. 20:28.

The characteristics mentioned in Proverbs 20:28 are the characteristics of God. (See Ps. 85:9, 10.) The delightful paradox is that God is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful. He is so just that He cannot save for eternity a sinner who refuses to accept His atonement for sin. He is so merciful that He can completely forgive and restore to Himself the one who accepts the atonement provided by His Son. (See John 3:16, 36.)

Judgment and mercy. "It is the mingling of judgment and mercy that makes salvation full and complete. It is the blending of the two that leads us, as we view the world's Redeemer and the law of Jehovah, to exclaim, 'Thy gentleness hath made me great.' "—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1072.

3. List what a good king should do:

Prov. 20:8, 26 _____

Prov. 25:2, 4, 5 _____

Prov. 29:14 _____

Prov. 31:8, 9 _____

The characteristics of God are shared with the ruler who accepts Christ and chooses to serve Him. Mercy and justice are mingled in his dealings with his people. In His reign, Christ mingles perfect justice (Matt 3:12) with infinite mercy (Eph. 2:4, 5). The same characteristics are manifested by all who enter into fellowship with the heavenly King. Because His love rules supreme in their hearts they are unwilling to deny facts, but equally unwilling to usurp God's role of ultimate Judge. Even so, secular authorities are appointed to pass judgment on those who break the laws of the land. And the church as a corporate body has the duty of deciding if a member fails to conform to the standards governing church membership. (Compare Matt. 7:1-5 with 1 Cor. 5:12; 6:2, 3; Rom. 13:1-4.)

MON

4. If a person in authority pays attention to false information, what will the officials who serve under that person be like? Prov. 29:12. Why do you think this is so?
- _____

Do his servants become wicked or are they already wicked? "A king sets his own policy, but he must depend on information from advisers to help him formulate that policy. If he only listens to lies from advisers (like King Ahab who rejected the prophecy of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22), then all the men who surround him will cater to his depravity and become wicked."—Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), p. 201.

5. In what ways may the following counsels given to kings and leaders be applied by every Christian believer?

Prov. 16:10 _____

Prov. 16:12 _____

Prov. 18:5; 24:23-25 _____

Prov. 31:3-5 _____

Whatever your calling in life, in what practical ways would your effectiveness be improved by following the instruction given to kings in the book of Proverbs?

II. MERCY OR REVENGE? (Prov. 11:17).

6. Explain the result of living out in one's own life the principles of righteousness and mercy. Prov. 21:21; 11:17.
- _____

We are not instructed to be merciful to others so that good will come

upon ourselves. There is nothing self-serving in the motives of the genuinely merciful person. Mercy is a characteristic of God that becomes ours when we enter into fellowship with Him. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8, NIV).

Jesus pronounced a blessing on the merciful. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Every seed bears fruit after its own kind, whether in the natural world or in the spiritual kingdom. Mercy's blessing is twofold. First, kindness reacts on the giver in immediate happiness, because mercy is always a happier way to live. Then kindness bears fruit in the words and actions of others in whose hearts the seed was planted, returning to refresh the soul who sowed it there.

Reflect the nature of God. "The heart of man is by nature cold and dark and unloving; whenever one manifests a spirit of mercy and forgiveness, he does it not of himself, but through the influence of the divine Spirit moving upon his heart. 'We love, because he first loved us.' 1 John 4:19, R.V. . . .

"The merciful are 'partakers of the divine nature,' and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 21, 22.

7. Apart from kindness shown to human beings, how else is a merciful spirit manifested? Prov. 12:10.

The Bible teaches that the Lord's "tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). This means that cruelty to animals is opposition to God; it is sin. Those who are working to save the endangered species are cooperating with the Lord in watching over His created works. Hunters who kill for sport and pleasure and those who treat domestic animals cruelly are classified in Scripture as wicked.

8. What excuse for unmerciful neglect is unacceptable to God? Prov. 24:11, 12.

"In the great judgment day, those who have not worked for Christ, who have drifted along thinking of themselves, caring for themselves, will be placed by the Judge of the whole earth with those who did evil. They receive the same condemnation.

"To every soul a trust is given. Of everyone the Chief Shepherd will demand, 'Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?' And 'what wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?' Jeremiah 13:20, 21."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 641.

9. What are the hazards involved in harboring a spirit of revenge toward those who have wronged us? Prov. 24:17-20 (compare 26:24-28).

Vengeful people who cherish hate toward their enemies do the greatest harm to their own spiritual and psychological health. Christ cannot dwell in the heart of a hateful person. The vengeance of God (Heb. 10:30, 31) is not in any way comparable to human vindictiveness. God's perfect love demands perfect justice for all.

"He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14; see also 1 John 2:11). This means that the individual who is harboring a vengeful spirit is living outside of Christ. The result is serious damage to psychological health, and possibly also to physical health. The ultimate result is loss of eternal life.

How to treat an enemy. As Christ dwells in our hearts we are enabled to practice the counsel He gives: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee" (Prov. 25:21, 22; compare Matt. 5:43-48).

As we forgive our debtors. "One of the most common sins, and one that is attended with most pernicious results, is the indulgence of an unforgiving spirit. How many will cherish animosity or revenge and then bow before God and ask to be forgiven as they forgive. Surely they can have no true sense of the import of this prayer or they would not dare to take it upon their lips. We are dependent upon the pardoning mercy of God every day and every hour; how then can we cherish bitterness and malice toward our fellow sinners!"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 170.

Think of a situation in your life in which you showed a merciful, forgiving spirit toward someone who had wronged you. What was the effect of your attitude upon: (a) the person you forgave; (b) yourself?

III. JUSTICE OR INJUSTICE? (Prov. 21:15).

10. List some characteristics of "the just," the righteous:

Prov. 4:18 _____

Prov. 9:9 _____

Prov. 10:20 _____

Prov. 20:7 _____

The just are the righteous who have accepted God as their King and who, by His grace, obey His law. (See Isa. 51:1, 7; Rom. 8:9, 10; 10:6-10.) They practice justice in their dealings with their fellow human beings

because they have received the righteousness of Christ into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. They are given the assurance of eternal life with the Lord.

Natural antagonists. The just and the unjust cannot respect each other's characters. (See Prov. 29:10, 27.) Yet the just express their genuine concern for the unjust by praying and working for them. They really care.

11. How does the book of Proverbs describe the unjust (the unrighteous)? Prov. 11:5-7; 28:8-10 (compare 2 Pet. 2:9).

The Lord never justifies the unjust, nor does He condemn the just. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just [righteous], even they both are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). The Lord gave the same message through Moses: "I will not justify the wicked" (Ex. 23:7).

Then what hope is there for us? We are all sinners in the sight of a holy God. (See Rom. 3:10-19.) In the light of the Old Testament teaching, how can we explain Paul's statement: "But to him that worketh not [does not attempt to earn favor with God by his own efforts], *but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly*, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5, italics supplied)?

The answer is that when Christ justifies the ungodly (the unjust) they do not remain ungodly. The ungodly are unjustified, unconverted, outside of Christ, and lost. (See 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 4:18; 2 Peter 3:7.) The justified have been transformed by the power of Christ. They are now willing slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:17, 18); their lives are in conformity with God's law (Rom. 8:3, 4), because the Holy Spirit is reigning in their hearts (verses 9, 10).

When probation closes a short time prior to the second coming of Jesus, the just (the righteous) will remain right with God for eternity, and the unjust (the wicked) will remain antagonistic to God. (See Rev. 22:11.) At the Advent the just will be translated and the unjust slain by the brightness of His coming. (See 1 Thess. 4:16-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-10.)

If an unjust person comes to you with the plea that he or she wishes to change sides, what steps would you recommend? How would you explain from the Bible the means by which he can be transformed in character?

How does a Christian help persons who are escaping the results of their wrong and not dealing with its root cause?

THU

IV. HONESTY OR DECEIT? (Prov. 20:17).

12. What makes a person dishonest and deceptive? Prov. 11:18; 12:5, 20.

Unless Christ reigns supreme in a human heart, the evil one will convey his characteristics, and there will be no fortress against deception of one form or another. Satan will deceive the soul, and that soul, in turn, will practice deception.

13. What are some of the forms of deception practiced by those who do not know Christ? Prov. 17:23; 29:24; 10:10.

Proverbs 17:23 reads in the New International Version: "A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice."

True Christians faithfully pay their bills and refuse to be bribed in any way. They categorically reject any of the many forms of stealing that are practiced in our world today, and refuse to lie under any circumstances. Cheating in examinations or as a means of personal advancement is totally foreign to one who is serving Christ.

Spiritual toughness is needed. "There is in true Christian character an indomitableness that cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances. We must have moral backbone, an integrity that cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.

14. In what ways does the Lord bless those who are strictly honest? Prov. 10:3, 24, 25, 28-30.

HOW ARE MY DAILY DECISIONS AFFECTING MY DESTINY?

- Am I God's friend as God considers true friendship?
- Do I receive favors from God without acknowledging their Source?
- Am I as ready to extend finite, human mercy as to ask for the mercy and forgiveness of God?
- How can I in my inmost soul be true and honest, as true to duty as the needle to the pole?
- Were the final decision of the judgment to be made today, where would I find my place?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Consider the examples of integrity referred to in the following passages: Num. 16:15; 1 Sam. 12:4; 2 Sam. 18:12; 1 Kings 13:8; 2 Kings 5:16.

SUMMARY: Jesus is the King of kings, the Author of mercy, justice, and honesty. He is the ultimate Example. Today He still waits to bestow His character, His likeness on all who are willing to accept Him. He provides the power, the means to live a life of strict integrity. Will you accept the gift of His divine presence in your life?

Apples of Gold

THE CAPACITY TO LISTEN IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE CAPACITY TO SPEAK. A young man asked Socrates to teach him oratory. Because he talked so much Socrates asked for double fees. "Why are you charging me double?" the young student asked. "Because I must teach you two sciences: the one how to hold your tongue and the other how to speak. The first science is the more difficult, but aim at proficiency at it, or you will suffer greatly and create trouble without end."

What goes on in our minds determines the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our speech. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). "The heart" refers to the mind, the source of thoughts, feelings, actions, and motives. Even as positive and negative actions stem from the mind, so do positive and negative words. The things we say have important consequences not only to the people around us, but to our own souls, as well.

