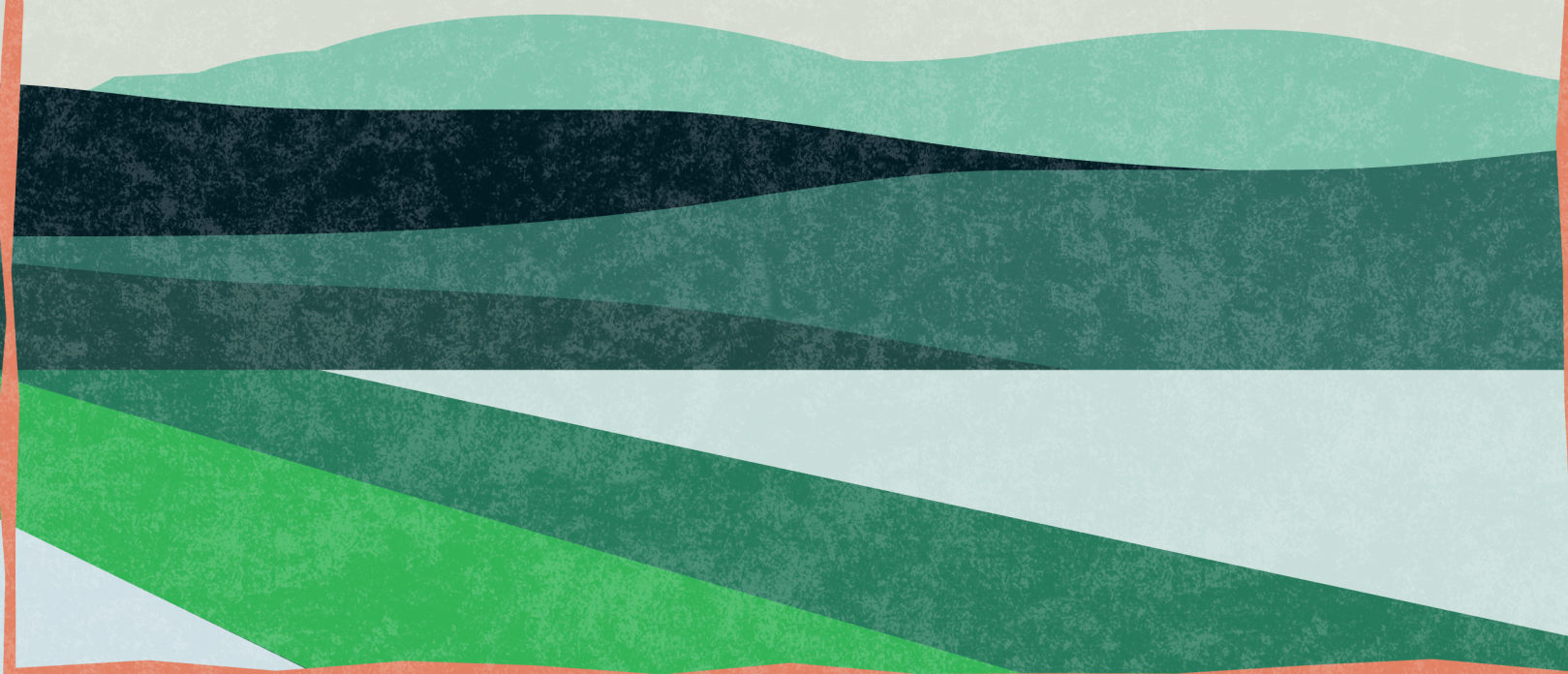


# PROVERBS

*learning to thrive*



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# Passage Schedule

## PROVERBS CHAPTERS 1 - 9

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1	Prov. 1:1-7	The Purpose of Proverbs
2	Prov. 1:8-33	Wisdom Wants Your Attention
3	Prov. 2:1-22	Wisdom's Deliverance
4	Prov. 3:1-12	Don't Lean on Your Understanding
5	Prov. 3:13-35	Lean Into Your New Life
6	Prov. 4:1-27	The Way of the Righteous
7	Prov. 5:1-23	Don't Poison the Well
8	Prov. 6:1-35	The Four Warned
9	Prov. 7:1-27	A Dead End
10	Prov. 8:1-36	Wisdom's World
11	Prov. 9:1-18	Choices

## VARIOUS PROVERBS (CHAPTERS 10 - 29)

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>PASSAGE</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>
12	Prov. 10:8; 11:2; 15:25,33	Humility
13	Prov. 14:29; 15:18; 19:11	Outrage (Anger)
14	Prov. 19:13,14; 22:6; 18:22	Family Matters
15	Prov. 26:28; 18:21; 12:18	Talking, Typing, & Texting
16	Prov. 16:1, 4, 9, 33	Providence
17	Prov. 17:17; 18:24; 27:6,17	Friendship

## PROVERBS CHAPTERS 30 - 31

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>PASSAGE</b>	<b>TITLE</b>
18	Prov. 30	The Gift of Written Wisdom
19	Prov. 31	Committed to Wisdom

# Series Introduction

We all want to thrive. To live wisely is to experience thriving, and experiencing thriving starts with fearing God. What's this mean?

The thriving life is seen in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve enjoyed life in God's world, God's way. Since God is the Creator, the first people knew that everything they thought, did and said was in connection to God. And connecting to God was no problem, because they knew the One they walked with - His faithfulness, His love, His power; in other words, Adam and Eve had the proper awe or "fear" of God.

