

# North American DIVISION



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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

PROVERBS

Jan • Feb • Mar 2015

Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide

Jan | Feb | Mar 2015

# Proverbs



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## Words of the Wise

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

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

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

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

Yet the book of Proverbs *is* the Word of God, because it was under divine

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The book of Proverbs is a witness to the wisdom that had been accumulated over generations.*

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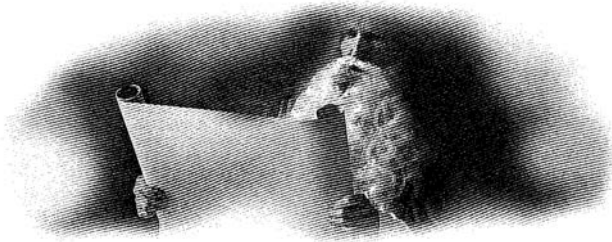


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# The Call of Wisdom



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Proverbs 1–3, Gen. 1:1, Exod. 19:16, 20:20, Prov. 11:30, 13:12, 15:4.*

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.

## The Beginning of Wisdom

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

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

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

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

In short, to fear God means to be faithful to God and to love Him.

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

**We are told to love God and also to fear Him. How do these two concepts relate to your own experience with the Lord?**

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## True Education

**Read** Proverbs 1:8–19. What two contrasting ways of “education” are presented in these verses? What’s the basic message here, not just for parents, but for everyone who fears the Lord?

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Call of Wisdom

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Benefit of Wisdom

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

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

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

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

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

“When wisdom enters your heart,” it marks the final stage of conversion. Not only will we enjoy the knowledge of the Lord, but it will be a pleasant experience to our souls (*Prov. 2:10, NKJV*). We will also be protected from the way of evil (*vs. 12*) and from the seduction of evil (*vs. 16*), and we will walk in the path of righteousness (*vs. 20*).

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

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

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

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## Do Not Forget!

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Hidden Treasure,” pp. 111–114, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “A Blessing in the Home,” p. 334, in *Messages to Young People*; “Study of Physiology,” pp. 197, 198, in *Education*; Ellen G. White Comments, p. 1156, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3.

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? How can someone have a lot of knowledge and not wisdom? After all, who doesn’t know personally, or at least know about, some very knowledgeable people who seem to have no wisdom?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea of “the fear of the LORD.” If “there is no fear in love” (1 John 4:18), how can we fear the Lord and still love Him? How do we reconcile the tension between justice and love in “the fear of the LORD”?
- 3 Why is being “wise in one’s own eyes” such a dangerous state to be in, especially when we consider how corrupt the human heart is, and how easy it is for us to rationalize just about any behavior we want? Think of those who have rationalized the worst of behaviors. How can we make sure we don’t do the same thing?

## From Humptulips to Aleknagik

Life was hard in the western Washington town of Humptulips during the 1930s. Located on the Humptulips River on the Olympic Peninsula, the town had seen better days for the commercial fishermen trying to earn a living.

One family, the Moodys, found life so difficult in Humptulips that they decided to follow Mrs. Moody's brother to Alaska, where, according to the brother, the fishing was good, and there was money to be made. The family of six packed up and traveled the 2,500 miles from Humptulips to the Canadian border, then on through British Columbia and the Yukon before heading west to the frontier town of Dillingham, Alaska. From Dillingham, they headed up the Wood River, finally arriving on the remote shores of Lake Aleknagik.

Although *Aleknagik* is a Yupik word meaning "wrong way home," the Moody family found a good place to settle beside the lake, where they built a small log cabin. Mr. Moody and the eldest son took their large fishing boat down into Bristol Bay, home of the world's largest source of red salmon, while Mrs. Moody cared for the three younger children at home.

Sadly, just a few months after settling into their new home, tragedy struck the Moody family. As the father and eldest son headed up the river from Dillingham, somehow both men ended up in the fast current and drowned, leaving the mother to raise the two younger sons and a daughter.

Being a family of faith, the mother continued to gather the children for worship, and on Sabbath they met with the uncle and his family. During the week, Mrs. Moody carried out the work of the family fishing business with the help of her two younger sons, Lloyd, 14, and Roland, 13.

"We grew up fast," remembers Roland. "We had a mother and little sister to help."

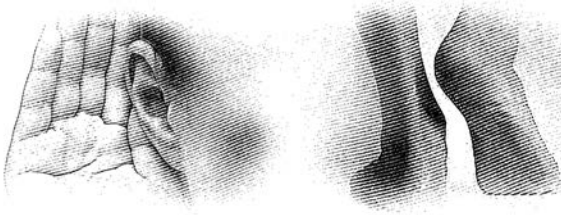
In order to help their family survive, Lloyd and Roland had little time for school as they worked as commercial fishermen near their home. By the time they left their teens, the young men had not yet finished at the rural public school. Early each morning, Roland, who was now 20, built a fire in the school's woodstove so the place would be warm when the students arrived.

During those early mornings, Roland not only warmed up the classroom—he also took the opportunity to get to know the school's beautiful young teacher, Miss Jackie. By the end of the year, they were married and set up a home beside Lake Aleknagik.

*Continued next week*



# From Ears *to* Feet



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Hear!

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

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

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

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

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

## Protect Your Family

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

### **Read** Proverbs 5. What dangers must we guard against?

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Protect Your Friendship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Protect Your Work

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

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

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

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

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

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## Protect Yourself

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*; “In Contact With Others,” pp. 489–491, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Other Object Lessons,” pp. 117–120, in *Education*.

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on this idea of how we can help others, even at a personal cost to ourselves. How do we look at what this week’s lesson taught in contrast to this verse: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*John 15:13, NKJV*)?
- 2 What other lessons can we take from the natural world that we can apply to our own lives? Given, however, that the world is fallen, why must we be careful in the lessons we do draw?
- 3 Read through the seven abominations in Proverbs 6:16–19. Why do you think that they are considered so bad in God’s eyes?

## Camp Polaris: A Guiding Star

After they married, Roland and Jackie Moody started talking about ways to reach out to the native Alaskan community around them, and decided to build a Seventh-day Adventist school on their property by the lake. They called it the Mission School and offered first through eighth grade. Students and parents were delighted, and kids came from as far away as Nome just to attend the mission school. In order to accommodate the students, two dormitories were built. Additionally, the Moodys started an Adventist congregation and built the first Aleknagik Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As the school grew, Roland and Jackie wanted to provide more for their students, so they started a camp. “We just didn’t have any place to take the young kids for activities and stuff,” recalled Roland, “and kids like to go someplace.” They named the new place Camp Polaris—after the guiding light of the North Star.

Roland purchased several old buildings from Crick Cannery, which had gone out of business. He barged these buildings across Bristol Bay to Aleknagik, and then 12 miles up the lake to Camp Polaris. More than 60 years later, these old cannery buildings are still in use each summer by the children of western Alaska.

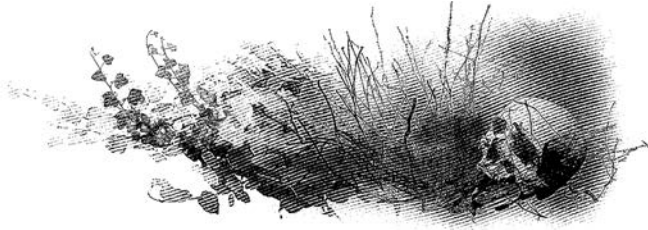
For decades, Roland and Jackie enjoyed hosting the children and ferrying them up the lake by barge to the camp. Each year on the last Sabbath of camp, the entire Aleknagik Adventist church prepared a feast for the kids and made the one-and-a-half-hour boat trip up the lake to Camp Polaris where they enjoyed a special Sabbath by the lake with the campers. After Jackie passed away, Roland married Beverly, who helped continue the Camp Polaris traditions.

Over the years, the camp has been a vital ministry to the young people of western Alaska. Many of the children who attend camp come from less than ideal homes where poverty, alcoholism, and abuse are too often the norm. They often exclaim that going to the camp is the highlight of their year, because it is a place where they feel loved, accepted, and cared for.