MEMORY TEXT: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

THEME: Our words are either a source of strength and encouragement or of weakness and despair; they either build up or tear down. As we allow the power of God's Word to control our minds, our words reflect His love.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Power of the Tongue (Prov. 15:4).
- II. Words That Destroy (Prov. 10:19).
- III. Words That Inspire (Prov. 10:11).
- IV. God's Words (Prov. 30:5).

I. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE (Prov. 15:4).

1. Describe the kind of power the tongue exercises. Prov. 15:4; James 3:2-13.

Pray for a village church building in a newly entered area of India. US\$2,400.

Jesus illustrated the importance of mind-control as the basis of speech-control. (See Matt. 12:34-37.) The tongue is an index to the heart. The reason for the abundance of "mouth trouble" that afflicts us is the "heart trouble" with which we were born and to which we have added by our wrong choices.

Jesus said that idle words are sin. In the judgment we are justified or condemned by our words. This does not mean that we earn justification by good words. It means that consistently good words evidence the heart change we have experienced, and evil words evidence that the change needs to be made.

The only permanent remedy lies in the power of the Master Teacher, who can transform our minds and enable us to speak pure words. One way Jesus does this is through the medium of Christian education and Christian teachers. "In the highest sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one."—*Education*, p. 30.

2. How would you express Proverbs 4:23 in your own words?

How can we follow this counsel? Notice the context of Proverbs 4:23. God's Word must be cherished (Prov. 4:20, 21). But how? "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NIV). We choose Christ daily, feeding on His Word, storing in our minds the positive truths and promises it contains. When we are tempted to give voice to evil words, we ask Christ for His power, claim His victory, and praise Him for it. By reminding ourselves of His Word and claiming it by faith, we can speak in a manner acceptable to Heaven.

Heavenly conversation. "In the work of heart-keeping we must be instant in prayer, unwearied in petitioning the throne of grace for assistance. Those who take the name of Christian should come to God in earnestness and humility, pleading for help. . . .

"He whose conversation is in heaven, is the most profitable Christian to all around him. His words are useful and refreshing. They have a transforming power upon those who hear them, and will melt and subdue the soul."—Ellen G. White *Comments*, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1157.

We have emphasized that what is on the inside comes through to the outside. Is it also true that our words influence our own minds? Can you illustrate the thought contained in the following quotation?

"'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' But the words are more than an indication of character; they have power to react on the character. Men are influenced by their own words. Often under a momentary impulse, prompted by Satan, they give utterance to jealousy or evil surmising, expressing that which they do not really believe; but the expression reacts on the thoughts. They are deceived by their words, and come to believe that true which was spoken at Satan's instigation."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 323.

II. WORDS THAT DESTROY (Prov. 10:19).

Destructive words come in a number of forms: lies, criticism, gossip, flattery, impetuosity, scorn, argumentativeness, and anger. All such negative speech comes from minds that are out of harmony with Christ.

MON

3. Identify the kinds of lying mentioned in the following passages. What will ultimately become of liars? Refer to a modern version if possible.

Prov. 14:5, 25 _____

Prov. 18:8 _____

Prov. 19:5, 9 _____

Prov. 20:14 _____

Prov. 26:18, 19 _____

Lying is sometimes divided into categories. Supposedly there are white lies and black lies; are there varying degrees of gray lies in between? Or are all untruths sinful?

Any intention to mislead is falsehood. " 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' False speaking in any matter, every attempt or purpose to deceive our neighbor, is here included. An intention to deceive is what constitutes falsehood. By a glance of the eye, a motion of the hand, an expression of the countenance, a falsehood may be told as effectually as by words. All intentional overstatement, every hint or insinuation calculated to convey erroneous or exaggerated impression, even the statement of facts in such a manner as to mislead, is falsehood. . . . Even the intentional suppression of truth, by which injury may result to others, is a violation of the ninth commandment."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 309.

4. What does the book of Proverbs have to say about strife and gossip? Prov. 16:27, 28 (compare 26:20, 21; 11:13).

"He who covers over [forgives, RSV] an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Prov. 17:9, NIV).

How does this counsel relate to the publication of literature specifically designed to expose the faults, failings, and mistakes of those who are endeavoring to bear responsibilities in the church? In the light of the Bible counsel can you support or distribute such publications?

The Bible indicates the correct way to confront problems. (See Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:1, 17-21.) "Not until you feel that you could sacrifice

your own self-dignity, and even lay down your life in order to save an erring brother, have you cast the beam out of your own eye so that you are prepared to help your brother. Then you can approach him and touch his heart.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 128, 129.

In what way is the Bible counsel regarding negative criticism relevant within the home, the school, the local church, the place in which you work?

“Cease to dwell upon the shortcomings of others. Keep the tongue sanctified unto God. Refrain from saying anything that might detract from the influence of another; for by indulging in these words of criticism, you blaspheme God’s holy name as verily as you would were you to swear.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1093.

TUE

5. Why is flattery so harmful? Prov. 26:28 (compare 27:6; 28:23; 29:5).

Flattery is insincere or excessive praise. A genuine expression of appreciation is not flattery. Sometimes in the attempt to avoid flattery, we hurt a person with little or no praise. The ministry of encouragement can revitalize the waning forces of a weary soul.

6. Why is hasty speech so damaging? What are the advantages of restraint and caution in the way we express ourselves? Prov. 29:20 (compare 15:1, 28; 18:13).

Think before you speak. “Be sure brain is engaged before putting mouth into gear”—practical advice that can be applied!—especially so when the brain itself is in contact with Headquarters.

Gentleness under provocation—an effective argument. “The servants of Christ . . . need to have close communion with God, lest, under provocation, self rise up, and they pour forth a torrent of words that are unbefitting, that are not as dew or the still showers that refresh the withering plants. This is what Satan wants them to do; for these are his methods. . . . But God’s servants are to be representatives of Him. . . . And the spirit that is kept gentle under provocation will speak more effectively in favor of the truth than will any argument, however forcible.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

7. What do the following passages teach regarding scorn and anger?

Prov. 15:18 _____

Prov. 16:32 _____

Prov. 22:10 _____

How delightfully practical the Bible is! It identifies the kinds of speech that cause sorrow, antagonism, and misery: lying, criticism, gossip, flattery, and hasty, scornful, angry words. Assuming that at least sometimes you are guilty of one or more of these modes of speech, what steps do you take to overcome? What counsel from your personal experience would you share with someone struggling with the habit of speaking unwisely?

III. WORDS THAT INSPIRE (Prov. 10:11).

One way to describe something is to tell what it is not. But that is not the only way the writers of the proverbs give instruction regarding proper speech. They tell us what good speech is and the effect it has.

8. How does the book of Proverbs characterize the speech of a righteous person?

Prov. 10:11 _____

Prov. 10:13, 31 _____

Prov. 10:21 _____

Prov. 10:32 _____

The manner in which Jesus spoke is the best example of the effectiveness of righteous words. Even the hardened hearts of the temple guards were melted, for they testified: "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46, NIV). The reaction of the two disciples who walked with Him to Emmaus was the reaction of people throughout His life and ministry: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32).

Jesus' words were wise, uplifting, encouraging, knowledgeable, and cautious. Even when He issued a rebuke, it was in a spirit of love, with the intention of saving the offending person. He understood the force of simple eloquence, and the power of silence. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.)

9. What is one of the most effective ways to lift another's burdens? Prov. 12:25; 15:23 (compare 15:26, 30; 16:24; 17:22).

Both the listener and the speaker are inspired by positive, encouraging words. Anger, discontent, selfishness, and impurity are ruinous in effect, while there is marvelous life-giving power to be found in cheerfulness, courage, faith, hope, and love. Before speaking we should always ponder what it would be like to be in the listener's shoes and the effect our words may have.

Someone has said that "cold words freeze people, and hot words scorch them, and bitter words make them bitter, and wrathful words make them wrathful. Kind words also produce their image on men's souls; and a

beautiful image it is. They soothe, and quiet, and comfort the hearer.”

THU

10. What is the relationship between words of wisdom and knowledge? Prov. 15:2, 7 (compare 16:21, 23).

Our world tends to extol the virtues of knowledge. Those whose minds are capable of storing a multitude of facts are thought to be especially intelligent. Notice, however, that Solomon presents the essence of true education. Knowledge without wisdom ultimately is not worth much. The wise person knows how to interpret and apply available knowledge. Knowledge has value when it is wisely used for the uplifting of humanity. The wise person's words of knowledge involve summarizing, interpreting, and applying truth.

11. Why is there special power in silence? Prov. 11:12 (compare 13:3; 17:27, 28; 21:23).

Sometimes we feel that we will be thought fools if we do not speak up. Proverbs 17:28 answers that. On the other hand, as someone has said, “It is better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt.”

The principal contributor to these lessons testifies: “I grew up in a family of four daughters. And we thoroughly enjoyed talking! When we had too much to say, Daddy often asked us to be quiet. More than once he offered this bit of wisdom: ‘You just watch people who are always talking; they don’t have time to think about what they’re saying, so most of it is not worth listening to.’”

The crucial question. Does my heart instruct my mouth? Is the wisdom that God has made available evident in my speech?

IV. GOD’S WORDS (Prov. 30:5).

“Man’s words, if of any value, echo the words of God.”—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 423.

12. How does Proverbs 30:5 describe the words of God?

Pure means “refined.” God’s words are as pure gold and silver, free from all dross. Any tampering by man would not improve them; nothing added would increase their value. (See verse 6.)

Christ “is a perfect and holy example, given for us to imitate. We cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it and, according to the ability which God has given, resemble it.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 549.

FRI 13. What results from relying on the Lord for words that will echo His character? Prov. 16:1; 25:11 (compare Rev. 14:5).

Apples of gold! "Words fitly spoken, coming from sanctified hearts and lips, and sustained by a godly, consistent Christian deportment, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 247.

Guile (deceit) will not be found in the mouth of a true Christian, for he has consecrated his tongue—and his whole life—to the accurate representation of his God. And God has accepted his offering, working in him to will and to do according to His pleasure.

AM I SATISFIED WITH MY SPEECH?

- Do my words and manner of speaking truly represent God to those around me?
- To what extent do I need spiritual speech therapy? What are the areas of speech in which I can improve?
- What Bible promises can I claim for divine assistance?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: In answer to the question immediately above study the following passages: 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 1 John 5:2-5; Rev. 12:11. Read from the chapter titled "Who Are My Brethren?" in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 323, and "Facing Life's Record" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 486, 487.

