

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Proverbs for Living

Lesson 1	
Becoming Wise	3
<i>Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:1-10</i>	
Lesson 2	
Wise Wealth	8
<i>Proverbs 10:1-15</i>	
Lesson 3	
Wise Talk	13
<i>Proverbs 18:21; 16:23-30</i>	
Lesson 4	
Wise Character	18
<i>Proverbs 31: 10-31</i>	

WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

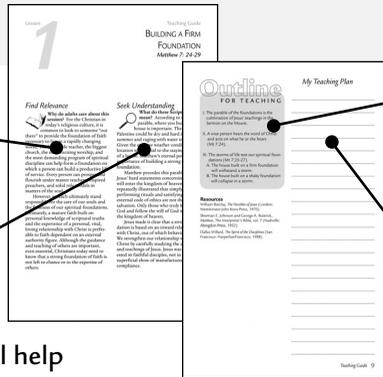
Teacher Helps

Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

My Teaching Plan is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

Teacher Options

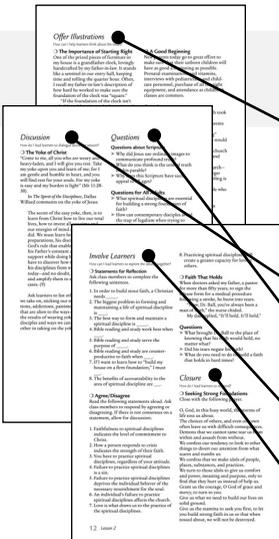
Offer Illustrations presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure gives you a means for wrapping up the session.



You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

BECOMING WISE

Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:1-10

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? “The feel-good movie of the year.” That’s the line given by promoters to the many films that are supposed to lift your spirits. There’s the one about a habitual liar forced to tell the truth, who in the process learns the value of being truthful. There’s the one about the successful but unscrupulous executive who learns relationships are more important than material success. These movies can make you laugh and, for those of you who are weepers, reach for the tissue box. Besides being a fun distraction, movies like these can help us think about how to live better, smarter, and with greater joy. An old axiom of adult education says, “Adults vote with their feet.” If this is true, then there must be a hunger for stories that point to the elusive “good life.”

The Bible has much to say about the good life. Jesus spoke of it as abundant life. Paul wrote of the grace of God making a new creation of each of us. The Old Testament tells of God’s chosen people, the descendents of Abraham, the new nation. In Proverbs, we find concise and practical instructions about daily living that make the good life much less elusive. Actually, it becomes quite clear how to live the good life. In Proverbs, the path isn’t difficult to find, but it does take much discipline to walk it.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Proverbs is a collection of practical advice aimed at helping the young know how to live a life full of righteousness, integrity, and discipline. While it is likely a collection from a variety of sources, it is attributed to Solomon in the early verses, probably a means of validating its significance and trustworthiness.

The text of Proverbs seems to jump from topic to topic without much regard for organization or themes. However, an important assumption lies behind the book and isn’t pointed out explicitly. The entire book is based on the premise that God is the Lord of the believer’s life. Proverbs speaks of this as “fearing the LORD.” Fearing the Lord can make us think of living in constant dread of God’s harshness. While not dismissing the judgment of God, Proverbs uses “fearing the LORD” to lift up the notion that faithful believers subject themselves to the authority and lordship of God. Hearing this can be difficult, for we often equate authority with oppression or misused power. The message of Proverbs is that living under the authority of God is liberating, not oppressive. With God as our Lord, we are free to live justly and enjoy the good life.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Is He Wise?

Begin the session by forming class members into two groups. Share the following with the groups: Wayne Oates was a prominent teacher and minister, specializing in pastoral care. He held teaching positions at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the University of Louisville School of Medicine, where he taught in the department of psychiatry. In 1935, Dr. Oates was a commuting student pastor, and he and his wife would stay in the home of a church member on Saturday evenings. At about 8:30 one evening, the host asked Dr. and Mrs. Oates if they were healthy. They responded that they were. “Good,” responded the host. “Then I am going to go to bed. It is my bedtime, and I don’t stay up for anyone unless they are sick. Help yourself to anything in the house that you need. If you need something, I’ll be glad to get up and help you look for it. If we don’t have it, I’ll teach you how to get along without it” (Weaver, 338).