Until they stopped taking God at His word.

We're all now enslaved to this self-focused foolishness. Though we were created to make sense of life in God's presence, we instead choose to independently build stories about Him, the world, and ourselves.

Through Proverbs, God invites us back to Himself, the only place of true thriving.

As down-to-earth, ground-level, and practical as Proverbs is, we'll discover that wisdom and thriving aren't a matter of organizing our lives around great principles, but are instead a gracious gift from the God who gives both to those He loves.

In Proverbs we aren't being summoned to follow advice but to follow and fear a person, Jesus Christ, the gracious Lord who opened up the path of wisdom and thriving through His substitutionary death and triumphant resurrection.

# Help for Studying Proverbs

Proverbs are *not* promises, guarantees, or laws but are instead observations about how life and situations *normally* unfold.

For example, Proverbs 22:6 says this:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

There are probably more than a few parents who can attest to the fact that this simply isn't always true. However, as a general observation, life does work like this: children who are parented and loved well are set up a little better than children not parented well.

There are different kinds of these observations: instructions, sayings, and admonitions or exhortations based on life lived in relationship with God.

The Old Testament balances the “life-works-this-way” nature of Proverbs by setting it alongside the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, which show life in the face of God's mysterious sovereignty (Job) and life's imbalances and seeming futility (Ecclesiastes).

Life doesn't always work out as we expect it to work out because God does not reveal all of the details of His sovereign activity in the world. So the thriving life requires trust in God, who fully revealed Himself in Jesus and reveals Himself through His Word today.



# The Fear of the LORD

Proverbs 1:7 is like the motto for the entire book of Proverbs:

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."*

What does it mean to have or live with "the fear of the Lord"?

To "fear the LORD" is to:

1. Live in awe of God, who is utterly holy and entirely different from us.
2. Be in covenant relationship with God, knowing and believing His promises.
3. Know that you are accountable to this incomprehensible God, and that He is entirely trustworthy.
4. Walk in holiness by trusting Him because of who He is.

So, does God want you to be *terrified* of Him?



The short answer is: if you've trusted in Jesus, **no!**

Some of the most clarifying passages for understanding the true nature of the fear of the LORD are found in the Psalms:

"Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!" (Psalm 31:19)

"Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name." (Psalm 86:11)

"If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." (Psalm 130:3-4)

Those who are God's children aren't being called to stand in terror of Him, but to live in trusting reverence and awe. As Jerry Bridges says it,

*"I can know if I truly fear God by determining if I have a genuine hatred of evil and an earnest desire to obey His commands."*

# What is Proverbs?

Proverbs is a collection of individual wisdom sayings that “offers skill in the art of godly living.”<sup>1</sup>

**Chapters 1-9** act as a unit that introduces the entire book, urging readers to pursue wisdom. These chapters are poems or speeches from a father to his son that provide instruction and insight for understanding and reading the rest of the book.

**Chapters 10-29** explore wisdom by applying God’s counsel to many areas of life. There are many comparisons between the wise and the foolish, Lady Wisdom (the personification of wisdom) and Lady Folly (the personification of foolishness and evil), tackling various topics that pop up throughout one’s life.

**Chapter 30** presents Agur as a model to emulate - he knows he lacks wisdom, so he goes to the words of God for instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-the-bible-proverbs>

**Chapter 31** presents the wisdom of King Lemuel's mother, along with a picture of the ideal wise woman in an acrostic poem. Some see Proverbs 31 as a picture of Lady Wisdom, whom all who love God should seek to commit themselves to and pursue.

Proverbs was collected over time and one of the main authors, King Solomon, likely started to pass these onto Israel's future leaders so that they could rule just like God rules: with wisdom, justice, and righteousness. So if you're wondering why there's so much said to young men throughout Proverbs, it's because they were the main original audience: they're being prepped to lead God's people in righteousness and justice.

Despite such a wealth of instruction and training, the Old Testament shows the failure of King Solomon and the rest of Israel's kings, highlighting the need for a better King who really does rule with wisdom, justice, and righteousness, King Jesus, the true Son of David.

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Here's what makes the wisdom of Proverbs unique amongst so many other forms of wise sayings, advice, good counsel, etc.: Proverbs makes it clear that true wisdom and thriving can only be found in a covenantal relationship with God.

Proverbs makes it very clear that there are really only two paths to walk in this world: the way of wisdom or the way of folly. That's it. Every choice has us walking further along with God, or further away from God. We do not have infinite choices before us, we cannot make our own path out of thin air; no, we are always either following God or turning from God. Proverbs invites anyone who hears to follow the way of wisdom.

Picture the wisdom in Proverbs as a hiking trail. To even get into the parking lot that leads to the entrance of the trail, you have to "enter" through the fear of the LORD. Why is this the case? Because God is the Creator, so all of life is related to Him. Apart from Him, there is no true wisdom and there is no true thriving.



# Week 1

## THE PURPOSE OF PROVERBS

### PROVERBS 1:1-7

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

We all want to learn to thrive. There are two ways to learn how to thrive: the way recommended by the world around us, or the way offered by God.

In this passage, we're shown how to thrive. The purpose of Proverbs is seen in verses 1-6, and then we're shown the theme or motto of Proverbs in verse 7.

All true thriving (or, as verses 1-6 put it, "wisdom, instruction, insight, righteousness, justice, etc.") starts with this: the fear of the LORD. Without this foundation, all of our efforts to learn how to thrive are useless.