While Roland and Beverly have since retired and moved to Walla Walla, Washington, the ministry of Camp Polaris continues. You can become a part of this special ministry to the children of Alaska by contributing to this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

To meet some of the children at Camp Polaris, read their stories at [www.adventistmission.org/resources](http://www.adventistmission.org/resources).

# A Matter of Life and Death



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

\* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 17.*

## The Law in Our Lives

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Symbols can be helpful, but why must we be careful not to mistake the symbol for the reality it represents?**

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## Light and Life

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Fighting Temptation

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

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

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

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

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

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



## “You Shall Not Steal”

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

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

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

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

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

## The Threat of Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Think of some "strong" people who have fallen in a big way. Why should this make you tremble for yourself? What is your only protection?**

**Further Study:** “Satan offers to men the kingdoms of the world if they will yield to him the supremacy. Many do this and sacrifice heaven. It is better to die than to sin; better to want than to defraud; better to hunger than to lie.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 495.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 How can we be serious about the gravity of sin without falling into the trap of fanaticism? At the same time, how can we be obedient to the law of God without falling into legalism?
- 2 Read Exodus 20:1–17. How are all the Ten Commandments related to each other? Why, if we openly violate one commandment, are we likely to transgress other commandments, as well? (See James 2:11.) What examples can you find in which transgression of one commandment has led to the transgression of others?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea of how people might use religion in order to justify wrong actions. It’s not that hard to do, especially if you tend to hold up “love” as the ultimate standard of right and wrong. After all, think about all the bad things done under the pretext of “love.” How, then, does the law continue to act as a way of protecting people, either from themselves or others, who might otherwise be led into sin?
- 4 Look again at the question at the end of Sunday’s study, which deals with mistaking symbols for reality. How might we do that? For example, how might idolatry be one way of doing this? What traditions, which are symbols of spiritual truths, could be mistaken for those truths themselves?

## “This Isn’t Yogi Bear!”

Being from the tropical country of Puerto Rico, Paola never dreamed that she would end up in the wilds of Alaska. “It’s just so out there,” Paola says. “It’s one of those places that you’re never going to go to because it’s so far away.”

But when the recruiting team from the Alaska Conference came to Walla Walla University in Washington State, looking for summer camp staff, Paola decided to check it out. She was hired, and that summer she found herself lifeguarding on the shores of Lake Aleknagik at Camp Polaris.

“It was nothing like I expected,” Paola admits. “I pictured snow and igloos, but it was gorgeous and green!”

In addition to the natural beauty, Paola experienced other surprises. During orientation, the staff were warned that bears frequented the camp. “We were instructed that these bears aren’t like Yogi Bear [a friendly children’s cartoon character],” Paola remembers. “But even though we were warned, a lot of us were still thinking, *It’s just a bear.*”

One day Paola noticed a bear coming into camp. Wanting a picture, she quickly grabbed her camera and looked down as she walked toward the lake. Looking up, she suddenly froze—directly in front of her was a grizzly bear!

“Everything stopped. I couldn’t hear anything. Everyone else was in the lodge; no one could see me. The bear was frozen too. The only thought I had was, *This isn’t Yogi!*”

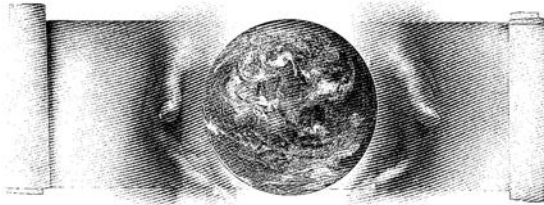
Suddenly, the grizzly headed toward a garbage container, and Paola moved quickly back into the lodge. “Sometimes you don’t know how bad something is until you come face-to-face with it,” she says.

Working at the camp opened her eyes in many ways, Paola admits. “I realized that I’m not a kid anymore. These are the kids now, and I needed to take care of them.”

Sometimes Paola found drawing the line of authority challenging. “When there were issues, I learned to maneuver around the children, not making them feel unwelcome or inferior, but working with them in a way so they could see they needed to stop their tantrums and come back with the others who were having fun.

“There had to be a certain amount of respect going on so that they would know you were the authority but would still feel comfortable coming to you if they had any problems—especially spiritually. At Camp Polaris, there is a spiritual aspect to everything.”

# Divine Wisdom




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 24.

## Wisdom Cries Out

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Wisdom and Creation

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Rejoicing in Creation

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

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

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

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

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

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## Wisdom's Appeal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Either/Or

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

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

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

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

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

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

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The key to wisdom is humility. The wise man is the man who is teachable and responds to instruction with an open mind. Wisdom comes only to the one who, like a child, feels the need to grow. This is why, in the most explicit manner, Jesus taught that “‘unless you . . . become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’” (*Matt. 18:3, NKJV*).

**Further Study:** “The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate—a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.’ John 1:1, 2. Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God. . . . And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: ‘The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.’ Proverbs 8:22–30.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is belief in the Genesis Creation account the foundation of biblical wisdom? Why is the idea of evolution contrary to the Bible in every way?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that true wisdom is something that we cannot generate of ourselves but that must be revealed to us. What are some examples of important truths that we would never know other than their being revealed by divine inspiration? For instance, how could we know about Christ’s death on the cross and what it offers were it not revealed? What about the seventh-day Sabbath or the Second Coming?
- 3 How does God’s work, as revealed in Genesis 1, testify to the fact that good cannot be mixed with evil? What implications does your answer have for the idea that one could, for instance, incorporate an evolutionary worldview into the Genesis Creation story?
- 4 How does God’s enjoyment of the creation help us to understand how we can have a deeper and richer Sabbath experience?

## “Being Ready for Whatever”

Travis didn't know what to do with his camper. At the age of 12, Logan\* was the toughest kid in the cabin and wanted to be in charge of everyone and everything. One night, Logan decided he wasn't going to bed, so Travis and his co-counselor came up with a plan.

“OK,” they told the obstinate camper, “you can stay up—as long as you read the Bible.” Logan agreed, but he didn't have a Bible; in fact, he had never read one. So the co-counselor loaned Logan his Bible, and by the light of the moon and a flashlight, the boy met the heroes of Genesis for the very first time.

The next morning Logan confided to his counselors, “I actually found some cool stories in there.” He was especially interested in the story of Joseph and asked many questions, wondering how Joseph was able to do all that he did.

“Although Logan still acted tough, you could see the gears starting to turn as he wondered what we were all about,” remembers Travis. “It was kind of cool to see the change that took place over the week.”

Most of the kids who come to Camp Polaris don't know the Bible's stories. Travis remembers a time when only one camper knew the story of David and Goliath. “We're ministering to kids who don't grow up in Christian homes, who don't read the Bible. It takes a lot of prayer to help reach these kids . . . to know how to reach them.”

Travis, a senior mechanical engineering student at Walla Walla University, started working at Camp Polaris in 2011. In addition to being a counselor, he has taught a variety of classes including wakeboarding and model rocketry.

“I've loved it every summer, that's why I keep going back,” he says. “It's been an absolute blast. On top of that, I've learned a lot about trusting in God, because you get situations where you don't know how to make it through the week, but you always do. Then in hindsight, you see that even the tough things were a positive. It definitely is about learning to trust God.

“I think I'm a little more comfortable now with just being thrown into a situation. I've learned to be flexible and go with the flow, and to be ready for whatever—because you don't know what's going to happen next.”

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\* *Not his real name.*

# The Blessings *of the* Righteous



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Prov. 10:1–14, Matt. 19:19, Proverbs 11–12, John 3:16, Proverbs 13.*

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

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

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

## Righteousness Is Holistic

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Mouth of the Righteous

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Hope of the Righteous

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Truth of the Righteous

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

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

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

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

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

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

**When was the last time you lied? How did you feel when you did it?**

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## The Reward of the Righteous

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Discussion Questions:

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

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

## A Light in the World

Heather Ueeck grew up in Delta Junction, a small town at the end of the Alaska Highway. As a child, Heather loved going to camp every summer and kept a record of her experiences, listing her daily activities. Early on she wrote, “And of course we had to do worship, and that was dumb.”