Questions

- Was the host wise or simply selfishly unaccommodating?
- Is wisdom popular?
- To whom do you go when you want to get the perspective of a wise person?
- By what standards do you consider someone wise?

○ Take Your Pick

It is not the rich man you should properly call happy, but him who knows how to use with wisdom and the blessings of the gods, to endure hard poverty, and who fears dishonor worse than death, and is not afraid to die for cherished friends or fatherland. Horace, *Odes* (65–8 BC)

The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.

H. L. Mencken (1880–1956)

Read the quotations above. Ask for participants to choose one of the quotations and answer these questions:

- Do you agree with the quotation?
- Do you think its author was wise? Why?
- What is a practical result of believing in the validity of this statement?
- Pretend someone asks you for a wise saying for use in a collection to be published 100 years from now. What would be your wise quotation?

○ Wisdom Hall of Fame

Distribute a small piece of paper to each participant. Suggest: We all have persons in our lives that we consider wise. It might be a grandparent, a teacher, or a friend who always seems to have the right idea. Think of a person whom you consider wise. How might you nominate that person into the Wisdom Hall of Fame? Briefly write your letter of nomination.

After a few moments, call on several participants to share their letters of nomination. Then ask the following questions.

Questions

- Were any qualities consistent among all the nominees? What were they?
- How do you think your nominee developed that quality?
- How has your life been changed for knowing this person you consider wise?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Do You Have a Lord?

Tell your group that Proverbs begins by saying that the “fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (1:7). The session writer suggests that “fear” is best understood as a statement about the *order* of things and not about an abiding fear of God’s retribution. Assuming this, what is the best way to understand the question “Do you fear the Lord?”

Write “What it *doesn’t* mean to fear the Lord” on a chalkboard. Record summaries of participants’ responses. After several responses, continue by writing “What it *does* mean to fear the Lord” on a chalkboard. Again, record summaries of participants’ responses.

Next say something like: Proverbs is full of easy-to-understand but difficult-to-live-out teachings. According to the wise teachers of Proverbs, fearing the Lord or honoring God’s lordship is the key to all wisdom and happiness. The choice to follow Christ as Lord of your life is demanding. What can you recall Jesus telling his followers about the consequences of being one of his disciples? Allow several responses, recording summaries on the chalkboard.

Next, ask, “What might Jesus say to us about the consequences of being one of his disciples in 2002?” Allow several responses.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- How can Proverbs be of practical help for living today?
- How can the phrase “fearing the Lord” be misunderstood?
- How are the teachings of Proverbs different from proverbs from other religions or cultures?
- What is your favorite proverb?

Questions for All Adults

- Who is the wisest person you know?
- How has that wisdom affected his or her life?
- What about following the wisdom from Proverbs may not be popular in 2002?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Does wisdom automatically come with age?
- How do you know when someone is wise?
- Can one live a moral life, yet not be wise?

Questions for Younger Adults

- Does wisdom come with age?
- Are you wiser now than you were ten years ago? Why or why not?
- From whom do you seek advice? Why do you value their perspective?
- Why might the notion of “fearing the Lord” be unpopular or misunderstood? How might you explain it to someone in a manner that could help them better understand?

Questions for Adults with Children

- In what ways can children be wise?
- How has being a parent helped you understand God’s love more fully?
- What is the difference between passing along wisdom and hoping your children think like you do?
- With what wise person would you like your children to spend time? Why?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ **About Last Week**

Distribute copies of the Resource Kit page “About Last Week.” Give participants the following instructions:

- (1) Under each day, summarize what you remember doing from that day, regardless of how major or minor.
- (2) Read Proverbs 3:1-10 and underline the terms that describe the positive consequences of living wisely as a believer, honoring the lordship of God.
- (3) Draw a line from the words you underlined in the Scripture to a daily activity where you either pursued or experienced that benefit. For example, Proverbs 3:10 includes this: “Your barns will be filled with plenty.” Draw a line to an event of the past week where you experienced/enjoyed the gift of God’s provisions. Feel free to add new activities to last week as you think of them.

After learners have had several minutes to work on their “About Last Week” grid, ask for volunteers to share their grids with the rest of the group.