God didn't have to reveal the path to wisdom and thriving to us. But He is incredibly gracious and calls us back to Himself, something He ultimately does through Jesus.

## GROUP INTRO

Take a minute to read together the section entitled "Defining 'Proverb'" on Page 6 above.

Have you ever taken a proverb as a promise from God or seen someone else do so? What was the result of this?

## TEXT

1. Why is it significant that Proverbs begins by stating that it was written by Solomon, an Israelite king who is a son of David (verse 1)?

*Leader help: this is significant because it connects the book of Proverbs to Jesus.*

*We sometimes forget that "Christ" is not Jesus's last name, but is instead a title that means "anointed king". When we read about King Solomon in the Old Testament, we see that he was wise but he also ultimately failed to lead God's people with perfect wisdom and righteousness, highlighting the need for the better King, Jesus. Jesus is also called "Son of David" in His earthly ministry. These facts show us that Proverbs points us to the beauty and goodness of Jesus.*

2. Verses 1-6 state the purpose of Proverbs. What is this purpose or goal? Why do we need this?

*Leader help: the purpose is to help God's people become wise. "Wisdom" in Proverbs simply means **skillfully living in awe of God**. We need this because we've rejected God and have become foolish by trying to be autonomous.*

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3. Verse 7 tells us that “the fear of the LORD” is the beginning of knowledge. What’s it mean to “fear the LORD”? How would someone know if they’re a person who fears the LORD?

*Leader help: to “fear the LORD” means to be in awe of God. It’s also helpful to remember that the Hebrew word translated as “LORD” is God’s covenantal name, Yahweh, which highlights the fact that someone who is in awe of Yahweh is in covenant relationship with Him - they belong to Him because God, in His grace, has made them one of His own.*

*Someone can know if they “fear the LORD” if they are truly in awe of God and know that He is holy, loving, powerful, etc. and live in grateful - not perfect - trust and obedience. But this “fear of the LORD” only can come when someone is restored back into relationship with God through the New Covenant, the covenant of grace that Jesus fulfills and seals by His life, death, and resurrection.*

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4. Verse 7 tells us that “fools” despise wisdom and instruction. How is despising wisdom and instruction not just foolish but evil and destructive?

*Leader help: the “fools” don’t fear God and choose to try to live apart from God. Since God is the very source of life, holiness, and goodness, anyone who rejects Him is going to act wickedly and harm themselves and those around them through their rejection of God and His wisdom.*

5. How do these introductory verses relate to the story of the whole Bible? In other words, how does Proverbs fit in with the story of “Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration” we see from Genesis to Revelation? For some ideas, read Isaiah 11:1-5 and Matthew 12:38-42.

*Leader help: the Bible is about God and His gracious redemption of His sinful people. We need redemption because, like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we refuse to trust God and seek to gain knowledge apart from Him. We are therefore enslaved to our sin and foolishness. God accomplished redemption through Jesus, who is the ultimate source of the wisdom and thriving offered in Proverbs. If we want to learn to thrive and live wisely, we must first repent and believe the gospel, putting our faith in Jesus so that we are restored back to relationship with God.*

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## APPLICATION

1. When you are facing a difficult or confusing situation, where do you usually turn for guidance? What would it look like to help one another first turn to God and His Word in all situations?
2. How does our culture tell us we can learn to thrive - where are we instructed to go or what are we told to do if we want to thrive? How is this different from "fearing the LORD"?
3. Name an area of your life where you need God's help to learn how to thrive. Where do you need His wisdom and guidance right now?
4. When is the last time you were truly in awe of God? What caused this? How can we pursue this kind of awe together?
5. What makes Jesus a King worth trusting for wisdom and thriving? Why can we be certain that He will guide us into what's best?

## PRAYER

Praise God for being gracious enough to give us His Word and promising to guide His children.

Ask God for wisdom in specific areas of your life. Ask God to help you stay close to Him and His Word for the wisdom you need.

Repent for the times you are not in awe of God, and ask God to restore true awe of Him in you.

Ask God to help you offer the wisdom and thriving that comes through Jesus Christ to those who don't yet have faith in Him.

# Week 2

## WISDOM WANTS YOUR ATTENTION

### PROVERBS 1:8-33

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

There are truly only two paths in life: to God or away from Him.

We're inclined to send wisdom's calls to voicemail as we rapidly run to the evil and foolishness around us. As we jump headfirst into folly, wisdom blares over the loudspeakers - right here, right now, we must repent at the rebuke of wisdom. If we don't turn today, tomorrow may be too late.

The situation wasn't different in King Solomon's day. In this passage, the first of several exhortations to Israel's future leaders, a father and mother plead with their son to heed the call of wisdom and to reject the foolish, evil paths of the wicked. Wisdom is personified as someone calling out for the attention of all who hear.

To heed wisdom's call is to embrace God and His gift of thriving. To ignore the call is to suffer distress and anguish.

## GROUP INTRO

What are the recurring temptations, distractions, or experiences that pull your attention away from Jesus? How have you seen your inattentiveness to Jesus impact you and those around you?

## TEXT

1. Observe the passage - who is this section of Proverbs written to? How does knowing this help us understand Proverbs as a whole?