SUMMARY: The capacity to speak is a divinely bestowed talent, which, if used rightly, can bring great blessing to those with whom we associate. Our words are to uplift and save. Death and life are in the power of our words, and it rests with us to choose which we will speak.

Lesson 9

November 24-30

“What Hath God Wrought!”

SAB
PM

GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF REVELATION AND OF ALL TRUE SCIENCE. A study of either sheds light on the other, and ultimately advances our knowledge of the Creator Himself.

“In their original perfection all created things were an expression of the thought of God. To Adam and Eve in their Eden home nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. Wisdom spoke to the eye and was received into the heart; for they communed with God in His created works. As soon as the holy pair transgressed the law of the Most High, the brightness from the face of God departed from the face of nature. The earth is now marred and defiled by sin. Yet even in its blighted state much that is beautiful remains. God’s object lessons are not obliterated; rightly understood, nature speaks of her Creator.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 18.

MEMORY TEXT: “Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?” (Job 12:8, 9).

THEME: Observation of the natural world opens a treasury of information to the keen searcher for truth: practical, scientific, and spiritual.

OUTLINE:

- I. Lessons From Life Science (Prov. 6:6-11).
- II. Lessons From Physical Science (Prov. 3:19, 20; Ps. 19:1-6).
- III. God’s Creative Masterpiece (Ps. 8:3-5; Prov. 8:22-31).

I. LESSONS FROM LIFE SCIENCE (Prov. 6:6-11).

By connecting truth with familiar objects we are reminded afresh, with every sight of them, of the teaching of Scripture and the impressions of the Holy Spirit. This, incidentally, is one practical method of keeping our hearts “in tune” with heaven.

Pray for seven water tanks for staff houses at Atoifi Hospital in the Solomon Islands. US\$3,000.

1. Of whom does Job advise us to inquire for information concerning God? Job 12:7-9.

So much can be learned from animals. If we only understood all about them, we would have a clearer conception of God and His care for His creatures. How can a bear hibernate five months and not atrophy? What shuts off the growth of a hibernator and tells the body to put on weight instead, even when it is not a full-grown animal? How can young songbirds migrate hundreds of miles to wintering areas they have never seen, after the parent birds have gone ahead? How can lizards regenerate a tail after having dropped the original one; or how can a starfish not only grow a new arm to replace one lost from the original body, but regenerate a whole new body on a severed arm if it includes a nerve from the main trunk?

Currently, a group of scientists is studying the social behavior of wolves. From observing how wolves usually settle their differences short of bloodshed, they are hoping to learn how to diffuse human anger and avert national crises.

2. What are the characteristics of the coney? Prov. 30:24, 26?

We can learn from the coney. "There is general agreement now that the animal intended must have been the hyrax."—*The Bible Almanac* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980). The hyrax is a furry creature about the size of the hare. Its remarkable features include its feet and toes, four toes on its front feet and three on its hind feet. The toes are connected with skin folds, and the soles of the feet are equipped with pads kept moist by glands. The feet thus form natural suction cups which enable the coney to climb the steepest and most slippery rocks.

Coneys live in colonies in mountainous areas. They are still found in Palestine, in the rocky Dead Sea area. They post guards who, when danger approaches, sound an alarm by issuing sharp whistles. Then all scurry for cover in the crannies of the rocks. (Based on *Encyclopedia of Bible Creatures* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965], pp. 63, 64. See Ps. 104:18.)

Christians may cling to Christ, the solid Rock, for protection from every enemy attack. The psalmist expressed his complete dependence upon the Lord: "Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me" (Ps. 31:2, 3, NIV).

3. With what other animals was the writer of Proverbs 30 especially impressed? What did he particularly like about them? Prov. 30:29-31.

“Let us not forget to imitate the features of the *stately* ones here portrayed; to be fearless as *the lion*, when pursuing the path of duty, *not retreating from anything*, to be useful as *the male goat*, as we lead a band of God’s people; and to maintain our proper authority, as the *king* does, in any place of trust, as parents or guardians of families.”—Charles Bridges, *The Book of Proverbs*, p. 726.

4. What lesson does Solomon draw from the ant’s habits? Prov. 6:6-11 (compare 30:24, 25).

A sluggard is a person who is indolent, slothful, idle, or lazy. God is a very active being. His desire is for us to be active, providing for ourselves, our families, other human beings, and even for His animal creation. We are admonished to minister to those in need of help. The apostle Paul taught the Galatians: “Help to carry one another’s burdens and in this way you will obey the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, TEV).

Diligence, perseverance, and preparation for the future. “The habitations which the ants build for themselves show skill and perseverance. Only one little grain at a time can they handle, but by diligence and perseverance they accomplish wonders. Solomon presents to the world the industry of the ant as a reproach to those who waste their hours in sinful idleness, in practices which corrupt soul and body. The ant prepares for future seasons. This is a lesson which many gifted with reasoning powers disregard. They fail entirely to prepare for the future immortal life which God has in His providence secured for the fallen race.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 1157, 1158.

5. What seemingly opposite lesson is presented in the Sermon on the Mount, and from which creature is it drawn? Matt. 6:25, 26.

“Relax! Eat, drink, and be merry for God will provide!” Not so! The desired response is trust, not irresponsibility or extravagance. The Father in heaven provides for the birds, but He does not drop food into their mouths or build their nests for them. They must gather food, build nests, and raise their young. Every moment they are in danger; the possibility of destruction by enemy forces is very real on every side. Yet how cheerily they go about their work! How full of joy are their songs! Creatures of hill, wood, and field are members of God’s great household, and it is from His hand that the desire of each is satisfied. (See Ps. 145:16.)

“An enemy hath done this.” While it is true that God feeds and cares for the creatures of His hand, there are also laws operating in opposition to the principles of His kingdom. It was not God’s design that one species should subsist by preying upon another, nor did He originate the principle that only the fittest survive. Such perversions of God’s original plan for life on this planet were caused by the enemy, the evil usurper.

- 6. How did Jesus illustrate from nature His teaching regarding trust in God? Matt. 6:25-34.**
-

Why else would God have "clothed the grass" in such magnificent array, from brilliant jewel tones and delicate pastels to glistening, almost iridescent white—and all fashioned in exquisite, intricate detail—unless He did it for sheer enjoyment? For God is the Master Artist, a lover of beauty. Within His children He has planted a like appreciation, and has even given us a power akin to His own—individuality, creativity, inventiveness, apportioned in varying degrees. Because God is able to clothe nature and human personality with such beauty, why should we doubt His willingness to supply our daily needs?

Are you so involved in the affairs of your busy life that you do not take time to enjoy the natural beauty of the world around you? Are there other lessons from nature you have found helpful?

II. LESSONS FROM PHYSICAL SCIENCE (Prov. 3:19, 20; Ps. 19:1-6).

- 7. How are God's wisdom and power manifested? Prov. 3:19, 20.**
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Verse 19 speaks of the creation of the heavens and the earth. Verse 20 indicates how God maintains His marvelous creation. He acted in the beginning; He continues to act day by day, moment by moment. Every day and night God is at work in the natural world. He keeps the earth moving, spinning on its axis, rotating in its orbit around the sun, not only keeping time, but governing time, days, seasons, and years.

Despite its great weight, water is drawn up from the seas into the clouds and drips again as dew or rain to dress the earth in green vegetation. The grand cycle is constantly repeated. In His control over the processes of nature, God employs engineering marvels far beyond the ingenuity and power of man.

- 8. What do the heavens declare about God, according to Psalm 19:1-6? Compare Isa. 40:26.**
-

The vastness, beauty, and clockwork order of the starry heavens reveal something of the character of God. His power is infinite, He is the author of matchless beauty, and He insists upon order and design. It takes greater faith to believe that galaxies of stars evolved on their own than it does to believe the Bible account that God created them. (See Rom. 1:20.)

The universe, functioning in accordance with strict laws and mathematical precision, did not stumble into existence as the result of nature's accidents. "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He

who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing" (Isa. 40:26, NIV).

9. How else does God reveal the glory of His character? 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; Col. 1:25-27.

In Old Testament times, God spoke to mankind "in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:1-3, NIV).

Jesus Christ is the Creator and Sustainer of the physical universe. To know Him is to know the Father (John 14:9). The glory of the character of God is imparted to us as we enter into fellowship with Jesus. He prayed: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22).

Unbelievers can see the character of God to some extent in the physical universe and to some extent in the lives of Christians. As you associate with those who do not believe in Jesus, in what specific ways do you reflect His character? By what attitudes, words, and actions do you attempt to make Christ known to others?

WED

III. GOD'S CREATIVE MASTERPIECE (Ps. 8:3-5; Prov. 8:22-31).

10. While observing the brilliance of the night sky, what important question did David ask the Lord? Ps. 8:3-6.

David's question has been asked by many others after observing the marvels of the heavens. We seem to be infinitesimal specks on a tiny world in one small solar system of infinite space.

A Jewish rabbi once offered a possible explanation for the wearing of the yarmulka, the little cap worn at Passover. He said, "The yarmulka is like the palm of the hand of God resting in blessing on the man in the home saying, 'Little man, you're not such big stuff!'" —Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1984), p. 70.

Why should God, who is greater than His universe, notice us at all? The answer is in Psalm 8, and it is startling:

1. God *is* mindful about you and me, though we may seem small, even to ourselves. He notices and cares. 2. God has made us; that alone demonstrates His concern. We belong to Him. 3. He made man a little lower than *Elohim*. This is the original word in the Hebrew text. It means that God made man a little lower than Himself. 4. God crowned him with glory and honor. That is breathtaking; the person of man was,

and is to be, the revelation of God's glory and honor! 5. God visits him. He did, above all, in the Person of His Son. He still does today. He will do so face to face.

11. How does David, in another psalm, describe his remarkable origin? Ps. 139:14.

The psalmist speaks of his conception in his mother's womb. It is a miracle of God that is repeated in the birth of every newborn child. Ellen White urges all to study physiology, the science of the functions of the human body, for in it students will see that they are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made." (See *Education*, p. 201.) She speaks of mankind as "the crowning work of His [God's] creative power."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 44.

The creation of man is the most wonderful of all miracles in God's creative work. The design and function of every system of the human body are wonders of supernatural wisdom and power.