Questions

- Were you surprised by anything in this activity?
- Can you point to any activity that would fit under the category of “pursuing wisdom and truth”? Would you be willing to share that?
- When in the last week did you miss an opportunity to enjoy God’s goodness?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ **This Week I Will...**

Close the session by asking participants to consider in the next week how they might pursue more fully God’s wisdom and enjoy more fully God’s goodness. Pass out note cards and ask everyone to write three things they will do in the coming week to pursue wisdom. Ask them to pray, committing themselves to these items. After moments of silent prayer, voice a closing prayer for the class and dismiss.

WISE WEALTH

Proverbs 10;1-15

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? All adults want to live a meaningful life. The desire for meaning and the discovery of meaning, however, are two very different things. The problem is that a multitude of answers are available for the question *How does one live a meaningful life?*

In our culture, personal wealth and gain have been the most popularly chosen paths to gratification, meaning, and purpose. The pioneering spirit behind the American dream has been replaced with the entrepreneurial spirit. Shopping has evolved from an efficient means of acquiring needed goods to a common form of recreation. Opryland U.S.A., the former music-oriented theme park in Nashville, is closed. On that site, where once were found roller coasters and outdoor stages, now stands a shopping complex designed as a recreational venue, Opry Mills.

The prevailing thought of our culture is that the pursuit of wealth is very near the center of the good life. Proverbs teaches that the *pursuit* of wealth does not offer peace, pleasure, and wisdom. What one *does* with that wealth makes the difference. Christians today are concerned that they, too, find a life of meaning. However, the largest challenge for today's believer is recognizing the difference between wealth and extravagance.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? As we learned last week, Proverbs is a collection of practical and easy-to-learn guidelines on how to find wisdom, the good life. Proverbs contains a variety of opinions about wealth—how to manage it and prepare for the future. Some general notions about wealth consistent through the entire book of Proverbs include: (1) there will always be the “haves” and the “have-nots”; (2) the use of one's wealth is very important; (3) the wise use of wealth is charitable, investing in aiding those in need; and (4) wise wealth involves diligence, discipline, dutiful work, saving, and sharing.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ What Is Wealth?

Wealth is a difficult topic to discuss in church. One, our personal information about our income is very personal. Two, the example and teachings of Jesus are uncomfortably clear. The Gospels leave little room for theological debate.

Yet another reason for the difficulty of discussing wealth in church is because assumptions about the meaning of life are hidden in our assumptions about wealth. In other words, it is in some ways “short hand” for “what really matters.” For most of us, our assumptions about wealth are related to the setting or situation in which we find ourselves.

To explore this idea with your group, prepare the group instructions as described below. Have the class form four smaller groups. Give to each group one of the following group instructions.

(1) **Group One:** You’re invited to address a group of college finance majors. Prepare a brief outline for a presentation to this audience. The presentation is to answer the question *What is wealth?*

(2) **Group Two:** You’re invited to address a group of senior adults who have recently relocated to an assisted-living facility. You are to deliver a presentation on the topic “What is wealth?” As a group, develop an outline for your presentation.

(3) **Group Three:** It is your Sunday to assist the extended session for the children’s ministry at church. This is the program for preschoolers while adults are in worship. The Bible story for the day is about the rich, young ruler. After telling the story, a child asks you, “What is rich?” Prepare a list of ideas, or points that might be included in a response.

(4) **Group Four:** An active investment group has formed in your community. To join the group, one must have a minimum

of \$500,000 for venture capital. The investment group is seeking your counsel on how to manage their assets in a way that benefits others. Prepare an outline of what you might tell them.

Give each group approximately ten minutes to prepare their remarks. Ask a representative of each group to share their assignment and response with the large group. When all small groups have shared, ask questions like the following.

Questions

- What is wealth? Is wealth sin?
- What influence does circumstance have on what one considers wealth to be?
- Do you consider yourself wealthy?

○ The Line Is Right Here

For Christians, it seems the most comforting conversations about wealth are those that point to personal means just beyond our own. In other words, when discussing what the Bible teaches about personal wealth or the example of Jesus concerning personal gain, it is easier to think “people wealthier than me” are the ones being harshly judged. The following true story bears this notion.