But as the years went by, camp worships became more meaningful to Heather. One worship that made a big impression involved a candle and a balloon. “They held a balloon over a lit candle, and the balloon popped right away. Then they put water into another balloon and held it over the candle, and it didn’t pop! The presenter explained that we are like the balloon and the water represents Christ. If we have Christ in us, He calms us and gives us peace and strength. He’s a resource that we can latch on to.”

Heather now tries to pass on these lessons to campers as she works at Camp Polaris. “The kids aren’t Adventists, and they don’t come from the best families. They aren’t used to discipline, to structure, and people caring about them. They often act up. Sometimes it seems as if they hate camp, but they keep coming back. Even with the struggles, underneath they realize that we actually care about them.”

Heather admits that working at Camp Polaris has taught her patience. “It’s my job to lead the kids toward God. Patience and flexibility are so important, and trusting in God. It’s given me a strong tool for facing situations that will come up in my life—just learning to deal with the things that this world throws at you. It’s given me an appreciation for others who have served me and has given me the attitude that I want to help other people and be a light in the world.”

Camp Polaris is in need of updated facilities, such as “bear-proof cabins,” says Heather. And now that the Moodys have left, the only way to ferry the children to camp is by making several one-and-a-half-hour trips by small boat. Restroom and bathing facilities include two outhouses, a steam sauna, and the icy waters of Lake Aleknagik.

But the primitive accommodations are not a deterrent for Heather. “I’ve lived in Alaska all my life,” she says, “and [Camp Polaris] is the most isolated I’ve ever been. But it’s definitely a place where you can feel very close to God. I really love it up there.”

# What You Get *Is* Not What You See



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.

## The Assurance of the Fool

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Fear of the Wise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## “The Eyes of the LORD”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Joy of the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Sovereignty of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**As we seek to understand why things happen, how does the reality of the great controversy help us work through some difficult issues regarding why things happen as they do?**

**Further Study:** “From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; ‘but the end thereof are the ways of death.’ Proverbs 14:12. Happy [are] they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 720.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the idea that we have only a limited view of reality. What does this mean? What things are out there that we know are real, yet we just can’t sense them, in any way? For instance, how many radio waves (cell phone calls, satellite programs, radio programs) are in the air all around you right now, and yet you can’t see, hear, or feel them at all? How should the existence of such realities help us to understand how limited our senses are? How should this understanding help us to realize the reality of other things that we can’t see, such as angels?
- 2 Why is it important to understand the reality of human free will and free choice, even if God is ultimately in control? Though these concepts (human free choice, God’s sovereignty) seem to be in contradiction, both are taught in the Bible, so how can we reconcile them?

## “They Deserve a Chance Too”

When Paul and Christie Brown moved into a less-than-desirable neighborhood in Elkins, West Virginia, they didn't know that their home would become a magnet for young people.

“I've always been youth focused,” says Paul, “so when the neighborhood kids wanted to hang out with our kids at the house, we said, ‘OK, but there are rules:

“ ‘1. Respect. You will treat yourself and others respectfully, with no swearing and no name calling.

“ ‘2. No lying. You lie to me, and it's done—you are out the door.

“ ‘3. Health and dietary issues—no drugs, no alcohol, no unclean meat.’ ”

Once the young people understood about clean and unclean foods, they tried sharing what they had learned with their families. “The grandfather would be cooking a groundhog,” says Paul, “but the kids would tell him, ‘No! We're not going to eat that!’ ”

Before long, the visitors were asking to move in with the Browns. “Brayden spends every weekend at our house,” says Paul. “It's his Sabbath retreat and gets him away from his house.” During the week, Brayden tries to avoid his abusive, alcoholic stepfather as much as possible.

Hunter and Wyatt are two others who spend more time with the Browns than at home. Coming from difficult situations, both of the boys feel safe with Paul and Christie, whom they consider to be their surrogate parents.

“I try to treat all the kids as if they're my kids,” says Paul, “because they deserve a chance too.” That includes providing clothing, bicycles, and various other items. “Even the vehicle I drive—an extended-cab truck—is based on how many kids we're looking after, so we can take them to and from school.”

With parental permission, the Browns have taken Brayden and Hunter with them to Pathfinders and to church and are even paying for them to attend the local Seventh-day Adventist church school. Unfortunately, Wyatt's mother will not give permission for him to join in these activities; but for Brayden and Hunter, their experience has been life changing. On November 2, 2013, both boys, along with the Browns' son, Payton, were baptized at the Elkins Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We've been living here for three years now,” Paul says, “and my wife really feels that the Lord put us in this neighborhood. It's not where we would have chosen, but we are sure that the Lord led us here.”

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*\* All names of neighborhood children have been changed.*

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**Shawn Boonstra**

**2015 Sharing Book**

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# Dealing With Fights



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 14.

## Sin and Friends

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Be Just!

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Words, Again

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

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

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

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

**Read** Proverbs 18:21. What does it mean?

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

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

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## Two Sides to a Story

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Be Truthful

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

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

“Why not?” asked the king.

“Because I never lie,” the counselor replied.

The king decided to appoint him to the position.

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

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

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

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

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

**Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22.** What important principle is seen here, and how should we apply this to ourselves and to our dealings with those who are needy?

**Further Study:** “The spirit of gossip and talebearing is one of Satan’s special agencies to sow discord and strife, to separate friends, and to undermine the faith of many in the truthfulness of our positions. Brethren and sisters are too ready to talk of the faults and errors that they think exist in others, and especially in those who have borne unflinchingly the messages of reproof and warning given them of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 195.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 It’s always hard when those you love or care about mess up. And it’s so easy to try to cover up for them. How do we strike the right balance in situations like these? Certainly, we need to show grace, as we have been shown grace for our errors—that goes without saying. But does grace always, or ever, mean that a person can sin with impunity and not face consequences? What then is the right course to take in situations like these?
- 2 As the lesson said this week, most things in life are very complicated and have many facets to them. So, even those things we happen to be right about will usually be more complex than we understand them to be. How can we learn to be open-minded while at the same time not being foolish about it?
- 3 What are some ways we can lie without ever using words?

## “Your Parents Should Be Very Proud of You”

“My dog’s been shot!” Brayden blurted out in tears to his friend Payton. “Would you speak at his funeral?”

Twelve-year-old Payton had never conducted a funeral, but wanting to help his friend, he agreed to do what he could. “I planned the whole thing out,” he said. “The dog is buried in my yard—Brayden and I dug his grave.” After Payton performed the eulogy, the boys added the dog’s dish, collar, and squeaky toy before filling the grave.

When Payton and his family first moved into the neighborhood, Payton befriended Brayden and learned about the struggles he was facing at home. “I told him that I was a Christian and shared my beliefs with him,” says Payton, “and then he told me, ‘I want to try that out!’ ”

Brayden began spending more time at Payton’s house and often spent the night—especially on Fridays, so he could go with Payton and his family to church the next day. Before long, Brayden’s cousin, Hunter, wanted to stay with Payton too, “So I was housing three people in my room,” Payton explains.

While Payton’s bedroom may be small, his heart is big. He befriended another neighbor, Wyatt, whose father committed suicide. Wyatt had been kicked out of several public schools at the age of 13, and his mother didn’t know what to do with him. Payton spent time with Wyatt and invited him to come with him to Pathfinders and to church, along with the other boys, but Wyatt’s mother would not allow her son to join in.

During the next three years, Payton often shared his faith with Wyatt, and one day after hearing that they might be moving, Wyatt handed Payton and his sister, Stormy, a note. The note is so precious that Payton keeps it in the family safe.

“Dear Payton and Stormy,

“Before you move, I want to thank you. When you first came, I had lost my way. I stopped going to church and didn’t plan on coming back. When we became friends, I was trying to act tough, but on the inside, I wanted to be more like you, Payton. When the hard times came and I lost my father, talking to you was a comfort. I learned about God through you. You were and still are a hero, inspiration, and role model to me. Your parents should be very proud of you, knowing that you helped me find Jesus.”

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# Words *of* Wisdom



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.