Quadrillions of cells make up the human body; several billion wear out and are replaced every day. The heart pumps about three gallons per minute, millions of gallons of blood in an average lifetime.

Most intricate is the human brain, serving as the nerve center of all physical functions, while originating thought and the power of reason. It enables us to think God's thoughts after Him.

The wonder of human physiology leads us to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" (Num. 23:23; "see what God has done!" NIV).

THU

12. In a graphic word picture of earth's creation, what clue is given in Proverbs of the Creator's purpose and motivation? Prov. 8:22-31.

Wisdom is the subject of this chapter. (See Prov. 8:12.) We discovered in an earlier lesson that the wisdom of Proverbs is the wisdom of God. It is preeminently the quality or characteristic of the only wise, all-wise God. He is the source of all true wisdom.

Wisdom is Christ the Creator. Proverbs 8 was written by Solomon. (See *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 33, 34.) In the central passage of the chapter, Solomon tells of the wisdom of God in creating the world. In the New Testament we learn that Christ is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and six texts declare that the world was created by Him. (See John 1:1-3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3.) Proverbs 3:19 teaches that "the Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth." Commenting on Proverbs 8:22, Ellen White writes: "The Son of God declares concerning Himself: 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning.'"—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

Why did Christ create? "My delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. 8:31). Christ made the world and mankind because He delights in us. In love and wisdom, He created us to be His loving, loyal children. When humanity marred their godly image, Christ did all He could to restore them. "What had Christ not done to win the hearts of sinners and to inspire them. . . . From the times of the patriarchs He had shown how His 'delights were with the sons of men.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 195.

Restored by Christ, the Wisdom of God. "To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in His creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life."—*Education*, pp. 15, 16.

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE:

- How do I respond as I am made aware of my complete dependence on God for my life now and in the future?
- How do the truths of this lesson affect my relationship with Jesus?
- What in my life can be detrimental to perfect fellowship with Him?

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Study what 1 Corinthians 2 says about Christ as the wisdom of God imparted to believers.

"The book of nature is a great lesson book, which in connection with the Scriptures we are to use in teaching others of His character, and guiding lost sheep back to the fold of God. . . . All need the teaching to be derived from this source. In itself the beauty of nature leads the soul away from sin and worldly attractions, and toward purity, peace, and God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 24.

SUMMARY: The natural world, the physical universe, and the physical structure of mankind, direct us to Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, who created all things. He seeks to restore us to the perfect image of Himself so that we can have unending joy in the sin-free universe.

Like Father, Like Child

SAB
PM

HUMAN ANGER IS USUALLY THOROUGHLY IRRATIONAL.

On one occasion, an important businessman entered the dining car of the train in which he was traveling and ordered plum pudding. The waiter explained that they had no plum pudding. The businessman became very angry. He roared at the waiter: "Don't you realize that you're talking to one of the most frequent customers of this railroad?"

The steward got off at the next stop and managed to get him some plum pudding. The passenger looked at it disdainfully, pushed it away, and snorted, "Take it away! I'd rather be mad at the railroad."

God's anger is quite different. Never is He irrational, never does He react in an unloving manner, and never are His attitudes toward us governed by selfishness. God's wrath against sin is another aspect of His love. If He did not hate sin and deal with the sinner, we would have reason to question the genuineness of His love.

MEMORY TEXT: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

THEME. Whereas anger, revenge, and strife destroy physical health and spiritual vitality, a positive, contented, optimistic attitude of mind contributes to health and spirituality. Is there any place for anger? What does the Bible mean when it speaks of God's anger?

OUTLINE:

- I. Happy, Healthy, Holy (Prov. 17:22).
- II. Anger, Strife, and Revenge (Prov. 16:32).
- III. The Wrath of the Almighty (Prov. 11:23).

I. HAPPY, HEALTHY, HOLY (Prov. 17:22).

Holiness, spiritual wholeness, is the basis of happiness. Happiness has been a major quest of mankind from time immemorial. Unfortunately most people have ruled out heart union with God as the source of genuine happiness. The book of Proverbs brings us back to the true Source.

*Pray for budgets for pioneer workers in Russia.
US\$3,500.*

1. What well-recognized benefit is attributed to happiness? Proverbs 17:22.
-

The Hebrew word translated “merry” means “joyful,” “glad.” The kind of merriment intended is not the boisterous hilarity that is sometimes justified by reference to this Bible verse. A joyful heart is one that knows peace, freedom from guilt and fear, and contentment with the circumstances of life.

Four hundred years ago Robert Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* cited authorities who said, “Humor purges the blood, making the body lively and fit for any manner of employment.” The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), believed a hearty laugh to be “a good way to jog internally without going outdoors.”

On the other hand, research of grieving persons has revealed a decrease in the number of white blood cells, the “soldiers” that combat germs. The body’s defenses against disease are weakened by grief. Significantly, the place where blood cells are manufactured is bone marrow.

- SUN**
2. What effect does a positive mental attitude have in times of suffering? Prov. 18:14.
-

The New International Version translates Proverbs 18:14: “A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?”

3. When the human spirit is at the breaking point, what can help to alleviate the problem? Prov. 12:25; 15:13 (compare James 5:13).
-

A happy melody from a heart overflowing with joy can bring a similar spirit to another heart. When trouble threatens our contentment, a song of trust and thanksgiving can keep us at peace both with heaven and with those around us. Even when we cease to hear it, a melody can hold its place in the mind, repeating its message of cheer and strength.

4. Describe and explain the experience of the person who has a merry heart. Prov. 15:15.
-

Contentment is determined more by the state of a person’s heart than by the value of his or her possessions. “The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment” (Luke 12:23).

“The pessimist worries so much about the past, which he cannot alter, and the future, which he cannot know, that he does not use wisely the present, which alone is his. This attitude of gloom colors his vision and reacts upon others. The glad, contented heart finds a feast in a little thank-

fully received, forgets the troubles that are behind, and looks forward with joy and confidence to a future under the loving care of a heavenly Father.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1000.

5. Read Matt. 5:3-12, listing those who have found happiness.

The poor in spirit recognize their emptiness and fill their souls with Christ; those who mourn experience genuine sorrow for sin and receive infinite forgiveness and healing; the meek have emptied themselves of pride and love of supremacy and live a life of peace even in the midst of conflict.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19), brought into His likeness from glory to glory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). The merciful enjoy mercy; and the pure in heart, who live as in the visible presence of God, discern the Creator in the works of His hand, and long to reflect His image.

Peacemakers have themselves received the heavenly peace offered by Christ, having renounced sin and opened their hearts to His love. Even those who are persecuted and reviled for righteousness' sake, whose unlikeness to the surrounding confederacy of evil has provoked hostility, can be happy. God has promised, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9).

MON 6. What wish is expressed in 3 John 2? Why could we reasonably extend it to include ourselves, as well as Gaius, to whom it was originally written? Ex. 15:26; Ps. 103:3, 4.

How could you be filled with contentment, peace, and joy under the following circumstances?

- a. You have been laid off work and cannot find another job.
- b. Your boss, who is not sympathetic with your religious faith, enjoys making fun of you in front of others.
- c. Your daughter, who is about to be married, has been involved in a car accident.
- d. You have discovered that one of your teenage children is using drugs.

(See Ps. 42:5.)

II. ANGER, STRIFE, AND REVENGE (Prov. 16:32).

All of us are acquainted with the intense emotions that stir the human heart at any slight or injustice, real or supposed—particularly if it is directed at ourselves. Such emotions often are vented in words—angry, bitter, hateful expressions.

7. What causes of strife are pointed out in the following verses?

Prov. 13:10 _____

Prov. 17:19 _____

Prov. 22:10 _____

Prov. 26:20 _____

Prov. 30:33 _____

The last part of Proverbs 30:33 reads in the NIV: "so stirring up anger produces strife."

The Lord does not hate in the human sense, in a spirit of selfish vindictiveness. But, because sin is completely alien to His nature, He is totally antagonistic to it. This is why the Bible teaches that God hates lies and discord. (See Prov. 6:16, 19.) There is no disharmony in heaven, and the Lord seeks to bring human beings into peaceful fellowship with Himself and with one another. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7, NIV). Jesus taught the danger of anger (Matt. 5:21-24), and instructed us to love our enemies (verse 44).

TUE

8. What descriptive words does Solomon apply to the individual who is "soon angry"? Prov. 14:17, 29 (compare Prov. 19:19).

When we "lose our temper" we are actually not in control of our senses, reacting rather than acting. Having temporarily lost our mind and thrown out the life principles we had so carefully chosen, we say and do things we will later regret. We have become fools.

Bad temper can become a fixed habit. Today's English Version translates Proverbs 19:19: "If someone has a hot temper, let him take the consequences. If you get him out of trouble once, you will have to do it again." Bad temper is a reversion to childish ways of reacting. Certain stimuli suggest a negative mode of behavior that has become customary. The only escape from this vicious circle is to allow God to take control of the mind and heart. For "God will be to us everything we will let Him be."—*Our High Calling*, p. 131.

9. When two people are consistently hurting one another, how can the cycle of action and reaction be broken? Prov. 20:22 (compare Prov. 20:3; 24:29).

As long as both parties operate on the basis of the principle that "one bad turn deserves another," the fight will continue. This is the stuff of which

family feuds are made, with human life being destroyed figuratively, as well as literally. If only someone would be big enough to forgive! It matters not so much who started the quarrel as who ends it peaceably.

The capacity to overcome bitterness and to forgive the person who we think has wronged us comes from the Lord: "Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you" (Prov. 20:22, NIV). Ask for, believe in, and claim the victory that Christ has promised. (See 1 John 5:2-5.)

10. How deserving of honor is the person who rules his spirit? Prov. 16:32 (compare 25:28).

"The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 43.

Two kinds of anger. "It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger and resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 310. (See Eph. 4:26.)

11. What principle is given upon which to base our relationship with others? Rom. 14:13.

Are there stumbling blocks in your path? Even they do not constitute a legitimate excuse for bad temper, for God knows how to deal with them.

"If we are creatures of circumstance, we shall surely fail of perfecting Christian characters. You must master circumstances, and not allow circumstances to master you. You can find energy at the cross of Christ."—*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 47.

In your own experience, what good methods have you employed in counteracting the causes of strife and discord?