Millard Fuller took seriously Jesus’ teachings. He walked away from a successful and lucrative career to form Habitat for Humanity. Once, while lecturing to ministerial students at a seminary, Millard asked this question: Is it possible to own a home “sinfully large”? The audience easily and confidently answered “yes.” “When?” Fuller responded. The room got uncomfortably quiet. Someone finally softly responded, “When it’s bigger than mine.” (Wood, 302)

Question

- Are we reluctant to consider ourselves wealthy? Why?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Jesus on Wealth

Use this exercise to help learners explore wealth from Proverbs and the teachings of Jesus.

Using the “Teaching Outline” from this session, review what Proverbs has to say about wealth. Write major themes from Proverbs on a chalkboard.

Then, for each of the following Gospel texts, ask class members to summarize what Jesus is saying about wealth. Write responses on a chalkboard or newsprint.

- Matthew 6:19-24
- Matthew 13:22
- Mark 10:23
- Luke 16:13
- Luke 18:24

After reading all of the Scriptures, ask questions like the following.

Questions

- Is Jesus’ message about wealth different from Proverbs’ teachings on wealth? If so, in what way? (Keep in mind that different doesn’t necessarily mean contradictory. For example, one response could be that Proverbs is more practical in nature. Jesus’ teachings are more demanding.)
- What makes a person wealthy according to Proverbs? According to Jesus?
- What is the difference between selfishly hoarding one’s wealth and responsibly saving for one’s future?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- Proverbs 10:2 says, “Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit.” What does this mean?
- Which verses in Proverbs 10:1-15 do you find troubling? Why?
- Did Jesus’ teachings about wealth differ from the Proverbs? If yes, in what way?

Questions for All Adults

- Why are folks reluctant to talk about their personal finances?
- What is the “joy of giving”?
- What is the central message from Proverbs about wealth?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What do you remember of the Depression, or what do you recall about your family members who experienced it?
- How did the memory of the Depression shape your childhood?
- Has your understanding about how to define wealth changed over time? In what ways?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What is wealth?
- Is becoming wealthy one of your goals? How will you know if you have achieved it?
- What proverbs do you live by?

Questions for Adults with Children

- What do you want your children to learn about wealth?
- How are you teaching that?
- Beyond money, what does wealth involve?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Picture This

Before this session, collect popular magazines that include subjects like the following: news, entertainment/celebrity news, hobbyists/special interests, lifestyle, etc. Try to find enough magazines for each participant to have one. If you can't find enough magazines, newspapers will work as well.

After reading Proverbs 10:1-15 and discussing its meaning, distribute a magazine to each participant. Ask them to look through their magazine and to find and tear out six pictures, ads, or articles that have to do with wealth—either how to obtain it, what to do with it, etc. On each picture or article, write its main message about wealth. Allow participants approximately five minutes to find their pictures or articles. Then ask them to share with a partner their pictures/articles and respective messages regarding wealth.

After a few more minutes read Matthew 6:19-24 and ask, "How is our culture's prevailing attitude about wealth different from what Jesus taught about wealth?" Again, allow the pairs of participants several minutes to reread the Scripture and discuss the question.

Questions

- What is the message of our culture regarding personal wealth and gain?
- What is the message of Proverbs regarding wise use of wealth?
- What is the message of Jesus regarding personal wealth?
- Should wealthy Christians repent?
- What makes a person wealthy?

○ Degree of Difficulty

After reading and discussing Proverbs 10:1-15, ask a volunteer to read Matthew 6:19-24. Proverbs is concerned that we discover and live a pleasing, righteous life—one that honors God as Lord. The wise teachers of Proverbs knew this was a good but difficult way to live. Jesus came to give us our clearest picture of God. He also had something to say about wealth and its wise use. The biblical witness about our wise use of money is straightforward. Unlike some other biblical subjects, this one isn't prone to a variety of meanings or symbolism. Ask your group to consider these things during the next activity.

Use the index of titles in the back of your church hymnal to find titles of familiar hymns. As you read the titles, ask your class members if the hymn you name is more difficult to sing after reading Proverbs 10 and Matthew 6. After reading the title, simply ask, "On a scale of one to ten, ten being very simple and one being very difficult, rate the degree of difficulty for this hymn."