*Leader help: This is King Solomon writing to his son, a future king. Knowing that Proverbs was originally a collection of materials given to future kings helps us see this book's place in the story of the Bible. The wisdom presented in Proverbs was a gift to Israel's kings, showing them how to not just lead but live in wisdom and righteousness. However, because of their sin nature, these kings, just like us, failed to live with perfect wisdom and righteousness, highlighting the need for Jesus. We needed Jesus to come to perfectly heed this wisdom, perfectly teach this wisdom, and die and rise in our place for our failures so that we could be restored to relationship with God.*

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2. How is the temptation of sinners presented in verses 11-19, i.e., what kind of outcome do the sinners promise in verses 11-19? What's the actual outcome of their evil?

*Leader help: The sinners promise community, success, security, and wealth. The actual outcome is that they destroy their own lives and bring death upon themselves - a point made by Paul in Romans 6:23. It's important to remember King Solomon's vantage point: he fears God and knows that God is just and will not ignore sin like this - it will either be punished here and now or in eternity.*

3. What are the two main responses to wisdom seen in verses 20-33? What is the end result of each of these responses? Notice how many words throughout this passage describe actions!

*Leader help: We could categorize the two responses as "heeding" and "rejecting". We all either heed wisdom (i.e. fear the Lord and listen to Him) or reject wisdom (i.e. live without awe of God and reject His words).*

**The end result of heeding:** receiving wisdom which leads to thriving ("whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster") - this "dwelling secure without dread" doesn't mean life won't have trouble, but that you'll know you're secure as one of God's own.

**The end result of rejecting:** sudden terror and anguish, all culminating in experiencing the consequences of your actions and then experiencing God's wrath in eternity.

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4. Looking at the big story of the Bible, how does someone turn at wisdom's reproof instead of giving in to the enticement of the wicked?

*Leader help: It starts with admitting foolishness and the need for outside counsel. The starting point is repenting and trusting God, or "fearing the Lord" (1:7). Remember, to "fear the Lord" is to be in covenant with Him, to know who He is, what He's like, and what He's promised, all of which are fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus.*

5. Why is it just or right for wisdom to laugh, mock, and ignore those who ignore wisdom's counsel?

*Leader help: Because willful rejection of God and His wisdom is sinful and evil, not just ignorant, so it is an expression of God's holiness and justice to respond this way to those who reject.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. This passage includes the "marketing" of wicked people (they offer houses filled with plunder, community, not missing out, etc.). What are some examples of this kind of sinful "marketing" today? Which of these examples of temptations do you specifically fall prey to? What kind of sin do you get enticed by?

2. If you're a Christian, where in your discipleship are you currently complacent like the fools of verse 32? Why is this? How can we help one another instead repent at wisdom's reproof?
3. Is our Community Group a place where we're helping one another live wisely? If not, how can we grow in this area together? If so, what are some examples we can look to as an encouragement to keep this up?
4. How can having a foundation of awe for God help you make wise decision sin your everyday life?
5. How can God's love displayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus fuel our repentance and diligence in listening to and heeding God's Word?

## PRAYER

Confess the specific ways you've sinfully tried to satisfy your own desires, and ask God to satisfy your wants and needs instead.

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Ask God to help you heed the correction/reproof of wisdom - ask Him to help you grow in your ability to discern the specific ways the devil tries to “market sin” and ask for the power to reject that path.

Thank Jesus for offering Himself on the cross so that you could be reconciled to God and given the Holy Spirit.

Praise God for His gracious offering of wisdom.



# Week 3

## WISDOM'S DELIVERANCE

### PROVERBS 2

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Except for Jesus, every human being is born with a poisoned heart. We naturally seek the ways of evil and death because of this heart and we therefore reject God, His wisdom, and His goodness.

The fact of our brokenness is addressed in this passage as God reveals our desperate need for deliverance. We'll see that wisdom's deliverance comes from outside of ourselves and our culture as a gift of grace. Tips, tricks, self-esteem, and self-help cannot deliver us from evil.

We'll also see that God doesn't simply deliver us and then leave us to fend for ourselves; instead, He calls us to diligently seek out more and more wisdom through His revelation - the Bible - which will help us stay close to Him. And it's in His presence that we'll find thriving, even when we still experience pain and brokenness in this sin-sick world.

## GROUP INTRO

Describe a time in your life when you had to endure or face the consequences of a foolish/sinful decision that you made. What truths about yourself did this reveal to you?

## TEXT

1. Observe the passage: what specific *actions* are being commended from the father to the son? What's the end goal of these actions?

*Leader help: the father is exhorting his son to truly treasure and diligently pursue wisdom and understanding within the context of a relationship with God. The end goal is living with God and experiencing His gracious provision and protection - both here and, one day, in the new heavens and new earth.*

2. What does the word "wisdom" mean in Proverbs? How is this different from how our culture uses the word "wisdom" and where do we obtain wisdom?

*Leader help: wisdom in Proverbs is essentially skillful living with an awe of God. Culture often thinks of wisdom in terms of intelligence/ability to think things through. We get wisdom in the context of truly knowing God. He gives it as a gift to His people who come to Him by faith alone.*

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3. Notice the “if...then” pattern of verses 1-12. Why do these verses say wisdom is crucial to pursue? What does applying and pursuing wisdom do for God’s people?

*Leader help: wisdom is crucial to obtain and apply because God’s wisdom delivers us from the “way of evil” and from the path to death as described in verses 12-19.*

4. Attentively read verses 12-19, which gives us an illustration of what wisdom delivers the son from. What two kinds of people are being described in these illustrations? How are they described?