III. THE WRATH OF THE ALMIGHTY (Prov. 11:23).

"If I'm not supposed to get mad, why can God?" This kind of query evokes more than one kind of response. A typical but shallow and inaccurate answer would be: "Well, God is ruler and master of everything, and He has the right to do whatever He wants. You don't question God."

At the other extreme is: "What do you mean, God can get mad? Why, that is contrary to His nature! He would never hurt anything!"

Both answers present problems. The first pictures our loving Father-God as a wise, powerful, but severe and arbitrary dictator who has neither time for, nor interest in questions, and who cares for nothing from his subjects but immediate and absolute compliance. The opposite view sees the all-powerful Creator as an indulgent parent who cannot bear to bring an evildoer to justice, but who lets things run their natural course rather than interpose. *Such incomplete pictures of God fail to portray the truth about Him.*

12. What can be expected by those who do not experience righteousness? Prov. 11:5, 23.

The consistent teaching of Scripture is that only the righteous will enjoy eternal life with Christ. (See Matt. 25:46; Heb. 12:14.) The sinner who refuses to accept Christ's power to stop sinning and the gift of His righteousness has no hope beyond the grave. (See Rev. 20:9, 15.)

13. When Moses insisted on a revelation of God's glory, what did he see, and what did he hear? Ex. 34:5-7 (compare Ps. 145:8, 17, 20).

Notice that, according to Exodus 34:7, there are two aspects to God's love: (1) He has "mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." (2) He "will by no means clear the guilty." These two points do not represent contradictory elements in God's character. The most loving thing for a redeeming God to do is to forgive the person who accepts the sacrifice of His Son, and to hold guilty the person who rejects that sacrifice. It is not unloving for God to manifest wrath against sin and, consequently, against the person who refuses to be separated from it. "The Lord preserveth them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy" (Ps. 145:20).

God wishes to take away guilt. "God is Himself the source of all mercy. . . . He does not ask if we are worthy of His love, but He pours upon us the riches of His love to make us worthy. He is not vindictive. He seeks not to punish, but to redeem. Even the severity which He manifests through His providences is manifested for the salvation of the wayward. . . . It is true that God 'will by no means clear the guilty' (Exodus 34:7), but He would take away the guilt."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 22.

14. How does this depiction of God's character harmonize with the severity of His judgments described in the following passages? Did God cause the destruction described?

Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13 _____

Gen. 18:32; 19:24, 25

Ex. 11:4-7

Emergency measures. In both His teachings and His life, Jesus demonstrated what God is like. (See John 14:9.) The God of the Sermon on the Mount and the God who destroyed the world by the Flood are one and the same. (See 2 Peter 3:5, 6; Heb. 13:8.) While God expresses Himself most fully in the life of Christ, the tragic existence of sin requires His intervention.

Extreme situations sometimes require major "surgery," as in the cases of both the antediluvian world and the city of Sodom. Civilization in general had become so vile as to be a moral menace to humanity. Because God is perfect in character, perfect in wisdom, in love, in righteousness, and in justice, He cannot do other than deal in perfect fairness with evil and with sinners who persist in sinning. (See Heb. 10:30.) God's moral response to sin and sinners was fully demonstrated at Calvary.

The wrath of God. "Satan and all who have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. . . . This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is 'alienated from the life of God.' Christ says, 'All they that hate me love death.' Eph. 4:18; Prov. 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 763, 764.

SELF-INVENTORY:

- How do I find happiness? Have I found that which is true and lasting?
- In my relationships with others, how do I act, or react?
- Why should I allow God to take from me all my bitterness and anger?
- Realizing that the eternal Judge is my friend, who is on my side, what keeps me from enjoying a closer relationship with Him?

SUMMARY: Happiness and contentment are treasures of superlative value. The peace that Christ imparts is far superior to any so-called happiness the world has to offer. Nothing need disturb that peace, for it is not dependent on outward circumstances. Even though others may try to make life miserable for us, though anger and strife rage around us, we can be kept in the peace of heaven, for nothing can disturb us when Jesus dwells within.

Lesson 11

December 8-14

A Friend for All Seasons

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THERE IS MORE THAN ONE KIND OF FRIEND. When the editors of a magazine offered a prize for the best definition of a friend, they received thousands of responses. One person wrote: "A friend is one who multiplies joys, divides grief." Another suggested: "A friend is one who understands our silence." Yet another said: "A friend is a volume of sympathy bound in cloth." The definition that won the prize read: "A friend—the one who comes in when the whole world goes out."

A true friend is a treasure whose worth is beyond computation. A false friend, or one whose life is directed by a different value system, could constitute a major danger. God has given insight and warning to guide us in the choice of our friends.

We need to develop our social awareness, so that we might reach out in friendship to people where they are and minister to their needs. Reaching out to others is a privilege and a responsibility, as well as a spiritual gift. Through hospitality "some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

MEMORY TEXT: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20).

THEME: Even though true friendship is contrasted with the danger of close association with unbelievers, we win souls to Christ by being sociable and hospitable, by kindness to strangers.

OUTLINE:

- I. A True Friend or an Unwise Fool (Prov. 13:20).
- II. The Saving Value of Hospitality (Prov. 25:21, 22).
- III. Kindness to Strangers (Prov. 31:20).

I. A TRUE FRIEND OR AN UNWISE FOOL (Prov. 13:20).

Deep in every heart is a longing, even a craving, for companionship, appreciation, belonging, and a mutual sharing of treasures, whether material, intellectual, or spiritual.

Adam in Eden felt such a need before God created Eve. Lacking a friend with whom he could share, Adam could not have gained the greatest

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possible satisfaction from the beauties of a perfect world, or the delights of employment, exploration, and expanding powers. As a social being, he needed the understanding, sympathy, and companionship of one who shared his nature. He needed someone with whom he could share human love.

1. What reason did God give for providing a companion for Adam? Gen. 2:18.
-

Friendship within marriage. Marriage is especially meaningful when husband and wife are best friends. No other feature of the marriage relationship can replace friendship. As friends, husband and wife can communicate about mutual joys, challenges, and sorrows. Spiritually and psychologically our lives are enriched by the experience of having a partner who is a closer friend than any other human being.

Friendship for singles. Those who have chosen not to marry may enjoy the enriching experience of having close personal friends. Everyone needs someone with whom he or she can share confidences, joys, and sorrows. Though unmarried, the apostle Paul found deep satisfaction in the relationship of mutual dependence that he enjoyed with his fellow laborers. (See Phil. 4:3.) Because we have been created social beings, we achieve our full potential in association with others.

2. By what comparison does Solomon indicate the value of a friend? What advice does he give? Prov. 27:9, 10 (compare 17:17).
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Ointment and perfume were often very expensive. Usually composed of olive oil, sweet spices, gum resins, or other aromatics, and often preserved in alabaster jars, these ointments were a sought-after luxury in Palestine.

Some friends may be more like a cheap fragrance—easy to procure, easy to give up, and not particularly valuable as companions. A true Christian friend, who gives help and hope, and who inspires calming faith, is rare. Such a friend is worth more than gold and silver. (See *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 161.)

A beautiful friendship. The friendship between Helen Keller, who could neither see nor hear, and her teacher, Anne Sullivan, is one of the most beautiful illustrations of the Bible teaching. Anne was born poor and half blind. After an operation partially restored her sight, she devoted her life to work for the blind. With tender love and patience she taught Helen to “see,” “hear,” and communicate. For forty-nine years Helen and Anne were inseparable. When Anne became blind later in life, Helen returned her kindness by helping her overcome the disability. After Anne’s death, Helen said: “I pray for strength to endure the silent dark until she smiles upon me again.”

3. What vital principle should be kept in mind when choosing one's friends? Prov. 13:20.

Friendship influences character. Not only are we judged by the company we keep ("birds of a feather flock together") but we tend to assimilate the characteristics of our friends. "By beholding we become changed." We are shaped and fashioned by the people and even things that we love.

"The youth fail to realize how sensibly both their character and their reputation are affected by their choice of associates. . . . As a stream always partakes of the property of the soil through which it runs, so the principles and habits of youth invariably become tinged with the character of the company in which they mingle."—*Messages to Young People*, pp. 411, 412.

Since we are inevitably influenced by our friends, let us choose them wisely.

- MON 4. What reason is given for the strong caution expressed in Proverbs 24:1, 2?

Fostering an inclination or cherishing a desire usually results in giving in to it. While we cannot of ourselves change our hearts or control our inclinations and impulses, we do have the power of choice and can give our wills to God. "We can *choose* to serve God . . . then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 176.

Close friendship with those who are not serving Christ involves certain hazards. Unconsciously we are likely to absorb their habits. Their disrespect for our spiritual and moral commitments may lead us to weaken and lean toward their lifestyle. Our personal purity and reputation can become tarnished by too close an association with those whose moral and ethical standards are not in harmony with the Christian gospel.

Since association with unbelieving friends is fraught with spiritual danger, how can a Christian maintain spiritual integrity while seeking to win others to Christ? How does our motive have a determining effect on this process?

5. What can we learn about true friends from Proverbs 27:6? (Compare Prov. 27:17; John 15:13.)

"Deceitful" kisses bring to mind Judas the betrayer. In direct contrast is the Friend of friends who "was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Three kinds of friend. "People learn from one another, just as iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17, TEV). In order to make our learning well-rounded, we need three kinds of friend.

The friend we most readily recognize is a peer, someone with whom we share ideals, concepts, and plans, one who stimulates us to be our best and achieve the most for the right reasons and the highest purposes.

We also need a model, someone who personifies the goals we have set for ourselves, who has traveled the path before us, and to whom we can look for wise counsel. Segregation of generations has brought unnecessary trauma and loneliness for the senior members of society, while at the same time robbing those who could benefit from their long experience.

There is the friend who looks up to us in admiration, regarding us as a pattern. We need to cherish the opportunity to be a friend to such a person, though the relationship may not be to our personal advantage. Only in eternity will we know the extent of our influence on such a person.

Bigotry, exclusiveness, and favoritism will find no place in the heart of the true Christian. We need to remember "the Christlikeness of exhibiting a kindly interest, a social disposition, toward those who are in the greatest need, even though these may not be . . . [our] own chosen companions."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 406.

TUE

6. What are the pitfalls in having the kinds of friend described in Proverbs 19:4, 6?

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) provides a prime example. Many "friends" took advantage of his generous nature, and helped him spend his money. But when it was wasted and gone, so were they. They cared nothing for him in his need, but only for themselves and what they could get.