Variation: Have participants form small groups and ask them to discuss each hymn and how difficult it is to sing it after today's lesson.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ I Surrender

Distribute hymnals and ask learners to find the hymn "I Surrender All." Tell your group that this is a traditional hymn of commitment. Many may know the words from memory, but encourage everyone to take a few moments to read the text of this hymn. Ask them to consider prayerfully how much of the text they are willing to live out. After a few moments, sing the hymn together as a closing prayer. Sing it as a commitment or sing it as a prayer, asking God for wisdom.

3

WISE
TALK*Proverbs 18:21; 16:23-30**Find Relevance*

Why do adults care about this session? Many adults in your classroom will remember the days before cable television. These were the days when, in the fortunate households, there were three channels. The news was on for an hour. Sporting events aired mostly on Sunday afternoons. Variety shows and sitcoms aired live. This era produced *The Carol Burnett Show*, *The Honeymooners*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Although they appear out of touch with life as it is in 2002, some of these programs remain in daily syndication. While its mode of operation was primitive by today's standards, this was television's golden age. By contrast, today, "confrontational reality" talk shows air daily. Many of them are broadcast late in the afternoon, just after school lets out. In 2009, in print, on the radio, on the television, in the courtroom, in the shopping malls, and even in the home, speech that is self-serving, undisciplined, and painful surrounds us. The wise teachers in Proverbs wanted more for their students and for us. In an age and culture that cherishes free speech, Proverbs offers important lessons in how to keep speech healthy, honest, and wise.

Seeking Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? Proverbs has much to say about truth and wisdom, mentioning speech in several places. Proverbs encourages us to pursue speech that is truthful and redemptive. Truthful speech is more than accurate. It has no intent to mislead. Redemptive speech is always on the lookout for an opportunity to lift up another, forgive, ask forgiveness, etc. Perhaps the most significant "key" to hearing Proverbs and perhaps the rest of Scripture, in regard to speech, is recognizing the significant role of the spoken word during the era in which it was written. If anything, we have a tendency to discount the importance of speech. Speech may be hateful and harsh, but it is, after all, just speech. The modern world develops advances by focusing on quantified or measurable realities. The notion that one's words are as or more significant or real than one's experience is difficult to comprehend. Biblically, with speech, the world was created, Lazarus was raised from the dead, the prophets delivered God's judgment, and sins were forgiven.

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Create Your Own

Listed below are four quotations. Below the quotations are multiple ideas on how to use them. Choose one that best fits your group

Speak when you are angry—and you will make the best speech you’ll ever regret. — *Laurence J. Peter*

Well-timed silence hath more eloquence than speech. — *Martin Fraquhar Tupper*

Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they have to say something. — *Plato*

I have learnt silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet strange, I am ungrateful to these teachers. — *Kahlil Gibran*

Option 1—Taking My Stand

If your meeting space has ample room, place a sign on one wall that says “Agree” and on another wall one that says “Disagree.” Have participants stand. Explain to them that you will read a quotation and that they are to stand under the sign that best reflects their perspective.

Option 2—Or, in Other Words

Write one of the five quotations on each of five strips of paper. Have the class form five small groups and give each group one of the five quotations. Ask them to restate their quotation in as many ways as possible in three minutes. They can paraphrase in any manner they wish. Call time when the three minutes have elapsed. Ask a representative of each group to read their group’s original quotation and report the number of paraphrases they brain-

stormed. Afterward, ask each group to read all their paraphrases.

Option 3—I Don’t Think So

Explain to the group that you will read a quotation and they are to consider how a person might argue otherwise.

○ Lesson from Lincoln

President Lincoln’s Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, had a sharp disagreement with a fellow military officer. Lincoln suggested that Stanton write the officer a letter, detailing the degree and purpose of his anger.

Stanton later brought the letter to President Lincoln, who asked Stanton what he planned to do with it. “Send it,” was Stanton’s reply. However, Lincoln told him to burn it. “That’s what I do when I have written a letter while I am angry. It’s a good letter. You had a good time writing it and you feel better. Now burn it and write another.” (Moody)

Questions

- What do you think of Lincoln’s advice? What can a person expect for not following the advice Lincoln gave? Is writing when angry better than speaking when angry? Why?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ God, Others, and Me

On the board, draw a triangle with one of these words at each point: God, others, me. Explain that our speech can destroy or build up relationships with God and others. Read each of the verses below. After each verse, ask, “Is this teaching more about our own health, our relationship with God, or our relationships with others?”