## We Are All Equal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Test of Life

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

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

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

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

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

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## Waiting for the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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## Compassion for the Poor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Education

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

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

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

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

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

**We so often teach others (especially children) by our example. Think about your example: What kind of legacy are you leaving? In what areas, if any, might your example be better?**

**Further Study:** “Parents should be models of truthfulness, for this is the daily lesson to be impressed upon the heart of the child. Undeviating principle should govern parents in all the affairs of life, especially in the education and training of their children. . . . Parents, never prevaricate; never tell an untruth in precept or in example. If you want your child to be truthful, be truthful yourself.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 151.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the idea of Proverbs 22:6. Why must we be careful in how we apply this? That is, many parents have done a good job in rearing their children, and yet as adults those children make wrong choices. Why must we never forget the reality of free will and the reality of the great controversy as we look at the meaning of this text?
- 2 Look again at the final question at the end of Wednesday’s study. What does it tell us about ourselves that we get such a sense of satisfaction from helping others, especially when we get nothing in return? What should this truth tell us about why so many people who have so much of the world’s riches are miserable nonetheless?
- 3 Though we are not all equal in talents, education, experience, and so forth, we are equal in the most important thing: we all need the Cross for salvation. What should this teach us about the basic equality and worth of all human beings? More so, how should this truth impact how we treat all people?

## Brayden's Testimony

Paul Brown and his family are a true blessing to me. A few years ago, when they moved in, my step-grandfather asked Paul if I could mow Paul's yard. Paul agreed, and soon a connection grew between me and his family, and I found out what nice people they are. His kids, Payton and Stormy, are very upbeat and friendly. Their mother, Christie, is really nice and is always there to help me.

One day I asked Payton why they were always away on Saturdays. I thought it was weird that I couldn't do any work for them on that day. Payton invited me to come to church with them. I liked it, but after a while I started slacking off. Six months later I was back—this time to stay.

I joined the Pathfinder Club. As we were coming back from a campout, Payton, my cousin Hunter, and I were talking about school. Hunter and I didn't like our school because there were so many fights. Hunter said that he hoped to someday go to a Christian college. Payton asked, "Why don't you just go to a Christian school?" Our parents agreed to let us go to Highland Adventist School here in Elkins, and Paul found sponsors for us. I like the school a lot. The teachers and staff are really nice, and the students are friendly, not fighting.

One day as we were going to church, Payton said he wanted to get baptized. Hunter and I said that we wanted to get baptized with him. So we all took Bible studies together and were baptized on November 2, 2013.

The church members are the nicest people I've ever met. They are always there for you. And the pastor, Dan, there's something about his preaching that just sticks with me. I like the people here a lot; they are like my second family that I've always wanted.

Being able to come here and know about the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a real blessing to me. No one else in my family are Adventists. They don't understand why I don't do some things I used to do. My stepdad can't understand why I don't eat pork—all my life I've eaten it, and at first it was hard not to eat it. But I'm glad I went off of it. I've seen a change in my weight and my personality. Everything has gone up since I was baptized.

# Words of Truth



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

\* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 28.*

## The Knowledge of Truth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Robbing the Poor

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

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

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

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

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

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## Being Jealous of the Wicked

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## What We Put in Our Mouths

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Our Responsibilities

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

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

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

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

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

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

**It’s tragic enough to remain silent and do nothing as a woman is being murdered on your street. But what about many of the other evils in the world: hunger, war, injustice, racism, economic oppression? What are our responsibilities here, as well?**

**Further Study:** “Souls around us must be aroused and saved, or they perish. Not a moment have we to lose. We all have an influence that tells for the truth or against it. I desire to carry with me unmistakable evidences that I am one of Christ’s disciples. We want something besides Sabbath religion. We need the living principle, and to daily feel individual responsibility. This is shunned by many, and the fruit is carelessness, indifference, a lack of watchfulness and spirituality.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 99.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, go over your answer to Sunday’s final question. What can we learn from each other’s answers? What are ways that we can learn to build up our faith in what we believe?
- 2 Someone wrote: “Remember two things: Christ died for you, and you will one day die.” In the context of Tuesday’s study, which talked about how we will have to answer for sin one way or another, what crucial lesson should we take away from this thought?
- 3 Here again is the quote put on the buses in London: “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” Besides what the lesson talked about, what other problems do you find with that sentiment? Why would God’s existence be something that would make people worry to begin with? What does this sentiment tell us about how well Satan has distorted the character of God in the minds of many people? In class, come up with different ways in which you could respond to that slogan. What are some short, pithy slogans that could help people to see the hope that we can have in God?

## Helping Mission Succeed

When Dan Jacko isn't busy helping people learn to walk again, he's assisting his church members with their spiritual walk. Pastor Dan, a professional physical therapist, is also serving as a lay pastor for the Mountain View Conference in the two church district of Elkins and Parsons, West Virginia. He also teaches biology and chemistry to the academy level students at Highland Adventist School in Elkins. His wife, Cheryl, is an educator and registered nurse and serves as the principal of the kindergarten through twelfth grade school. Their son, Jeremy, teaches Bible, math, and history.

Believing mission is important, every other year, Pastor Dan leads the students and church members on a mission trip. So far, they've been to Mexico, Panama, Honduras, and, in 2014, Costa Rica.

While in Costa Rica, they built a church during the day and presented evangelistic meetings and Vacation Bible Schools in four different churches in the evenings. In spite of his own full schedule, Pastor Dan was impressed with the dedication of the pastor in Costa Rica, who shepherds six churches and doesn't have a car.

Not only do Pastor Dan and his members build churches abroad—they also build them at home, where they recently completed their own church and school, located on five and a half acres (2.2 hectares), completely debt-free.

The most recent challenge for Pastor Dan and the 80-member Elkins church is keeping up with the many Bible study requests coming from their community. Over the course of three mailings in 2013 and 2014, everyone in the state of West Virginia received an invitation for the Voice of Prophecy's Discover Bible course. The response was overwhelming—with 10,000 people indicating that they would like to have Bible studies. Of that number, more than 200 came from the Elkins and Parsons area.

"Some are face-to-face Bible studies," explains Pastor Dan, "and others prefer to take them by correspondence, which are then graded by our local church members." The local churches are responsible for purchasing the lessons and providing postage for correspondence students.

"What makes this area even more of a mission field," says Pastor Dan, "is that you'll get a lot of people who say, 'I believe this,' but if their family isn't in favor of it, a lot of them just won't make the commitment."

Nevertheless, Pastor Dan and the small churches he leads see reaching people for Jesus in their territory as an important mission and are willing to give the time, effort, and funds needed to help it succeed.

# Behind *the* Mask



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 7.

## The Mystery of God

Life is full of mysteries. Physicist David Deutsch wrote that “everyday events are stupendously complex when expressed in terms of fundamental physics. If you fill a kettle with water and switch it on, all the supercomputers on Earth working for the age of the universe could not solve the equations that predict what all those water molecules will do—even if we could somehow determine their initial state and that of all the outside influences on them, which is itself an intractable task.”—David Deutsch, *The Beginning of Infinity: Explanations That Transform the World* (New York: Penguin, 2011), Kindle edition, locations 1972–1975.

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

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

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

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

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## The Fool as Wise

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Sluggard

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## The Friend as Enemy

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Have you ever been rebuked for something that could have really hurt you? Suppose you hadn't been warned about it? Keeping this in mind, if you need to do the same for someone else, how can you do it in a redemptive manner, rather than in a judgmental and critical way?**

## The Enemy as Friend

**Read** Proverbs 26:17–23. On the lines below, summarize what is being said.

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

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

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

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

**How open and transparent are you in what you say? How much of a disconnect, if any, is there between your words and your thoughts? Do you really think that such duplicity can be maintained indefinitely? (See Matt. 10:26, 27.)**

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**Further Study:** “The agency of the Spirit of God does not remove from us the necessity of exercising our faculties and talents, but teaches us how to use every power to the glory of God. The human faculties, when under the special direction of the grace of God, are capable of being used to the best purpose on earth. Ignorance does not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian. Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently. The great object of education is to enable us to use the power which God has given us in such a manner as to represent the religion of the Bible and promote the glory of God.