*Leader help: we have “men of perverted speech” in verses 12-15 and the “forbidden woman”/adulteress in verses 16-19. They’re described as being crooked/perverted - not the way God intended humanity to be. They’re also evil, rejecting God, and will lead ultimately to inescapable death.*

5. What are some ways that this passage points us to Jesus and the hope of the gospel?

*Leader help: God ultimately delivered His people from the ways of evil and death by sending Jesus, the One who truly is “upright”, the One who really did “walk in integrity” and kept to the paths of righteousness but was nevertheless killed for His people’s folly, only to resurrect as the King of all creation. He is the better, actually righteous Son of David, who earns through His obedience the eternal security and protection of His people. His blood truly delivers us.*

## APPLICATION

1. We must pursue wisdom if we want to experience thriving. How can we as a group put into practice verses 1-4?
2. If someone came to you and asked you how to be delivered from the ways of evil and death described in verses 12-19, what would you say? How does the rest of the story of the Bible address their question?
3. Based on this passage, why do you think wisdom is worth pursuing?
4. If you are a Christian, how has the Holy Spirit used the Bible to rescue and free you from foolish thinking and actions? Can you think of a specific example of the Him doing this?

## PRAYER

Confess the specific ways you've rejected God and His wisdom this week.

Thank God for His desire to deliver us from our folly, sin, and death.

Ask the Spirit to help you strive for wisdom and understanding and to grow your fear of the Lord.



# Week 4

## DON'T LEAN ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING

### PROVERBS 3:1-12

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Since the first rebellion of our representative Adam, seeking independence from God has been a big problem for every person. We don't want to live in God's world, God's way, and we don't want to get His input on how we should think, speak, or live.

But the gracious call of God's Word is to repent and believe, to recognize who God is and to respond to Him with trust.

In this passage, King Solomon exhorts his son to remember and hold onto his teaching, which is anchored in God's revelation of His holiness and grace in the Old Testament Law. It's only in recognizing who God is through His revelation that we'll be able to thrive and live wisely. And it's in His revelation of Himself that we discover just how worthy He is of all trust and submission.

## GROUP INTRO

If you can remember, describe a time in your life when God used a Bible verse or passage to challenge you, help you, or transform you.

## TEXT

1. What does the word “heart” mean in this passage and throughout the Bible? How is the Bible’s use of the word “heart” different from our normal use of the word?

*Leader help: “Heart” in the Bible means something along the lines of “inner self” - it’s the inner part of us that guides our desires, will, reasoning, intentions, and what we are attentive to. We often use heart to mean “deepest feelings”. The biblical word means more than emotions.*

2. Remember that the foundation of Proverbs and all of its wisdom is the fear of God. What specific attitudes are readers urged to have toward God in this passage? Why is God worth the adoption of these attitudes?

*Leader help: love and faithfulness (verse 3), trust (verse 5), humility (verse 7), respect/awe/honor (verse 9), submission (verses 11-12).*

*God is trustworthy. He makes good on His promises. We see this ultimately in Jesus, and ability to adopt these attitudes only happens after we’ve trusted in Jesus and been given His Spirit.*

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3. Proverbs 2 addressed some external blocks to a wise, thriving life (Prov. 2:12-19), and these verses address some internal blocks to a wise, thriving life. Describe the internal blocks mentioned or assumed in this passage. Why is it beneficial to be aware of these?

*Leader help: internal blocks mentioned or assumed:*

- (1) Our tendency toward independence/autonomy through our forgetting or forsaking God and His Word (verses 1-4)*
- (2) Our pride (verse 7)*
- (3) Our pull toward evil (verse 7)*
- (4) Our greed (verse 9)*
- (5) Our distrust of God in suffering (verses 11-12)*

*With awareness, we can confess, repent, and ask God for help to turn from these things while also, by His Spirit, pursuing a life of trust in Him.*

4. From this passage we get a glimpse of the fact that the father in Proverbs anchors his teaching in God's Law. Read some of the corresponding passages from the Law below to see this for yourself, then answer the question.

Prov. 3:1-2 — Deuteronomy 6:1-2

Prov. 3:3-4 — Deuteronomy 6:6-8

Prov. 3:5-8 — Deuteronomy 6:20-24

Prov. 3:9-10 — Deuteronomy 6:10-13

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What's the benefit and beauty of the father anchoring his teaching and commandments in God's teaching and commandments?

*Leader help: God is the Creator and knows what's best for His creatures, meaning He knows exactly what it takes for us to thrive. When the father anchors his own instructions in God's Word, he's giving an invitation to his loved ones to continually live and think in God's presence, which is the absolute best place for His people.*

*The beauty of God's holiness and grace were also revealed through the Law then and ultimately through Jesus. It's in the acts of trusting God and receiving grace from Him that we're changed and grown.*

5. How is Proverbs 3:9-10 best understood? Is God promising to give His people lavish lives if they give to Him?

*Leader help: It's important to remember the context of this passage. Israel's economy was largely based on crops and livestock, which made their dependence on God all the more clear to them (for example, if it didn't rain, they wouldn't eat).*

*God is simply revealing through King Solomon's teaching what He said in the Law of Moses: He will bless obedience. This does not mean He is promising a lavish life, but He is promising to provide abundantly. Putting God first, as Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, really does lead to needs being met.*



## APPLICATION

1. What are some ways you personally “lean on your own understanding”? When does this happen most often for you? How will you repent today and instead pursue trusting God?