Prov 4:24—Put away from you crooked-speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Prov 6:12—A scoundrel and a villain goes around with crooked speech.

Prov 6:22—When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.

Prov 8:13—The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

Prov 12:6—The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush, but the speech of the upright delivers them.

Prov 14:3—The talk of fools is a rod for their backs, but the lips of the wise preserve them.

Prov 14:23—In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Prov 16:21—The wise of heart is called perceptive, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.

Prov 16:27—Scoundrels concoct evil, and their speech is like a scorching fire.

Prov 17:7—Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a ruler.

Prov 19:1—Better the poor walking in integrity than one perverse of speech who is a fool.

Prov 22:11—Those who love a pure heart and are gracious in speech will have the king as a friend.

Prov 29:20—Do you see someone who is hasty in speech? There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What does Proverbs 18:21 mean?
- What important events in the Bible involve speaking?
- In Proverbs 16:27 and James 3:6, speech/tongue is described as “fire.” Why is fire an appropriate symbol for talking about the power of speech?

Questions for All Adults

- When have you been hurt by words? When have you been hurt by what was unspoken?
- When have you been healed or loved by words? by what was unspoken?
- What forms of gossip are widely accepted today?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Do you remember the war posters stating, “Loose lips might sink ships”? What effect did they have on you and/or others?
- What do you think Proverbs might say if updated today?
- Is there something you need to say?

Questions for Younger Adults

- According to Proverbs, when is self-expression wrong?
- Can you take back something that’s been spoken?
- How might one prevent speaking too impulsively?
- Proverbs was written as a form of instruction for the young. Do you think it succeeded?

Questions for Adults with Children

- What have you taught your children about what they say?
- What have you taught by yourexample?
- From what kind of speech have you protected your children?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Small Only in Size

Ask someone in the class to read James 3:1-12. Remind your group that James goes to great lengths to warn believers about the ability of the tongue to destroy others and self. He mentioned three symbols for the power of the tongue: fire, a ship's rudder, and horse's bit. They are related in that they are small and hold significant influence. In each case, inattention is an unwise mistake. Ask your group what happens if one fails to pay attention to a fire? a ship's rudder? a horse's bit? Encourage several responses to each question. Then ask, "What happens if we fail to pay attention to how we speak or what we say to others?"

Ask volunteers to express what they have learned from their own experiences or someone else's example about ways to harness the tongue's ability. What are some simple steps anyone could take to make wiser use of their own speech? Write responses on a board.

○ Sticks and Stones

Have the class form small groups, and read the selected verses from Proverbs listed in the "God, Others, and Me" activity. Then read James 3:1-12. Tell your small groups that each has the same assignment—to prepare the three points of an outline to the essay titled "Sticks and Stones Only: How Proverbs and James Both Overreacted." As a small group, decide what three points you would make to argue that words are just words and that the psychic pain from them is fleeting and unimportant. This activity is intended to be a playful or satirical way of involving learners in thinking about the importance of our speech, so set a playful tone and keep participants at ease. After five to ten minutes, ask a representative of each group to share their three-point outline.

Questions

- Which of the arguments was most compelling?
- Which one(s) seemed most destructive to a healthy relationship?
- Have you ever known someone who paid little attention to how they spoke or what they said? What were the effects?
- What points would you include in a rebuttal titled "Sticks and Stones and Words: Each Can Be Used to Build and Destroy"?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ Forgive us Lord

Lead the class in the following prayer, pausing at each _____, allowing for individual reflection.

O God who spoke the world into being and Whose Son was introduced to us as the Word, We thank you for the great words that have come from the center of your heart: Be healed, your sins are forgiven, come unto me, turn and sin no more, suffer the children to come unto me, and fear not. With words, you have birthed, blessed, and loved us.

Forgive us Lord for our careless use of words.

Forgive us Lord for saying to another _____.

Forgive us Lord for our careless use of words.

Forgive us Lord for not saying to another _____.

Forgive us Lord for our careless use of words.

Forgive us Lord for withholding blessing.

Forgive us Lord for delivering curses,

All with words. May we speak your words, With your heart, With your voice. Amen.