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

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Discuss more about the mysteries that we find in everyday life, whether in nature, in human interactions, or in questions about faith and the nature of God and salvation. It’s one of the great ironies of life that the more we learn, the more we realize how little we know. Why is that even more true when it comes to spiritual truths?
- 2** What are some “truths” that are, indeed, relative, cultural, and changing? How do we distinguish them from truths that are eternal, universal, and immutable? Why is it so important that we know the difference between them? Why is the confusion of contingent truths with eternal truths one of the great dangers we face?
- 3** It has been said that smart people keep their friends close and their enemies closer. What does that mean? As Christians, how are we to relate to such a sentiment? In what way can Matthew 10:16 help?

## Opening “a Lot More Doors”

In Bridgeport, West Virginia, the only Seventh-day Adventist church in Harrison County meets each Sabbath in the local Presbyterian church. Although they don't have their own building yet, members of the Central Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church are certainly building relationships.

In response to the Discover Bible School mailings, the Central Hills church has received more than 300 requests for Bible studies just from within Harrison County. Pastor James Volpe and his 30 church members are doing their best to keep up. Some of the most active members include Angela, 21, Heather, 20, and Lee, 22.

“We were driving from house to house,” remembers Heather, “handing out the first two lessons, and asking people if they wanted to have personal visits or continue the lessons through the mail. One of the ladies we met requested that we return so Angela and I decided that we would do it. We studied with her every week.

“That winter, her son committed suicide. We quit doing Bible studies, but we'd still visit her. We helped her around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Sometimes she comes to church.” Heather and Angela have since resumed the Bible studies with this student.

While Lee doesn't give personal Bible studies, he jumped in and organized the mailings. “I make sure the completed lessons get graded and sent back so that person can start on the next lesson. If a month goes by and we haven't heard from the Bible student, then we follow up and make sure that we keep in contact with them.”

While the members of the Central Hills church have been supportive, the church's young people have especially enjoyed being involved.

“Our youth group has gotten a lot stronger,” says Angela. “I've always liked to be involved in some way; I just didn't know how.”

“I think this is one of the first times we could put into practice all of the stuff we hear every week, we could actually be a part of something and watch the church grow,” adds Lee.

Heather believes that giving personal Bible studies is one of the best methods for church growth and spiritual commitment. “All of the youth were together, delivering the lessons. Then once Angela and I started giving Bible studies, I enjoyed it. It made me grow spiritually.

“We had an [evangelistic] seminar coming to the area, but by us doing the Bible studies and getting out—that helped our church to grow. It opens a lot more doors.”

# Living *by* Faith



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.

## Keep the Law

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Seek the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Words for the Rich

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Handbook for the Poor

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

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

**What** is the message of Proverbs 28:3?

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

**What** is the message of Proverbs 28:6?

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

**What can we do when tempted to compromise our values for material gain? How can we protect ourselves from doing something like this, which is easier to do than we realize?**

## Loving the Truth

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

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

**Read Proverbs 29:15** (*see also vs. 19*). **What important principle is seen here, not just in education but in life in general?**

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Though our example is important—especially with those whom we can’t reprove or punish—in some cases more is needed. This is especially true with our children. At times children need to be punished in order to be brought into line.

Our natures are all fallen and corrupt, and this includes even those adorable little beings whom we love, our children. We don’t do our children or ourselves any favors by letting them do whatever they want. Children, in fact, not only need discipline—they *want it*. They need to know that boundaries exist, and that they need to stay within them. A mother who believes that she has to respect her children’s freedom and lets them do whatever they want without ever saying No to them, will ultimately bring “shame” (*vs. 15*) to herself and, no doubt, sorrow to the children—if not now, then certainly when the children become adults.

**What are some of the lessons you learned as a child that have stuck with you as an adult? How has that knowledge helped to make your life better now?**

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**Further Study:** “The laws of God have their foundation in the most immutable rectitude, and are so framed that they will promote the happiness of those who keep them. . . . Religion brings man into personal relation with God, but not exclusively; for the principles of heaven are to be lived out, that they may help and bless humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 267.

“The utter neglect of training children for God has perpetuated evil and thrown into the ranks of the enemy many who with judicious care might have been co-laborers with Christ. False ideas and a foolish, misdirected affection have nurtured traits which have made the children unlovely and unhappy, have embittered the lives of the parents, and have extended their baleful influence from generation to generation. Any child that is permitted to have his own way will dishonor God and bring his father and mother to shame. . . . By neglecting their duty and indulging their children in wrong, parents close to them the gates of the city of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 325, 326.

### Discussion Questions:

**①** Russian author Leo Tolstoy, though raised in a Christian home, abandoned his faith for many years. When older, he faced a crisis: *What did life mean, especially a life that will certainly end in death?* Though he sought answers in all areas of knowledge, he found none there. He eventually realized that the only logical answer to the question of life and its meaning had to be found in faith—in something that went *beyond* logic itself. That is, his logic told him to step beyond logic, into the world of faith, in order to get answers to the meaning of life. Why, then, is faith in Jesus really the most logical choice we can make regarding the meaning and purpose of life?

**②** What is your understanding of what it means to love the truth? How do we love truth? To love truth, of course, would mean that we would have to know it first. How do we come to a knowledge of truth? And how can we be sure that we don't allow anything to stand in the way of our loving truth above all else?

## Kindness Always Comes Back

Miranda Starr, principal and teacher at Parkersburg Academy in West Virginia, wanted to do an experiment with her first- and second-grade students.

“In Bible class, we were studying about kindness, and how it is contagious,” she says. “We wanted to see if it really works.”

Then Miranda had an idea; why not go to Eagle Pointe, a local nursing home, where the students could practice their reading skills and make friends with the residents? “This was something I had always wanted to do,” she admits. “We like to sing, but [I wondered] what else could we do for them to make relationships.”

The idea was a hit, and by January the students were reading well enough to read on their own.

“We go to Eagle Pointe every other Friday,” explains eight-year-old Ben. “We sing to the whole group, and we read to our partners.”

“It wasn’t hard to pick our partners,” chimes in seven-year-old Reagan. “We saw them, looked at their faces, and then chose one because we liked them!”

The students also get to choose the book or books that they want to read to their partner and are welcome to exchange books with other students if they finish their own.

As the students read, they are also developing friendships. “My partner’s name is Miss Jane,” says six-year-old Sophia. “I was reading about animal tracks, and I read about a red fox. She told me that she once had a red fox as a pet!”

The residents clearly enjoy the visits and comment on what good readers the students are. “I like seeing my partner smile,” Ben adds.

The students in grades three through eight also participate. “I really like going there,” says nine-year-old Ryleigh. “There’s one man I read to—Mark. He’s always happy to see me, and says, ‘God loves you.’ I really like him and wish we could go more often.”

In appreciation of the students’ visits, Eagle Pointe held a banquet in their honor and presented Miranda with an award plaque: “Junior Volunteers of the Year—Parkersburg Academy. You’ve warmed the hearts of many by the caring that you show. Volunteers are Shining Stars.”

Reflecting on their kindness experiment, Miranda knows it was a success. “Kindness did come back. We tried to give them joy, but they gave more to us.”

# The Humility *of the* Wise



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Proverbs 30, Luke 18:9–14, Job 38–40:2, 1 John 1:9, Rev. 3:14–18, Ps. 104:24.*

**Memory Text:** “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (*Matthew 5:3, NKJV*).

In the Bible, humility is considered an important virtue. The greatest of prophets, Moses, is singled out as the most humble person who ever lived (*Num. 12:3, NKJV*). According to Micah 6:8, the main duty that God expects from people is “to walk humbly with your God” (*NKJV*). Jesus, too, insists that humility is an ideal that the Christian should adopt: “Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 18:4, NKJV*).

After all, what does anyone have to boast about? Every breath, every heartbeat, every gift, every talent, comes only from God, in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*). And in light of the cross, even all our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*); how, then, can we boast?

This week Proverbs looks at humility; considering our situation, how foolish is it to be anything but humble?

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 21.