7. Why is the counsel given in Proverbs 17:9 so important? Why is criticism and gossip so damaging to friendship?

The danger of criticism. Repeating critical stories we hear about people is hazardous for a number of reasons. The report we heard might be only partly true. The person about whom the story was told will lose confidence in us if we repeat a slanted, biased account. If the story is true, the manner in which we tell it may give a false impression. Even if our account is strictly factual, the person listening to us may put his own construction on it and repeat it incorrectly. We can then be blamed for a story that we did not intend to circulate.

Speak evil of no man; hear evil of no man. "No Christian parent should permit gossip to be repeated in the family circle or remarks to be made disparaging the members of the church."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 242.

"Speak evil of no man. Hear evil of no man. If there be no hearers,

there will be no speakers of evil. If anyone speaks evil in your presence, check him. Refuse to hear him, though his manner be ever so soft and his accents mild. He may profess attachment, and yet throw out covert hints and stab the character in the dark."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 54.

Think of the dearest friend you have ever known. What especially endeared you to this person? Now think of a person who claimed to be your friend but with whom you were unable to establish a close, meaningful relationship. Why could you not establish friendship with this person? Was the fault partly yours?

WED

II. THE SAVING VALUE OF HOSPITALITY (Prov. 25:21, 22).

While the Christian's best and most intimate friends should be those who share his principles and convictions, it is also true that sanctified social power can be a means of blessing others and bringing them into a proper relationship with God.

8. An enemy can sometimes be made a friend by social contact of the right kind. How does the Bible writer suggest we go about this? Prov. 25:21, 22.

One of Abraham Lincoln's associates once complained about his attitude to his enemies. "Why do you try to make friends of them?" he said. "You should try to destroy them." Lincoln gently replied: "Am I not destroying my enemies when I make them my friends?"

Souls are won by friendship. Those who do not understand the distinctive message of Seventh-day Adventists can be attracted to Christ and His love as we include them in our social occasions. When we are insular and separatist, unable to relate to people in a relaxed social setting, they are not attracted to our message. Kindness is hard to resist; most people are melted by it.

9. What influence did Jesus have at a social function? John 2:1-11.

"The example of Christ in linking Himself with the interests of humanity should be followed by all who preach His word, and by all who have received the gospel of His grace. We are not to renounce social communion. We should not seclude ourselves from others. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are. They will seldom seek us of their own accord. . . .

"Let the world see that we are not selfishly absorbed in our own interests, but that we desire others to share our blessings and privileges. Let them see that our religion does not make us unsympathetic or exacting. Let all who profess to have found Christ, minister as He did for the benefit of men."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 152.

Jesus associated with sinful people. In fact, the religious leaders of the day strongly criticized Him for it. (See Luke 5:30-32; 7:33, 34.) Jesus pointed out that He was associating with sinners because they needed His ministry. Never did He condone or excuse sin, and never did He enter into the evil pleasures and activities of the people for whom He was working. But He staunchly resisted the pompous exclusiveness of the Pharisees. Jesus demonstrated that social outcasts can be won for His kingdom, and can become most effective reflectors of His love and witnesses for His truth.

Does your local church conduct social programs that are attractive to those who are not members? Have you considered cooking classes, health instruction, stress-management and weight-control classes, and home and family seminars? Do you have church hospitality dinners for visitors on Sabbath? If you have been doing things of this kind, what results have you seen?

What about unstructured social occasions in your home to which you invite nonbelievers? Have you tried to incorporate them into the circle of your friends? Perhaps they can be influenced by such an indirect approach, without the usual planned teaching situation.

THU III. KINDNESS TO STRANGERS (Prov. 31:20).

- 10. What is one class of strangers whose lot in life we are urged to relieve? Prov. 21:13; 31:20. How would you suggest individuals and the church should go about following this counsel?**

Have you considered the needs of the homeless in your community? Some conferences have begun a special ministry to these helpless people. If your church is located in or near a large city, is there something you can do for the homeless and the jobless?

- 11. What directive is common to the following scriptures? Rom. 12:10-13; 1 Peter 4:9, 10.**

“These admonitions have been strangely neglected. . . . Among our own people the opportunity of showing hospitality is not regarded as it should be, as a privilege and a blessing. There is altogether too little sociability, too little of a disposition to make room for two or three more at the family board, without embarrassment or parade. . . . By the unexpected guest a welcome is appreciated far more than is the most elaborate preparation.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 343.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2, NIV). What a privilege! But angels are with us always, whether or not we can see them. They enjoy being in homes where love and kindness are expressed in words,

looks, and actions, and they are pleased at the sight of a well-regulated, orderly family that is willing to share good things with others. (See *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 115; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 259; vol. 6, p. 342.)

MY PLEDGE: Check the statements below that you want to incorporate into your own experience:

- _____ I will pray that God will make me capable of friendship.
 _____ I will choose close friends who will help rather than hinder my spiritual life.
 _____ I will seek to develop my social powers, so as to reach souls for God's kingdom.
 _____ I will gladly share with others what God has entrusted to me.

List three practical ways you can show hospitality to others this next week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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FOR FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: For Bible examples of true friendship read Ruth 1:16; 1 Sam. 18:1; 2 Kings 2:2; Matt. 27:55, 56.

“If choice is made of companions who fear the Lord, the influence will lead to truth, to duty, and to holiness. A truly Christian life is a power for good. But, on the other hand, those who associate with men and women of questionable morals, of bad principles and practices, will soon be walking in the same path. . . . To walk in the counsel of the ungodly is the first step toward standing in the way of sinners and sitting in the seat of the scornful.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 587.

“The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 360.

SUMMARY: As we grow closer to God, we will also find closer unity and harmony with others who are likewise committed. As we study to advance the happiness of others and share with them the good things God has lent us, we experience the joy of cooperating with heaven. In our hospitality toward others, we demonstrate the character of God. Angels eagerly wait to work through us for others.

Drink From Your Own Spring

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MARRIAGE IS PULLING TOGETHER THROUGH LIFE. In Iowa is the little country church that has been associated romantically with the song "The Little Brown Church in the Wildwood." Every year hundreds of weddings are conducted there. One of its ministers adopted a novel and beautiful way of saying farewell to the couples he had married. After the ceremony he would lead the couple to the entry and say, "Before you go, the bride has the honor of ringing the church bell." He then placed the rope in her hands. She would pull with all her might only to discover that she was not strong enough to move the heavy bell. Then the minister would turn to the groom and ask him to lend his bride a hand. Together they would pull the rope, and the bell would ring, announcing that another couple had begun life together. Then the minister would say, "As you go out into life, never forget that as long as you pull together, you can ring the bell."

This week's lesson deals with passages in the book of Proverbs that deal with marriage. We will also look at other scriptures to develop the picture of God's gift as He gave it. Then we will understand why any perversion of His original masterpiece wreaks such havoc and devastation.

MEMORY TEXT: "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

THEME: By contrast with the destructive effects of infidelity and immorality, happy marriage is a beautiful, enriching expedition through life. As husband and wife experience united fellowship with Christ, they also develop an ever closer love bond between themselves.

OUTLINE:

- I. Marriage—a Divine Masterpiece (Prov. 18:22).
- II. Strange Perversion (Prov. 5:18-20).
- III. A Quarrelsome Spouse (Prov. 21:19).
- IV. A Virtuous Spouse (Prov. 31:10-31).

Pray for the production of quarterlies and visual aids for children in Eastern Asia. US\$5,000.

I. MARRIAGE—A DIVINE MASTERPIECE (Prov. 18:22).

1. According to Proverbs 19:14, where can a man find an intelligent, sensible, and understanding wife?
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“What God hath joined together.” The last part of the verse may be translated: “But from the Lord is a woman who acts prudently.” The Hebrew verb means “to act wisely, understandingly, with insight and comprehension.” A woman who acts in that manner is truly the gift of God. The Lord is the ultimate matchmaker. No one knows better the secret needs of each individual, and no one has the same ability to bring together the right two persons. Because He is the divine Father of love, no one can care as much as He, or provide better for the happiness of the couple He has united.

Why is a good wife from the Lord? Could it be because she has first given herself to Him? Wisdom, purity, and insight in the Bible sense are gifts of Christ to those who believe in Him. The Holy Spirit draws two devoted believers together. They consult their own convictions and preferences, and they listen to the counsel of their parents and their spiritual mentors; but in the final analysis they seek to follow God’s will. True love is born in heaven!

2. What activity did God provide for Adam before the creation of Eve? Why? Gen. 2:18-23.
-

When the animals were brought to Adam to receive their names, he noticed that to each had been given a mate, but there was no one for him. It is possible that God wanted Adam to recognize his lack, that he might better appreciate the gift He had in mind. God had a beautiful plan to supply Adam’s need. Man was not created to dwell in solitude; he was a social being.

3. What words did God use to pronounce the union between Adam and Eve? Gen. 2:24 (compare Matt. 19:4-6).
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The physical union of a man and his wife is a representation of the total bonding of their lives. They are united not only physically but also mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The love that is shared between them is like no other; two have become one.

4. After the Fall, what change took place in the marriage relationship? Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22-24.
-

Someone must be the leader. "In the creation God had made her [Eve] the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in transgression. . . . It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was now placed in subjection to her husband. Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man's abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 58, 59.

5. What counsel does Paul give to husbands? Eph. 5:25-33.

Paul uses the mystery of marital love to illustrate the mystery of our love relationship with Christ. Subjection to the leadership of such love is not grievous. "The Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife to be her protector; he is the house-band of the family, binding the members together, even as Christ is head of the church."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 215.

Preserve equality and individuality. One of the purposes of the gospel is to restore the marriage relation to the state of harmony and equality that existed in Eden. Husbands who function as domestic dictators are not following the biblical ideal of marriage. Are they willing to attend lovingly to their wives as Christ attends to the church? Are they willing to sacrifice for their wives and, if necessary, lay down their lives for them, as Christ has done for the church? The concept held by some men that a wife should submit obediently to their injunctions is bound to create marital unhappiness. A wife should be treated as an equal partner in the decision-making process. Her feelings and her will should be tenderly considered by her husband, and he should do all in his power to contribute to her sense of personal worth.