*Leader help: Note that true transformation comes through an ever-deepening awareness of the reality and truth of the good news of Jesus. See Colossians 2:6-7 for one example of this truth.*

2. One of the ways God has given the opportunity for us to grow in trust and generosity is by worshiping Him with financial offerings. Do you give financially to the church? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. What are some practical, day-to-day ways we can practice fearing the Lord and turning away from evil?
4. Verses 11-12 mention God’s discipline, which is not a pleasant experience. One way to submissively endure God’s discipline or suffering in general is seen in Hebrews 12:1-11. How will we as a group help one another adopt the heart and mindset of Hebrews 12 in the midst of trials?

## PRAYER

Admit to Jesus the areas of your life where you are leaning on your own understanding.

Thank God that He gave us the ultimate display of steadfast love and faithfulness in the death and resurrection of His Son, and ask Him to help you grow more and more aware of His love for you.

Pray for one another to grow in:

*Humility*

*Generosity*

*Gratitude*

*Trust*

*Submissiveness to God*

# Week 5

## LEAN INTO YOUR NEW LIFE

### PROVERBS 3:13-35

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Last week we were exhorted to avoid living independent of God and His wisdom. Now the father will tell his son why God and His wisdom are worth pursuing and prizing above all else. Instead of leaning on our own wisdom, we're invited to lean into the new life that comes as a gracious gift through relationship with God.

Promises of "blessedness" are all around us, but it's the one who gets wisdom that will truly be *blessed* (the word in Hebrew could be translated "happy"). Here's why: God ordered creation through His wisdom, so getting His wisdom means living in line with reality. But this first requires faith in Jesus, because it's through faith alone that we're reconciled to God and enabled to live in this world the way we're created to live.

When we come to Jesus in faith we're not only given eternal life, we're given a new life here and now and this section of Proverbs 3 shows how we lean into it.

## GROUP INTRO

What kind of goals or pursuits does our culture promote as a way to be fulfilled or happy? How are these goals or pursuits ultimately unable to provide true fulfillment?

## TEXT

1. Verses 13-18 are grouped together with the use of an *inclusio* - the opening words in verse 13 ("Blessed is the one...") are similar to the closing words in verse 18 ("Those who hold her fast are called blessed"). How does the author describe the blessed results of getting wisdom in verses 13-18? What is the author's purpose for providing these descriptions?

*Leader help: The author presents wisdom as almost irresistible by highlighting how God's wisdom fulfills profound human desires like security (which we often think comes through wealth), long life, honor, pleasure, peace, and flourishing. This is the true state of blessedness.*

*By describing the fulfillment wisdom gives, the author is trying to encourage a persistent pursuit of wisdom, showing that it really is worth the effort. The path to prosperity can't go around God, it's found only in following Him and His ways.*

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## 2. Why does the author tie wisdom to God creating the universe in verses 19-20?

*Leader help: The author is again helping readers understand the value and beauty of wisdom in two ways:*

- (1) If God used wisdom to bring order to all reality, imagine what He will do with wisdom in the lives of those who fear Him.*
- (2) There's order in the world, things have a certain way of working, and we can live in this order if we get wisdom. Getting wisdom starts with a humble awe of God, an awe that is restored to those who trust in Jesus.*

## 3. Look together at verses 21-26. How does a person get security and safety in this disordered world? Are these verses guaranteeing that God's people will never stumble or be afraid? Why or why not?

*Leader help: Safety is provided by God to His covenant people who cherish His wisdom (see verse 26). God provides safety by giving wisdom, and, as we saw in Proverbs 1:7, wisdom starts with a right view of and relationship with God (which only comes through faith alone in Jesus). By pursuing and prizing wisdom, God's people have security. If we reject God and His words of wisdom, we can expect destruction and pain.*

*God's people do stumble and experience fear. These verses describe in poetic imagery the general beauty of a life spent guarding the wisdom God gives.*

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4. Verses 27-35 show us how to lean into the new life God gives, and they're mainly relational exhortations. Describe in your own words how these verses are calling God's people to relate to others.

*Leader help: It's important to remember that these verses are not presenting a way for anyone to be made right with God but are instead showing how those who have been made right with God through faith relate to the people around them.*

*Israelites lived communal lives. One way to demonstrate your love for God then was to deal honestly and humbly with those around you. The way God's people are exhorted to live in these verses are essentially summed up in the Great Commandment:*

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

5. How do verses 33-35 show our need for Jesus?

*Leader help: According to Proverbs 3:33-35, blessings are given to the righteous, humble, and wise, three characteristics that none of us possess. But Jesus was perfectly righteous His entire life, humbled Himself by becoming a man and then dying on a cross, bearing God's curse that we deserve. Read Romans 3:10, 20-24 for a summary of this truth.*

## APPLICATION

1. If you're a Christian, how has surrendering to God's Word and the wisdom found there brought you flourishing?
2. Do you personally believe that God's wisdom is valuable enough to set aside pursuits of wealth, security, or any other goals that may distract you from it? Why or why not?
3. In your own life, what steps have you taken to pursue Jesus and the wisdom He gives in His Word? How would you best receive exhortation or rebuke if those who love you don't see you pursuing Jesus?
4. Read aloud verses 33-35. As you do so, trust that Jesus has stepped into human history as a man and been righteous, humble, and wise in your place. What do you feel as you think about this reality? How can meditating on this truth help you pursue God's wisdom with intentionality and tenacity?