## Who Do You Think You Are?

**Read** Proverbs 30:1–3, 32, 33. Together, what are they saying?

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The self-negation seen in these texts is quite a break from the usual self-exaltation of kings in the ancient Near East, who often liked to boast of their wisdom, achievements, and military victories. Solomon himself is recorded as surpassing “all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (*1 Kings 10:23, NKJV; Eccles. 2:9*). And then, of course, there’s Nebuchadnezzar, who proclaimed: “ ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’ ” (*Dan. 4:30, NIV*).

Because our author understands his own ignorance, he calls boasting “foolish.” The Hebrew word for “foolish” here is *nabal*, which is the name of Nabal, whose behavior exemplified foolish pride, as well (*1 Samuel 25*). Such boasting, which implies pride, also carries the potential for humiliation and thus, for anger and strife. The apostle Paul also called some of his church members “fools” who considered themselves wise and were, even worse, boasting about it (*2 Cor. 11:18, 19*).

**Read** Luke 18:9–14. Why might it be easier to be like the Pharisee than one might think? How can we make sure that we don’t fall into this same trap even in the subtlest ways?

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You have to feel sorry for people who boast (usually it’s a cover for insecurities, anyway); it shows just how self-deceived and foolish they really are.



## A Knowledge of God?

Pride arises in those who don't know the Lord in a personal way. In contrast, the person who lives in communion with God will be humble, for he or she is constantly in touch with the One who is infinitely greater than any of us. When we think about the size of the universe and realize that we are worshiping the One who created that universe, and that this same God suffered in the person of Jesus on the cross for us—it's hard to imagine how we could struggle with pride while keeping these thoughts before us.

**Read** Proverbs 30:3–6. What do these verses tell us about the power, majesty, and mystery of God?

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The expression “knowledge of God” is to be understood as meaning “knowledge about God.” Five rhetorical questions are then asked, which force us to recognize just how much about God we really don't understand.

**Read** those questions in Proverbs 30:4. What challenge do they present to us?

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Because God is the Creator (the first four questions), He remains far beyond our understanding (the fifth question). In the book of Job, God challenges Job with the same questions so that Job would realize that he could not comprehend God or His ways (*Job 38–40:2*).

The fact that God is the Creator, and that we cannot fully understand Him, gives us a crucial lesson regarding how we should receive His written revelation, which scholars are always questioning. Who are we—whose understanding of even the simplest things in nature is clouded and full of mystery—to challenge the Word of God, even the parts that baffle or disturb us?

**Dwell on the grandeur and mystery of the creation itself. What should these tell us about the grandeur and mystery of the Creator? Why should this grandeur and mystery give us comfort and hope?**

## Neither Too Much nor Too Little

Proverbs 30:7–9 contains the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. It is not by chance that this request immediately follows the affirmation of God as the great Creator (*Prov. 30:4*) and the promise of His faithfulness (*vs. 5*).

**Read** Proverbs 30:7–9. Why would someone ask these things?

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Before we ask God for anything, it is important to make sure our relationship with Him is solid. If we lie, then we act as if God, who knows all things, doesn't even exist. This is why the confession of our sin is a prerequisite for forgiveness (*1 John 1:9*). We cannot cheat God; He sees us exactly as we are. As we pray, the dramatic gesture of prostration, lying in the dust like the dead (*Lam. 3:29*), reveals not only our reverence and humility, but shows an awareness of our spiritual nakedness before Him.

In Proverbs 30:8, the writer asks God to “give” neither poverty nor riches. The first time that the verb “give” is used in the Bible in relation to humans, it deals with God's gift of food (*Gen. 1:29*). This is why in many cultures food is traditionally associated with prayer. This basic need, which makes us so dependent on the God of Creation, places the experience of prayer at the core of our survival.

The two requests do not aim just at the balance of human character. They converge in one goal: the glory of God. If we get too little, we tend to steal and insult God; if we get too much, we do not feel the need for God and may even deny His existence. It is noteworthy, however, that only the latter predicament can lead to a disconnect from God; the former will likely keep us in touch with Him.

The Lord's Prayer carries the same twofold concern: (1) “Give us this day our daily bread” (*Matt. 6:11*) provides for our needs and not more; and (2) “Do not lead us into temptation” (*vs. 13, NKJV*) takes care of our needs.

**Think about just how dependent you are on God. How can keeping that stark fact ever in your mind help you grow in faith? What dangers come when we forget this dependence?**

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## The Actions of the Arrogant

Just as humility is positive and brings blessings, a lack of humility is dangerous and brings curses. After having encouraged the virtue of humility by showing its rewards and fruit, Proverbs 30 gives a stern warning about the dangers that come from pride.

*Cursing your parents* (Prov. 30:11, 17). Agur begins with this category, for it represents the most serious act of arrogance, when children despise their source of life. Significantly, honoring and blessing one's parents is the only commandment associated with the promise of life (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:2, 3), while the death penalty is prescribed for its transgression (Exod. 21:15, 17).

*Self-righteousness* (Prov. 30:12, 20). The condition of sinners who think of themselves as righteous is bad, because they will stay in their sin, believing that they are pure and don't need forgiveness. This is why the confession of sin is so fundamental to obtaining forgiveness (1 John 1:9). The Laodiceans, who claim that they are rich, intelligent, and well dressed (though unaware that they are poor, blind, and naked), are counseled to acquire from God the means to repair their miserable condition (Rev. 3:14–18).

“Here is represented a people who pride themselves in their possession of spiritual knowledge and advantages. But they have not responded to the unmerited blessings that God has bestowed upon them. They have been full of rebellion, ingratitude, and forgetfulness of God; and still He has dealt with them as a loving, forgiving father deals with an ungrateful, wayward son. They have resisted His grace, abused His privileges, slighted His opportunities, and have been satisfied to sink down in contentment, in lamentable ingratitude, hollow formalism, and hypocritical insincerity.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 83.

*Contempt* (Prov. 30:13, 14). The picture presented of the arrogant is not pretty. Though they have a proud look on their face, the arrogance doesn't remain just there: it is manifested in the contempt they reveal to those who they feel are below them. The imagery of the “fangs” and “teeth” (vs. 14, NKJV) show just how bad their actions are.

**Think about how you have treated others, particularly those to whom you might even feel superior (most of us have those feelings at times, do we not?). How can you make it right? How can you display the *humility* needed to make it right?**

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## Lessons From Nature

All through the Bible, imagery from nature has been used to teach spiritual truths. Here, too, using nature, the proverb teaches us lessons about humility.

**Read** Proverbs 30:18, 19. What is it saying here, too, about the limits of human understanding?

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Agur sees mystery in even many of the “common” things. It is a very fascinating mix of mysteries that he presents here. The first two are from animals: an eagle silently moving through the sky, a snake silently moving along the earth. He then shifts to two human actions: a ship on the sea, and a man with a woman. Even today, with all our scientific knowledge, so many mysteries remain. How crucial it is that we never lose our appreciation for the depth and majesty of life. That attitude will surely help keep us humble before God.

**Read** Proverbs 30:24–28. What other mysteries from nature catch the author’s attention and awe?

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It’s interesting that the immediately preceding verses (*Prov. 30:20–23*) deal with human folly, arrogance, and vice. He then shifts to the animal world, pointing to small and humble creatures, even though he uses the same Hebrew word for “wise” in reference to them that is used in reference to humans (*Prov. 3:13*) and even God Himself (*Job 12:13, Ps. 104:24*). Even today, with all our advances in science, how these creatures do what they do remains beyond our full comprehension. How much more so their actions must have baffled this wise man in his time. And he was indeed wise, because one of the great signs of wisdom is to acknowledge just how little we know, even about the commonest things.

**Think about some of the “simplest” things in nature: the leaf of a tree, a drop of water, a seashell. How should the fact that even these things are full of mysteries keep us humble?**

**Further Study:** “We should reverence God’s word. For the printed volume we should show respect, never putting it to common uses, or handling it carelessly. And never should Scripture be quoted in a jest, or paraphrased to point a witty saying. ‘Every word of God is pure’; ‘as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.’ Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 244.