WISE CHARACTER

Proverbs 31:10-31

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? Character is steadily becoming a more popular topic of thought and discussion. What is it? How do you teach it? How do we deal with conflicting approaches? What role does faith play in character? The questions seem unending while the answers appear slow to develop. While the questions of *how* to nurture character continue, few would question the *need* for character in our society. Parents wish for their children the kind of trustworthy and local role models they knew as a child. Teens long to see adults living honestly and won't settle for simple answers to complex questions. Character is more than living within a prescribed set of moral guidelines. It is a way of life that at least struggles to diminish the distance between one's beliefs and one's actions. In this session, adults are challenged to consider not only the need for character, but also for their responsibility in nurturing it.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Proverbs is, in many ways, a treatise on character. **What is it? How does one live it? How do you know when you have it?** Like everything good in Proverbs, character begins with the "fear of the LORD" or living with God as Lord.

Today's session focuses on Proverbs 31:10-31, part of an oracle or teaching from Lemuel's mother. Often referred to as "Ode to a Capable Wife," this passage contains descriptions from Lemuel's mother of the qualities he should seek in a spouse. However, they could fit under the heading "How to Be a Person of Character."

In another passage Proverbs addresses the "how" question: How does one teach or find character? (Prov 6:20-23). The response is similar to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, where teaching character is like teaching everything else important: Make whatever you want to teach an important part of your own life, and those around you will learn. In the Hebrew faith of the Old Testament, teaching was simply part of living. The biblical challenge is not only to support character, but also to be a person of character. Biblically speaking, this is one instance in which it's not the thought that counts.

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ The Numbers

Read the following statements, leaving the percentages blank. Ask participants to guess the percentages, fill in the blanks, and write them on the chalkboard.

Remind participants not to look in their books.

Character Survey among High School Students

_____ % admit to cheating on an exam in the previous twelve months (answer 70%).

_____ % stole something from a store in the past year (answer 47%).

_____ % stole something twice in the past year (answer 25%).

_____ % lied in the past year (answer 92%).

_____ % report being “satisfied with my own ethics and character” (answer 91%).

_____ % think it’s not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character (answer 80%).

Questions

- Which numbers surprise you?
- Which numbers don’t?
- Are these percentages a reflection of what teenagers have learned from adults? Why or why not?
- Where does character come from?
- What do you make of the last statistic, where a majority consider it wrong to lie or cheat?

Variation: Give your group a “pop quiz.” Tell them that this quiz will reveal either how well they know teenagers or how well they read their session for today. Read the fill-in-the-blank items above and ask participants to write their responses on paper. After reading all the items, review each one and call for their guesses before giving the correct answers.

○ Laughter, Anger, and Tears

Will Rogers was one of the twentieth century’s most beloved personalities. His down-home wisdom and sharp wit made him a favorite. Even more, many admired and appreciated his humanitarian acts. Once, Rogers visited the Milton H. Berry Institute in Los Angeles, a unit for victims of severe and debilitating injuries. As usual, he had everyone laughing, even those with severe injuries. Suddenly, Rogers left the platform and went straight to the men’s room. Milton Berry found him there, leaning on a wall and weeping profusely. Berry simply closed the door. Moments later, Rogers appeared back on the stage, happy and funny as ever.

In writing of this incident in *The Integrity Crisis*, Warren Wiersbe suggests that if you want to know everything important about a person—his or her character—ask three questions: What makes you laugh? What makes you angry? What makes you cry? (75–76)

Questions

- What questions would you add to those three?
- What are some of the things that make people angry today? laugh? weep?
- Are any of these things petty?
- How do these three questions point to a person’s character?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Text—Context—Conflicts

Text: Introduce Proverbs 31:10-31 as the teaching of King Lemuel’s mother on what to look for in a spouse. Then, ask someone to read the passage. Write on the chalkboard “Signs of Character.” Ask learners to name qualities of the person described in these verses. See the “Teaching Outline” for a summary of qualities.

Context: Next, ask learners to consider how King Lemuel might have felt. Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to imagine themselves as King Lemuel and your mother telling you what to look for in a spouse. Write how you think Lemuel must have felt or what he said to his mother.