## PRAYER

Acknowledge the pursuits you put before the pursuit of God and His wisdom in a prayer of confession.

Ask God for the wisdom that you need in order to live your daily life in a way that honors Him.

Ask God to bring the truth of the gospel deeper into your heart, and to help you truly believe that He is as good as He says He is.

Pray for those you personally know who reject God and His wisdom. Ask God to have mercy on them and to save them.



# Week 6

## THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

### PROVERBS 4:1-27

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

In this world, how we walk and who we follow are just as important as where we're headed.

In Eden there was no such thing as autonomy; Adam and Eve lived all of life following God. But the Fall was humanity's first step in following the devil, a path overrun with corruption and darkness. We now effortlessly resist, suppress, and reject God and His way.

In this passage, God calls us back to the way of the righteous. And as the story of Scripture unfolds, we see that the way of the righteous isn't a lifeless path but a living Person, Jesus Christ, who shepherds all of His disciples into trusting that He really is the way, the truth, and the life.

Only through saving faith in Jesus will we avoid the path of evil and ultimate ruin and stay on the life-giving way of righteousness.

## GROUP INTRO

In this week's passage Solomon tells his sons how he received godly wisdom from his dad, King David.

In the New Testament, the church is referred to in family terms, which means that teaching and receiving God's wisdom is a crucial part of our discipleship.

So who in the church has modeled or passed godly wisdom to you? What has been the impact of this kind of relational discipleship in your life?

## TEXT

1. Take some time to observe that wisdom requires knowing what to do and what not to do. In this passage, what are the positive commands ("do this...") and what are the negative commands ("don't do this...")? Which commands stick out to you as particularly difficult?

*Leader help: It's important to help one another simply observe what the Bible says before attempting to interpret and apply what we read. This helps us notice things we'd otherwise ignore.*

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2. Why doesn't Solomon give *only* negative commands? In other words, what is the benefit of giving both positive and negative commands?

*Leader help: We've forfeited wisdom by our sin and therefore do not naturally pursue the best paths. We need God's instructions about the best way to think and live, not just what to avoid. Since we still battle our fallen nature (the flesh), we don't simply "drift" into wisdom and holiness, we have to be led into it by Jesus, and He does this through His Word, His Spirit, and His people.*

3. According to Scripture, what characteristics will be visible in the life of someone who is walking on the "way of wisdom" or "paths of uprightness"?

*Leader help: Since Solomon anchors his teaching in the Old Testament, especially the Law, a good answer could be found in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) - someone who is walking in wisdom will have reverence for God, will abandon idolatry, and will relate to others with love and honor.*

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4. Look together at verse 23. The word translated as “keep” could be translated as “guard” or “preserve”. Why is it necessary to guard the heart (i.e. why don’t our hearts stay on the way of the righteous?) According to the Bible, what’s it look like to guard your heart?

*Leader help: First remember that “heart” in Scripture refers to our inner being, the core of our decision making, thoughts, emotions, and will.*

*The problem with our hearts is summarized in passages such as Genesis 8:21, Jeremiah 17:9, and Ezekiel 36:26. We’re born with sinful hearts inclined away from God.*

*The promise of the new covenant is that God would give a new heart to His people and, through His Spirit, cause His people to obey.*

*Guarding your heart can look like the exhortations found in Colossians 3:1-17 - prayer, Bible study, corporate worship, Christian community, personal pursuit of holiness, etc. **But this can only happen after someone is given a new heart by trusting Jesus.***

## **APPLICATION**

1. We live in the time after Jesus has lived, died, and resurrected. How, then, are we supposed to relate to the commands in this passage?

*Leader help: We aren’t saved by obeying God’s commandments, but His commandments are beautiful and good. We relate to these commandments in 3 ways:*

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- (1) *God's commands show us our need for a Savior. If we're honest, we'll admit that we don't prize or pursue wisdom like we should, we do enter the paths of the wicked in various ways, we often give into evil. This all shows our need for Jesus and His salvation.*
- (2) *God's commands help to restrain or limit our corruption and sinfulness. For example, when we see God telling us that the way of evil is like deep darkness, we're likely going to want to avoid the way of evil.*
- (3) *God's commands are like a guide for living life, showing us what characteristics to aim toward. After trusting Jesus, we're empowered by the Spirit to begin obeying God's commands and heeding His instructions. We don't do it perfectly, but by His grace and by the Spirit, we gradually conform our lives to God's righteousness.*

2. In God's family, each of His sons and daughters plays a part in modeling and giving godly wisdom from Scripture. In what ways will you help model and give godly wisdom across generations?

*Leader help: This can serve as a call to be disciples making disciples. We all have a part to play in helping other disciples live wisely and righteously.*

3. Look at verses 20-27. Which of these commands are the biggest struggle for you? What are some ways we can pursue the described wise path together (i.e. how can we help one another put away crooked speech?)
4. It's fairly likely that one of the biggest obstacles to staying on the way of the righteous is distraction. What types of distractions have hindered your pursuit of wisdom? How can we help one another lay these distractions aside?
5. How can the wisdom offered in this passage be used as a tool in evangelism?

## PRAYER

Praise God for His gift of the Bible.

Thank God for rescuing you from the path of wickedness and foolishness.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you have specifically set aside wisdom and God's Word. Then confess, repent, and ask Him for help to cherish wisdom.