“Christ’s first words to the people on the mount were words of blessing. Happy are they, He said, who recognize their spiritual poverty, and feel their need of redemption. The gospel is to be preached to the poor. Not to the spiritually proud, those who claim to be rich and in need of nothing, is it revealed, but to those who are humble and contrite. . . . The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 299, 300.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Dwell on the plan of salvation and what was required to save us. That is, we are so fallen, so corrupt, so evil, that mere regeneration would not be enough to redeem us from sin. No matter how much we are changed and restored, that regeneration and restoration cannot save us. We need a substitute, someone who legally stands in our place and whose righteousness alone is enough to make us right with God. What should this reality itself tell us about why arrogance and pride have to be some of the worst sins in fallen beings like us?
- 2** What are some of the different ways that our very existence depends upon God? What are the things in nature itself that show us how God sustains our existence?
- 3** Dwell more on the prayer in Proverbs 30:7–9. Look at the balance there. How do we find balance in all that we do? Why is this so important?

## Thrice Saved

At the age of four, Jesse lost his mother. By the time he was nine, Jesse lived in foster homes. As a teen, he met a young man who played basketball. When Jesse shared his name, the young man looked surprised. “Your mother and my father were brother and sister!”

Taking Jesse home, the cousin introduced him to the rest of the family. That’s when Jesse learned that his mother had died of complications caused by his father’s beatings.

Jesse moved in with his uncle; and as his anger over his circumstances simmered, he joined the U.S. Air National Guard then switched to the U.S. Marines. He married, had three children, but later divorced. “I felt hurt and empty inside,” he recalled. “Once more I had no family and felt completely alone.”

Feeling life wasn’t worth living, Jesse took his rifle and ammunition down to the beach with plans to end his life. Wading into the sea, he sat down on a rock. Soon a police officer came, but Jesse raised his rifle, warning him to stay away. Then the colonel from the Marine base arrived, ordering him to put the gun down. Jesse refused. But when he saw his father approaching, Jesse put the gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger. There was an explosion and he fell backward—still alive. The bullet had jammed halfway through the barrel.

Jesse was discharged from the Marines and tried again to commit suicide. This time he ended up in the hospital emergency room where he met Dr. Nozaki, a Seventh-day Adventist physician determined to save him. When he awoke after surgery, Jesse found a Bible by his bed, placed there by Dr. Nozaki. He hid the Bible, but each day he found another one.

When Jesse was released from the hospital, Dr. Nozaki urged him to read the book of John. Finally, Jesse agreed. The doctor called him each day, making sure that he had food and clothing. In time, Jesse realized that Dr. Nozaki really cared, and he learned to trust him. He started Bible studies, and the doctor invited him to church.

One day Jesse returned to the rock where he had tried to kill himself and thanked God for saving his life. He continued studying and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. “For the first time in my life,” he said, “I felt peace.”

Later, with the doctor’s encouragement, Jesse and his wife reconciled. They remarried in Dr. Nozaki’s home.

# Women *and* Wine



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Proverbs 31, Job 29:15, Proverbs 8, 1 Cor. 1:21, Rev. 14:13.*

**Memory Text:** “Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink” (*Proverbs 31:3, 4, NKJV*).

The book of Proverbs began with the teachings of a father (*Prov. 1:1, 8; 4:1*) and ends with the teachings of a mother (*Prov. 31:1*). The name *Lemuel* may allude to Solomon; if so, then Lemuel's mother is Solomon's mother, and she warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women.

The association of wine and women is deliberate. To be efficient as a ruler, the king has to be careful of the influences he faces, and these two factors can be very powerful. Though the right woman could be beneficial, alcohol is only trouble.

The father's introduction was concerned with the spiritual acquisition of wisdom. Now, the mother's conclusion is concerned with applying wisdom in real life. For the spiritual principles taught by the father would mean nothing if the practical advice offered by the mother were not followed.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.

## A Toast “To Life”?

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is associated with living a good life. People raise a glass and wish one another a long life, though the irony is that each glass works toward destroying life. Nicely designed bottles, poetic and funny drinking songs, clever commercials, and even some “scientific” findings all comfort drinkers in their idea that alcohol is good for them. Proverbs has already warned us against this deadly deception (*Prov. 23:30–35*). Now the theme reappears, showing us even more damage that drinking can bring.

**Read** Proverbs 31:4, 5, 8, 9. Together, what do they say, and how does their message apply to every follower of the Lord, not just the king?

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In similar language, Job describes himself as being “eyes to the blind, and . . . feet to the lame” (*Job 29:15, NKJV*). Likewise, the king or those with means should help support the poor and the needy—those who are “speechless” in that they don’t have a voice because no one listens to them.

The destructive effect of wine can also be seen in how it can so easily distort one’s judgment. While alcohol is bad enough for common folk, for a king or someone with power, alcohol can create terrible situations. The drinking king not only “forgets the law” and does not know what is right, but he subsequently issues distorted judgments: the guilty are declared innocent, and the innocent guilty.

What is at stake here is the capacity to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. The prohibition of wine drinking has to do with basic wisdom and, as such, should apply to every human being. It is noteworthy that this concern is precisely the reason implied in the special prohibition of drinking for the priest: “that you may distinguish between holy and unholy” (*Lev. 10:9, 10, NKJV*).

**Who hasn’t seen the devastating effects of alcohol in so many lives? How can you help others, especially the young, stay clear of what can bring only harm to them and to others?**

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## A Toast “To Death”

**Read** Proverbs 31:6, 7. How are we to understand these texts?

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A quick reading of these verses gives the impression that Lemuel’s mother allows the consumption of wine or any other alcohol for the person who is about to die (*vs. 6*) or for the person who suffers from depression (*vs. 7*). This reading, however, would contradict not only the immediate context—Lemuel’s mother has just warned the king against wine drinking—but also the general context of the book of Proverbs, which systematically and emphatically prohibits wine drinking.

In addition, it hardly makes sense to offer something to the perishing that would only make their health and well-being worse. And giving alcohol to a depressed person is like giving salt to someone who is already dehydrated. If, as we know, God cares about our bodies and our health, it doesn’t make sense to see these texts, especially in context, encouraging the use of alcohol.

More important, an analysis of the use of the expression “who is perishing” in the book of Proverbs reveals that it is speaking about the wicked (*Prov. 10:28; 11:7, 10; 19:9; 21:28; 28:28*). Through the expression “who is perishing,” Lemuel’s mother points in fact, by association, to the wicked. As for the expression “bitter of heart,” it refers to the depressed person (*Prov. 31:6, NKJV*), who, like the wicked, becomes insensitive and “forgets” poverty (*vs. 7*).

“Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be led to commit crimes of all kinds. Through perverted appetite the world would be made corrupt. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to descend lower and lower in the scale.”—Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 12.

## A Virtuous Woman

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (*Prov. 31:10*).

Who is the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31:10? A number of indications suggest that the author has more in mind than a godly woman or the ideal wife. Following the lead of many passages of the book (*Prov. 1:20–33, 3:13–20, 4:5–9, Proverbs 8*), we have good reason to think that “the virtuous woman” represents wisdom. This personification of wisdom as a woman is justified not only because the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *chokmah*, is a feminine noun but also because it allows the Hebrew writer to draw all kinds of concrete lessons for our daily life. Wisdom is not pictured as some lofty and unreachable ideal but as a very practical and approachable woman who could become our life companion.

This last teaching about wisdom is given through a beautiful acrostic poem: each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order, as in the book of Lamentations and in many psalms.

**Compare** the text on wisdom in Proverbs 8 with our text on the “virtuous woman.” What features of the “virtuous woman” remind us of wisdom in the book of Proverbs?

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1. She is precious and worth finding (*Prov. 31:10, 8:35*).
2. Her worth is more than rubies (*Prov. 31:10; 8:10, 11, 18, 19*).
3. She provides food (*Prov. 31:14, 8:19*).
4. She is strong (*Prov. 31:17, 25; 8:14*).
5. She is wise (*Prov. 31:26, 8:1*).
6. She is praised (*Prov. 31:28, 8:34*).