Conflicts: Continue by reminding the group that obviously the person described in Proverbs 31 is somewhat idealized. Who can blame a mother for wanting a great spouse for her son? But Proverbs includes this teaching because it illustrates something about which the entire book is confident. Notice that the verses end the way the book of Proverbs begins by pointing out the “fear of the LORD” as being the key to a life well lived. Living in the fear of the Lord or with God as your Lord makes this kind of life possible.

Continue by saying something like, “It’s easy to read these verses and think, ‘Yes, it is good to live as God wants.’ The conflict comes when we consider the Old Testament’s response to the question ‘How is character taught?’ The Bible doesn’t point to a program, slogan, or civic campaign. The Bible points to you.” Ask someone to read Proverbs 6:20-23 and then Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Simply put, the Bible says if you want to teach character and be surrounded by people of character, then be someone of character yourself.

Questions

- How does our church teach character?
- Who are your role models?
- For whom are you a role model?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What strikes you about the description of the dream daughter-in-law?
- Are these verses only applicable to being a “capable wife”?
- What other Scripture would you use to teach about character?

Questions for All Adults

- On a scale of one to ten (ten being outstanding), rank our country, state, and community in terms of character.
- Who can/should teach character?
- How does the increasing presence of other world religions in our culture complicate the manner in which we approach character education?

Questions for Mature Adults

- From whom did you learn character?
- What life experience unexpectedly taught you something about character?
- How do you continue learning character in your life?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What does “character counts” mean? Does it?
- What qualities do you look for before you decide someone has “character”?
- Who is learning character from you?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How are your children learning character?
- How has Proverbs changed your perspective on character education?
- On what basis do you decide what your children are taught about faith and character?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Average Joe, a.k.a. A. J.

Duplicate on the chalkboard the chart found on the next page. Tell your group that Proverbs 6:20-23 places the responsibility for teaching character squarely on the shoulders of those who realize the importance of character. Character is best taught by example. Proverbs doesn't even mention another method. If it is true that character is taught best by example, let's imagine the truly Average Joe. We'll call him A. J. for short. First, we'll outline his basic day and then define the qualities about character that may be involved.

As a group, fill in the outline on the chalkboard, giving summary statements about likely activities for A. J. For example, early in the morning A. J. is likely to wake up, eat a quick breakfast, and go to work.

Then, for each period, consider what lessons about character A. J. might be teaching. For example, if A. J. rushes to work to beat rush hour, he might be teaching impatience. Lead the group in a brainstorming discussion around all the opportunities for teaching both positive and negative things about character.

Questions

- Is it fair to think that we are “always on” when it comes to character education?
- For whom are you a role model? What does your typical weekday teach?
- Read Proverbs 31:10-31. What do you imagine this imaginary person was like on a weekday morning? Sunday morning?
- What does “fearing the Lord” have to do with character education?

Variation: This activity could also be accomplished by having your class form small groups and giving each group a copy of the Resource Kit page.

○ Everybody Knows

Use this activity to explore our culture's fascination with celebrities and their role in character formation. Begin by asking the group to create a list of the ten most famous people from this country.

Next, read Proverbs 31:10-31 and briefly discuss the qualities of character found there. Then, read Proverbs 6:20-23 and point out that character, like other important issues, is taught by example.

Suggest that if Proverbs is right, then we teach and learn character through example. With that in mind, ask what one would learn about character from the ten people you've just listed. (The intent of this activity is not to be harsh toward a famous person, but rather to take stock of how much influence celebrities have and how that affects character in general.)

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ Practical Living

Close the session by helping the group to consider practical ways to live as wise people with “Proverbs” kind of wisdom. For each of the settings below, ask group members to suggest ways that one could exhibit wisdom—the love and mercy of God.

In the supermarket? In traffic?
Around the dinner table?
At the office? At the bank?

After brainstorming practical ways to live out a life of wisdom, ask participants to prayerfully choose two concrete things they will do this week that reflect the wisdom of God. Finally, voice a prayer for God's leadership, encouragement, and wisdom as we seek to embody the wisdom of God.



AVERAGE JOE, A.K.A. A. J.

	Week Day		Saturday		Sunday	
	Activity	Character Involved	Activity	Character Involved	Activity	Character Involved
Morning						
Afternoon						
Evening						