"Let each give love rather than exact it. . . . The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction. Sympathy and respect encourage the striving after excellence, and love itself increases as it stimulates to nobler aims. . . ."

"Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control, Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other's love."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361.

To one husband Ellen White wrote: "Brother B should soften; he should cultivate refinement and courtesy. He should be very tender and gentle toward his wife, *who is his equal in every respect*; he should not utter a word that would cast a shadow upon her heart. He should begin the work of reformation at home; he should cultivate affection and overcome the coarse, harsh, unfeeling and ungenerous traits of his disposition."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 227 (italics supplied).

6. What counsel is given in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 regarding sexual expression in marriage?

The "due benevolence" of verse 3 (KJV) refers to "conjugal rights" (RSV). The passage is not discussing money matters, but sexual intercourse within marriage. "Defraud ye not one the other" (verse 5) means, "Do not deprive one another of sexual satisfaction."

Inspiration tells us here that abstinence from marital sex may be necessary sometimes, as the married couple give themselves wholly to seeking the Lord; just as sometimes they may go without food for the same purpose. But the warning is: "Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (verse 5, NIV).

The point is not that, if you cannot exercise self-control, you should use your mate as an outlet for your carnal appetite. The point is that sex within marriage, practiced in the spirit of unselfish love, is a beautiful gift of God, designed to foster and express the marital bond and to enrich the lives of both partners physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Have you examined your own contribution to your marriage lately? Are you always kind in the way you speak to your partner, or do you speak cutting, ill-tempered words? Do you give your partner praise and appreciation, or do you destructively criticize his or her efforts, appearance, friendships, or manner of life? Do you treat your partner as Jesus treats those who love Him?

II. STRANGE PERVERSION (Prov. 5:18-20).

7. What counsel does Solomon emphasize regarding immorality?

Prov. 2:16-19 _____

Prov. 5:1-13 _____

Prov. 6:23-33 _____

Prov. 7:4-27 _____

A protecting hedge. In our world today it is common to regard Bible teaching on moral questions as old-fashioned and incompatible with the demands of modern existence. But, in His mercy, God has given us a moral law as a protecting hedge to keep us from physical suffering, emotional instability, and spiritual emptiness.

If there were no patrons, there would be no prostitutes. When the sexual union is indulged outside of marriage, as in premarital or extramarital affairs (or in perversions), the relationship is destructive of spiritual and emotional health, and so is contrary to God's will. It may also be destructive of physical health. Individuals are betrayed and traumatized, never to be quite the same in this life.

God will forgive anyone who sincerely repents; yet scars remain. This is a warning to those who might think that, because God will forgive, they can live as they please without suffering dire results. (See Prov. 9:13-18.)

Drink from your own well. In discussing the danger of moral impurity, Solomon counsels: "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. . . . May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Prov. 5:15, 18, NIV).

8. In what way did the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:27-30 magnify the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14)?

Adultery in the heart. "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man" (Prov. 27:20, RSV).

"He who finds pleasure in dwelling upon scenes of impurity, who indulges the evil thought, the lustful look, may behold in the open sin, with its burden of shame and heartbreaking grief, the true nature of the evil which he has hidden in the chambers of the soul. The season of temptation, under which, it may be, one falls into grievous sin, does not create the evil that is revealed, but only develops or makes manifest that which was hidden and latent in the heart."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 60.

If a woman is party to a man's lust, how could she be innocent herself? Christian women particularly have a responsibility to clothe themselves in "modest apparel" (1 Tim. 2:9, 10) that neither attracts undue attention nor reveals the body in a manner as to be sexually provocative.

What attitude do you adopt to a person in your church who has fallen into moral impurity? Do you condemn and criticize, or do you look for ways to be redemptive? How would you go about helping such a person rise above the mistakes of the past and accept Christ's saving grace? How did Jesus work for people who had fallen?

III. A QUARRELSOME SPOUSE (Prov. 21:19).

The book of Proverbs addresses counsel to wives on this subject, but it applies equally to men.

9. How is the problem of a nagging spouse illustrated? Prov. 27:15 (compare 19:13; 21:9, 19).

"Leaking roofs were common in the East, and the constant dripping tried the nerves of the inhabitants much as does a nagging woman."

"In ancient Palestine for most of the year a man might live in comparative comfort on the flat roof of his house. . . . Solomon contends that it is better to be exposed to the wind and rain than to the quarrelsome and vexing tongue of a contentious woman."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 1012, 1018.

10. What counsel for all Christians is particularly appropriate for a quarrelsome spouse? Eph. 4:29.
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Attitude reform can begin in more than one place. The ill-natured person can determine to consecrate his or her heart and lips to God, and speak only words that will minister grace to the hearers. God will give the power for this noble task.

The marriage partner can also help. Sincere words of positive appreciation given from a heart of love go a long way toward soothing the troubled nerves of a distracted spouse. Just knowing somebody cares—especially the one you love most—lifts a great burden from the heart.

THU IV. A VIRTUOUS SPOUSE (Prov. 31:10-31).

Who can find a virtuous woman? The question implies a rarity, although not a total lack. The real question is: Who can be a virtuous woman? Every woman can. For God is in the business of making men and women virtuous, of helping them build noble characters, equal to the burdens and demands of daily life.

11. What is the value of a virtuous woman? Prov. 31:10. For whose crown is she the jewel? Prov. 12:4; 31:11.
-

Pure rubies belong to the royalty of the mineral world, being hard, flawlessly transparent, dazzling in color, and rare.

12. How are these positive traits revealed in her character?

Diligence (Prov. 31:13, 17, 18, 27) _____

Efficiency (Prov. 31:14, 16, 24) _____

Compassion (Prov. 31:20, 26) _____

Beauty (Prov. 31:22, 25) _____

All of the above are traits that can be possessed by any woman, married or single. By the grace of God, any woman can be truly virtuous.

Her rewards are great, for those who know her best call her blessed.

The husband of such a woman praises her (Prov. 31:28, 29). Her peers are challenged by her example, and her works bring honor to her loved ones and to herself. Best of all, the God she loves is glorified in her life (Prov. 31:30).

FRI

13. How does the Bible describe the kind of husband a man should be? 1 Peter 3:7 (compare Ps. 14:1-5; Eccl. 9:9).

A humble, gentle man of integrity who loves and honors his wife is pleasing to the Lord. By contrast, the prayers of husbands who misuse their wives will be "hindered" (1 Peter 3:7), or unanswered. How can a man who fails to claim Christ's grace so that he might be the loving husband envisioned in Scripture expect God to answer his prayers? The Lord requires him to give his wife and family the understanding, mercy, forgiveness, and kindness that heaven has extended to him. True greatness begins at home. If a man's wife and family adore him as the best of husbands and fathers, what other recommendation could he wish for in this world?

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE:

- What am I contributing to my relationships that will be a blessing and gain a blessing?
- In what ways am I a hindrance to my spouse? Am I willing to change? How can I change?
- Am I a quarrelsome person? If I were to change the manner in which I react to things that displease me, would I bring greater happiness to my spouse?
- How can I become more like the virtuous woman or the man of integrity spoken of in Scripture?

SUMMARY: God is the author and designer of marriage and of all noble human relationships. The more faithful our human associations, the deeper becomes our understanding of our Creator and the relationship He yearns to share with us. With growing understanding comes abhorrence of unfaithfulness and contentiousness—not only because of the results to the sinner, but because God is thereby misrepresented and those we love are hurt. In our relationships with others we are to be living witnesses of God's saving grace.

Lesson 13

December 22-28

No Pruning, No Grapes

SAB
PM

NO CROSS, NO CROWN. "A grapevine says in the early spring, 'How glad I am to get through the winter! I shall have no more trouble now! Summer weather will come, and the garden will be very beautiful!' But the gardener comes, and cuts the vine here and there with his knife. The twigs begin to fall, and the grapevine calls out, 'Murder! What are you cutting me for?' 'Ah,' says the gardener, 'I don't mean to kill you. If I did not do this, you would be the laughingstock of all the other vines before the season is over.' Months go on, and one day the gardener comes under the trellis, where the great clusters of grapes hang, and the grapevine says, 'Thank you, sir, you could not have done anything so kind as to cut me with that knife. . . .' No pruning, no grapes; no grinding mill, no flour; no battle, no victory; no cross, no crown."—T. Dewitt Talmage.

A Christian is a disciple of Christ; a child is a disciple of his parents. Is acceptance of the truthfulness of Christ's teaching all that is involved in being His disciple? Does discipline make a person into a disciple, or does it encourage a disciple to be more like Jesus? The discussion of these questions in this week's lesson is designed to encourage us to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who have learned to claim His power.

MEMORY TEXT: "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments" (Proverbs 3:1).

THEME. A true disciple of Christ is a disciplined individual. Discipline is not merely punishment; in the Bible it is spoken of as the total training of the believer in Christ. Discipline is the process by which the disciple grows in grace, learning to depend fully upon Christ's power for self-government, power to obey His holy law. "The object of discipline is . . . self-government."—*Education*, p. 287. Subjection to Christ is restoration to freedom and to our true selves. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 466.)

OUTLINE:

- I. Parenting (Prov. 22:6).
- II. Despise Not Correction (Prov. 12:15).
- III. What God Hates (Prov. 6:16-19).
- IV. Heart Work (Prov. 3:1).

Pray for this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath projects in the Eastern Africa Division (see back cover).

SUN I. PARENTING (Prov. 22:6).

“To parents is committed the great work of educating and training their children for the future, immortal life. . . . No work ever undertaken by man requires greater skill than the proper training and education of youth and children. . . . The nature of man is threefold, and the training enjoined by Solomon comprehends the right development of the physical, intellectual, and moral powers.”—*Child Guidance*, pp. 38, 39.

1. What is the meaning of the action word *train* in Proverbs 22:6?

“Solomon did not say, ‘Tell a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.’ But ‘Train up a child.’”—*Child Guidance*, p. 38. Because children learn from example, illustration, and experience, as well as from words, we should employ all these avenues of teaching. No method used exclusively will be adequate.

Parental training is not the only influence in a child's life. For the sake of parents who have followed closely the Bible counsel in the training of their children, only to see them leave the Lord, we should point out that the general principle stated in Proverbs 22:6 can be broken by the child's own will. A child who does not go astray has usually been trained correctly; but unfortunately, the child who has been trained correctly at home may choose to succumb to other influences. The text states a general principle to which there are exceptions. Cain, Esau, and Judas are typical examples.