Though we live in the so-called information age, and though we have acquired so much more knowledge than had previous generations, there’s little to indicate that our generation is any wiser than previous generations. Indeed, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. What does it say to you, and how can this idea help you live by faith?**

## She Works

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is not lazy; she works hard and is very active. The poem insists on this quality (*Prov. 31:27*), which characterizes the wise versus the fool (*Prov. 6:6; 24:33, 34*). The field of her activities is comprehensive and concrete. To be spiritual does not mean that we should be idle, all under the pretext that we are concerned with highly important religious issues, and thus do not have time to take care of “trivial” matters. (*See Luke 16:10.*) The woman “willingly works with her hands” (*Prov. 31:13, NKJV*). It is interesting that this very spiritual person is never depicted praying or meditating. She is shown only as an efficient and productive woman, like Martha of the Gospels (*Luke 10:38–40*).

**Read** Proverbs 31:12, 15, 18. Why is the woman always working?

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The woman works “all the days of her life” (*vs. 12*), even during the night (*vs. 15, 18*). Her active and watchful presence is effective all the time. The reason for her constant attention is her responsibility.

**Read** Proverbs 31:20, 25. What is the temporal scope of her projects?

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Here we touch on an important point regarding our work and effort: it will be tested by time. Only the future will testify to the quality of our deeds. To work wisely is to work with the future in mind, not just for an immediate reward.

Though not quite dealing with the same thing, the principle in the following text from Revelation is so important: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (*Rev. 14:13*).

**If you have a special woman (a wife, mother, family member, teacher, boss, or friend) in your life, what can you do to show your appreciation for her and for all she has done for you?**

## She Cares

**Read** Proverbs 31:26–31. What other important characteristics are seen in this woman? Why are these important for all of us, regardless of who we are?

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As we have seen all through this quarter, an emphasis is placed on words, on what we say. The woman is known for her wisdom and for her kindness. They are related. After all, couldn't one argue that kindness is another form of wisdom, especially when we understand that wisdom isn't just what we know but what we say and do?

Notice, too, the phrase the "law of kindness." That is, kindness isn't just some fleeting attribute that escapes from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very existence. How powerful it would be if the "law of kindness" were to guide all that came out of our mouths.

**Read** Proverbs 31:30. What important point is revealed here that is so often forgotten?

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All too often women are rated only in terms of outward appearance; that's such a shallow and superficial marker. The Bible points out just how "vain," how empty, that kind of attitude ultimately is. This woman's true beauty is found in her character and how that character is made manifest in her life and works. Beauty will always pass away; character can endure forever. "A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 81.

**In what areas of your life do you need to see your character improve? Praying about it is fine, but what concrete positive steps must you take in order to see growth?**

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**Further Study:** “When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they could not discern the difference between the sacred and the common. Contrary to God’s express direction, they dishonored Him by offering common instead of sacred fire. God visited them with His wrath; fire went forth from His presence and destroyed them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 295.

“Let the children and youth learn from the Bible how God has honored the work of the everyday toiler. . . . Let them read . . . of the wise woman described in the Proverbs, who ‘seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands;’ who ‘giveth meat to her household, and their task to her maidens;’ who ‘planteth a vineyard,’ ‘and strengtheneth her arms;’ who ‘stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, . . . reacheth forth her hands to the needy;’ who ‘looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.’ Proverbs 31:13, 15, R.V.; 31:16, 17, 20, 27.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 217.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is total abstinence from alcohol the only right option? After all, what possible good can arise from any kind of alcohol consumption? On the other hand, think about all the damage that it often causes.
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that although we have a lot of knowledge for our time, we don’t necessarily have more wisdom. In what ways can knowledge without wisdom be even more dangerous than a lack of knowledge without wisdom? What are some recent examples we can see of just how damaging knowledge without wisdom can be?
- 3 Review the characteristics of the “virtuous woman.” How can the principles behind what is revealed in this specific situation be applied to believers, whatever their gender, marital status, or age?
- 4 The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. This should tell us that our religion, even with all its lofty theology and spiritual dimensions, has a very practical side to it, as well. How can we make sure that we don’t neglect the practical aspects of faith as we seek to fulfill its theological and spiritual dimensions?

## “Sabbath Shoes”

Becky needed a new pair of shoes. Going to her favorite shop near Newport Beach, California, she picked out a pair but discovered her size wasn't in stock.

Dwight McKeever, the sales rep, assured her that her size could be ordered, and the shoes would be in by Wednesday afternoon.

Becky returned on Wednesday, but the shoes hadn't arrived. On Thursday, still no shoes. When Becky came into the shop late Friday afternoon, Dwight explained that the delivery truck hadn't arrived but would any time soon. Becky waited a few more minutes, but then said she had to go. Fifteen minutes after she left the store, the shoes arrived.

Quickly phoning Becky's home, Dwight left a message. Sometime later, she returned his call, explaining that she would wear her old shoes the next day and pick up the new ones on Saturday night.

Just a few minutes later, Becky returned to the store. “I just came to let you know that I'm not angry that the shoes didn't arrive on time and that I'm very impressed with all you've done to help solve this problem.” Then she turned to leave.

“But what about your shoes?” Dwight asked. “I'll get them tomorrow night,” came the response as Becky walked out the door. Thinking that maybe she needed money, Dwight offered her a loan, but money wasn't the problem. Frustrated, Dwight couldn't understand what the problem was.

Finally Becky explained, “I'm a Christian. I want to honor God on the Sabbath.”

“Sabbath?” The only Sabbath Dwight knew of was the rock group Black Sabbath.

“I'm a Christian too,” he told her, “but what does that have to do with buying shoes?”

“If you're a Christian,” she replied with a smile, “then you know that the Ten Commandments tell us to keep the Sabbath holy and that means we shouldn't buy or sell.”

Intrigued, Dwight wanted to learn more. Becky invited him to a Revelation Seminar being held nearby, and he accepted. “I had picked up the Bible a few times and wanted to know how it would all end, so I went straight to the last book but couldn't understand a thing,” he recalls. “There was a beast with all these heads, but I wasn't too worried because I knew with nuclear warfare we could just blow up all those heads.”

When he told that to Becky, she laughed. “You might want to come to the seminar and learn what it's really all about.”

To see how Becky's faithfulness led Dwight and many of his family to accept Bible truth, continue reading the story in *Mission* magazine, for first quarter 2015, or online at [www.adventistmission.org/mqa-home](http://www.adventistmission.org/mqa-home).

Luke, a Gentile convert and doctor, directed his Gospel account to Greek and Gentile members of the community of faith while not disregarding the Jewish roots of Jesus. Luke presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and friend of humanity. We will study his account in our second quarter 2015 study guide, entitled *The Book of Luke* by John M. Fowler. The universality of salvation is the underlying theme of his Gospel, and so Luke's genealogy traces Jesus all the way to Adam and links Him to God. Luke's Gospel is the largest in the New Testament, and it contains six miracles and 13 parables that are unique to its account. Some theologians have recommended the book of Luke as a good biography of our Lord Jesus. So as a world church, the book of Luke will be the focus of our study for second quarter 2015.

## Lesson 1—The Coming of Jesus

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “An Orderly Account” (*Luke 1:1–3, Acts 1:1–3*)

MONDAY: “Call His Name John” (*Luke 1:13–17*)

TUESDAY: “Call His Name Jesus” (*Luke 1:31*)

WEDNESDAY: The Manger of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:7*)

THURSDAY: The Witnesses to the Savior (*Luke 2:25–32*)

**Memory Text**—*Luke 1:37, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Luke's readers must stand in awe and wonder at the fact that Jesus is real, and that through Him, God has invaded history with the “Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (*Luke 2:11, NKJV*).

## Lesson 2—Baptism and the Temptations

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Prepare the Way of the Lord (*Luke 3:1–14*)

MONDAY: “You Are My Beloved Son” (*Luke 3:21, 22*)

TUESDAY: Not by “Bread Alone” (*Luke 4:4*)

WEDNESDAY: “Worship Me” (*Luke 4:5–8*)

THURSDAY: Christ the Victor (*Luke 4:9–13*)

**Memory Text**—*Luke 3:22, NKJV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Jesus was baptized and received the benediction of Heaven that He is God's “beloved son” (*Luke 3:22*) and began His ministry at the time when the Roman Empire was being ruled by great historical dignitaries.

**Lessons for the Visually Impaired** The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.