2. What relationships between children and parents are spoken of in the following passages?

Prov. 10:1 _____

Prov. 27:11 _____

Prov. 28:7 _____

Prov. 29:15 _____

Prov. 30:11-14 _____

Each individual has been given freedom of choice. In that sense, each is the arbiter of his own destiny. This being the case, the waywardness of an offspring cannot necessarily be blamed on negligent or faulty parenting. God Himself lost one third of His heavenly family through no fault of His own. Even so, mothers and fathers have special responsibilities.

Some parents are too occupied to train their children. “Many fathers and mothers seem to think that if they feed and clothe their little ones, and educate them according to the standard of the world, they have

done their duty. They are too much occupied with business or pleasure to make the education of their children the study of their lives. They do not seek to train them so that they will employ their talents for the honor of their Redeemer."—*Child Guidance*, p. 38.

MON

3. How are children disciplined? Prov. 3:11, 12; 13:24 (compare 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15).

A minister riding in a subway train got up and gave his seat to a woman who was standing nearby, holding onto a strap for balance. In her surprise, she said, "Why did you do that?" Realizing that she would not understand a spiritual explanation, he said to her, "Madam, I tell you, ever since I was a little boy, I have had an infinite respect for a woman with a strap in her hand."

Corporal punishment should not be physical violence. When all else has failed, it may be necessary to administer physical punishment to a child. But violent physical abuse is totally contrary to the spirit of Christ and to the message of His Word. Punishment administered in anger will only create bitterness and resentment.

Reason with your child. A child is a sensitive human being who will usually respond to love and reason. If a child is habitually naughty, there is usually some physical, emotional, or psychological cause. It may be something that needs explanation, or something that creates fear or resentment. Communicating with the child in an attempt to draw out the real reason for the behavior may well result in victory over it. Some children are so sensitive that physical punishment can break their wills and destroy their legitimate self-esteem. A parent who lashes out in anger is creating future problems for the child and for himself.

"Also to punish the just is not good" (Prov. 17:26). "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Punishment rendered unnecessary by prayer. "There is great strength and blessing in praying together in our families, with and for our children. When my children have done wrong, and I have talked with them kindly and then prayed with them, I have never found it necessary after that to punish them. Their hearts would melt in tenderness before the Holy Spirit that came in answer to prayer."—*Child Guidance*, p. 525.

"The mother may ask, 'Shall I never punish my child?' Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail; yet she should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 116.

If you are a parent, can you say that the training you are giving

your children is contributing to making them faithful disciples of Christ? Examining your heart and your conduct, what areas of improvement in your child training do you recognize to be necessary?

How do the basic principles by which we should train our children relate to manager-employee, and teacher-student relationships? How do the same principles affect the manner in which a church should discipline unfaithful members?

TUE II. DESPISE NOT CORRECTION (Prov. 12:15).

Independence is an inherent facet of human nature. We feel that we can handle situations alone quite successfully. Christ is ignored in our haste to do things our own way. God exercises long patience with His self-deceived, self-reliant children.

4. What does God know about our choices, that we tend to forget? Prov. 16:25 (compare Jer. 10:23).

Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). On the other hand, by relying upon His power, we can do all things He expects of us. (See Phil. 4:13.) Becoming a disciplined disciple of Jesus involves learning to depend upon Him for grace to walk in His way. Our wills are involved in choosing Him and in resisting evil, but Jesus is the one who lifts our burden. (See James 4:6-8.)

5. How does Solomon categorize the person who is "right in his own eyes"? Prov. 12:15 (compare 13:18; 15:10; 29:1).

A tragic illustration of these verses is found in the final chapters of the book of Judges. The sad account underlines the tragic results of life apart from God. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, RSV). Confusion and violence reigned. Where were the true disciples of Jehovah? Because few were willing to take His counsel, there was confusion and disunity throughout Israel.

Even when such conditions prevail, God maintains ultimate control. "Above the distractions of earth He sits enthroned; all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 417.

How would you explain this principle of God's ultimate control to a mother whose child has been killed by a drunk driver? (See Rom. 8:18, 28; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Peter 4:12.)

6. How does God want us to relate to instruction, reproof, and correction? Prov. 3:5, 6; 4:20 (compare 5:1; 12:1).

Eve thought she knew better than God. When she obeyed Satan in the form of a serpent, she really believed he was telling her the truth. "In the judgment men will not be condemned because they conscientiously believed a lie, but because they did not believe the truth, because they neglected the opportunity of learning what is truth."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 55.

Judas Iscariot's self-confidence blinded him to his own weakness of character. He thought he knew better than Christ. He valued his own wisdom and counsel above that of the Lord Himself. The inevitable result of such attitudes is spiritual ruin. (See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 717, 718.)

WED

7. What kind of instruction are we urged to avoid? Prov. 16:22 (compare 19:27; Job 38:2).

How do we recognize a fool? We are invited to test all counsel by the teachings of the Bible (Isa. 8:20) and to seek the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit in every situation (John 14:26).

If we are listening, God has ways to get through to us. "Gray areas" exist in which it is difficult to know precisely what we should do. In such situations we need to pray much and rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But in matters where we have been given a direct "Thus saith the Lord," "open-mindedness" to contradictory philosophies is no virtue.

Ask yourself, What kind of instruction am I allowing to shape my life? Is it helping me along the right road?

III. WHAT GOD HATES (Prov. 6:16-19).

8. List some of the things that are especially disgusting to God. Prov. 6:16-19; 20:10-23 (compare 12:22; 15:9, 26).

Children sing in Sabbath School, "Jesus loves me when I'm good, when I do the things I should; Jesus loves me when I'm bad, tho' it makes Him very sad." Is it true? Indeed it is! God loves the sinner, but not the sin. The great problem in salvation is how to save the sinner without saving (and thus perpetuating) the sin. But God found a way of escape for us; Jesus died to give us another chance at life. Through the provisions of the cross we can be made free from "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

There are those who become so bound to sin that it is inseparable from them. When the sin is destroyed, they must be destroyed with it.

9. What attitude does the Lord have to religious practices that do not come from hearts of love to Him? Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9.

The sacrifices and prayers of those who are not right with God are a farce, a façade. When, by faith, the sinner appropriates Christ's merits, his religious services and sacrifices are accepted. Christ has promised, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

THU IV. HEART WORK (Prov. 3:1).

10. What problem persisted among God's chosen people in both Old Testament times and when Jesus walked among them? Isa. 29:13, 14; Matt. 15:7-9. To what extent does this problem still exist today? Rev. 3:14-20.

We are Laodicea. Our problem stems from the spiritual condition of our hearts. We are lukewarm. If we were cold, the Lord says, we would be better off; we would be more likely to wake up, recognize our pathetic condition, and seek His help. If our heart were truly filled with His Spirit, we would be "hot." Too often we attempt to reform by applying mere rules and regulations without genuine heart surrender to God.

11. Where does God begin the work of transformation? Prov. 23:26; 3:1 (compare Rom. 12:2).

Having our names on the church membership books is not sufficient. "Profession is as nothing in the scale. It is character that decides destiny."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 74.

The majority of God's people are still in the churches around us, waiting to be called out by the moving invitation of the Holy Spirit. (See Rev. 18:1-4; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 390, 464; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 41.) If we seek Him with all our heart the Lord will pour upon us the Holy Spirit so that we will have the spiritual power to reach honest souls who need to hear the final invitation of mercy.

12. What remedy for our condition is offered by the Great Physician? Eze. 36:26, 27 (compare Rom. 7:14, 24, 25).

"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'" (Prov. 20:9, NIV). The answer to this rhetorical question is obvious. No one can make such a claim. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Look to Christ for deliverance. "Be not discouraged because your heart seems hard. Every obstacle, every internal foe, only increases your need of Christ. He came to take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh. Look to Him for special grace to overcome your peculiar faults."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 112.

The Lord's plea to us is: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

WHAT RELEVANCE DOES THIS HAVE FOR MY LIFE?

- Do I represent God accurately to my children? Do I combine love and justice, mercy and truth, in all my dealings with them?
- How do I learn to depend on Christ to direct my steps? How can I come to the point of accepting His leading in my life?
- Do I learn from the experience of others, or do I insist on trying everything myself?
- How will my life change when I cease living it my own independent way, and allow God to recreate me a true disciple in the image of His Son?

FRI FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:

"If parents would see a different state of things in their family, let them consecrate themselves wholly to God, and the Lord will devise ways and means whereby *a transformation may take place in their households.*"—*Child Guidance*, p. 172 (italics supplied).

"Human pride and wisdom will prove to be a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 606. (See also *The Desire of Ages*, p. 307.)

SUMMARY: Discipleship is a matter of the heart. The greatest privilege and highest duty of a parent is to lead his child to give his heart to God. The discipline of a child is to mirror as closely as possible God's manner of treating us, and is to focus on the same end—that of conformity to His will through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are enabled to hate what He hates and love what He loves. Then we will represent His character accurately to the world.

Lessons for First Quarter, 1992

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the adult Sabbath School lessons for the first quarter of 1992 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is *No Time to Lose*. This quarter's lessons cover the books of Joel, Micah, and Zephaniah.

First Lesson: "The Day of the Lord"

STUDY TEXT: Joel 1:1—2:11.

MEMORY TEXT: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

THEME: The day of the Lord describes God's past judgments and points to the final judgment at the end of time. This lesson challenges us to sense the nearness of the close of probation and Christ's second coming, and urges us to let the Lord complete His work in our hearts and lives.

Second Lesson: Revival and Reformation

STUDY TEXT: Joel 2:12-17

MEMORY TEXT: "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:13).

THEME: The Lord calls for revival among His children. To seek the Lord's blessing there must be earnest effort and a sense of urgency. Then the Lord can bless His people.

Lessons in Braille

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Braille Foundation, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
East African	1,114	271,289	18,595,869
Ethiopian	143	53,235	50,109,983
South-East Africa	441	69,711	7,982,807
Tanzania	433	96,920	23,929,570
Uganda	300	54,092	14,654,442
Zambesi	365	127,309	9,649,454
Zambia	1,229	109,539	9,620,965
North Botswana Field	16	5,915	657,989
South Botswana Field	11	4,451	563,000
Totals June 30, 1989	4,052	812,461	135,764,279