# Week 7

## DON'T POISON THE WELL

### PROVERBS 5:1-23

#### **Leader note:**

*Proverbs 5-7 include various warnings and teachings about sex, marriage, and adultery.*

*It's important to remember and communicate that one's value in the church is not based on marital status, nor should we define brothers and sisters by their sexual sins and struggles. The goal of Christianity is not to alter someone's marital status, but to enjoy and worship Jesus, becoming more like Him by His Spirit. Consider how Proverbs 5 may impact group members who are divorced, married, newlyweds, dating, sexually sinning outside of marriage (including pornography), widowed, etc.*

*Pray for God's help to lead your group in healthy, Jesus-honoring discussions. Keep the gospel front and center as the only way forward for all of us, and consider what it feels like to battle deep-seated loneliness, shame, guilt, or fear.*

## PASSAGE SUMMARY

The first nine chapters of Proverbs are meant to help motivate the pursuit of wisdom in all areas of one's life, including the most intimate aspects. So Solomon now turns his son's attention to marital wisdom, undergirding his teaching with truth and counsel that apply across the board to all people, regardless of marital status.

Death and judgment await those who seek sexual pleasure outside the boundaries God has established. But fountains of joy are offered to those who choose to take God at His word and enjoy sexual pleasure within the context of the covenant of marriage.

Solomon essentially shows us that the refreshment and joy God offers in marriage are like a fresh glass of water, while giving in to adultery in any form is like poisoning your own well. Just like the rest of our lives, there's no neutrality in sexuality: we are either following God toward deeper joy or we are walking away from Him into utter ruin, and, without repentance, hell itself.



## GROUP INTRO

Proverbs 5 shows us that the fight against sinful folly is empowered by godly pleasure. Sam Storms helps us understand how this works:

*“The key to living a successful, sin-killing life doesn’t come primarily from trying harder but from enjoying more. This doesn’t mean you can be a successful Christian without trying. It simply means that enjoyment empowers effort. Pleasure in God is the power for purity.”<sup>2</sup>*

What are some of God’s gifts that fuel your joy in Him? (Ideas include: creation, good food, music, etc.)

## TEXT

1. Why does Proverbs 5 use the examples of a forbidden woman and a wife instead of forbidden man and a husband? How do these verses apply to both men and women?

*Leader help: The original context of Proverbs shows us that this was a book of wisdom provided to Israel’s future kings. A female is used as an example because of Solomon’s audience (his son, the future king). Fleeing from the disaster and death that sexual sin brings is the call to all of God’s people and is the main point of the first part of Proverbs 5.*

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<sup>2</sup> Sam Storms, *Enjoying God*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/enjoying-god/>

2. How does verse 3 tell us the temptation to commit sexual sin often starts? What's the significance of this?

*Leader help: The temptation starts with flattering words. This is significant because, in our pride, we can tend to overestimate our own strength in the face of seemingly "innocent" temptation or flirtation. This passage warns us otherwise: merely engaging with temptation - even simple words - is a step onto a path that ends in bitter, agonizing death.*

3. In what way are verses 4-14 an expression and example of God's love for His people? Why do you think the consequences of sexual sin are so vividly described?

*Leader help: God's love is seen in the fact that He warns His people about the danger of sexual sin. In our sinfulness, we likely wouldn't be able to comprehend how much ruin comes from sexual sin.*

*The consequences are vividly described because it helps drive home the horrific consequences of sexual sin.*

4. Instead of pursuing sexual sin, what's the son instructed to do? What does this command tell us about the character of God?

*Leader help: To sexually enjoy his wife and the love that they share as a married couple. This reveals that God is the giver of sex, joy, pleasure, and love. He isn't interested in destroying our happiness, but guaranteeing it.*

5. According to this passage, what is the ultimate reason to reject sexual sin and pursue pleasure within God's boundaries?

*Leader help: Verses 21-23 tell us: God is watching and will not stand idly by. A person may get away with sexual sin all their life, but that person's entire existence has been seen by God, and God will judge all sin - either Jesus takes that judgment, or the individual takes that judgment. So our response should be to flee to Jesus, who has been sacrificed in our place for our sins. See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. How does Scripture instruct us to respond to sexual sin in our own lives or in the life of another Christian? How is this response different from the response to the sexual sin of non Christians?
2. What are some ways those who are not married can apply this passage to their lives?
3. We have all fallen short of God's standards for sexual purity and experienced the suffering brought through it (or through divorce, death, etc.). What hope do we have if we've lost a spouse, experienced divorce, watched porn, had an affair, or committed sexual sin outside of marriage?

4. Is our Community Group a safe place to be vulnerable about loneliness, confess sin, and be held accountable to pursue God and His wisdom in regards to sexuality? Why or why not?

## PRAYER

Confess your sexual sin, asking God to free you, heal you, and give you a strong desire for holiness.

Praise God for the gift of marriage, and the joy that He gives, even if that is not a joy you currently experience.

Lament the destruction and pain sexual sin, divorce, or the death of a spouse has brought. Ask God to heal and comfort those who do not currently get to experience the joy of marriage.

Pray for marriages that are struggling.



# Week 8

## THE FOUR WARNED PROVERBS 6

### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Four kinds of people are warned in this passage:

1. Those who make careless financial pledges/decisions (verses 1-5)
2. The sluggard (verses 6-11)
3. The wicked (verses 12-19)
4. The coveting adulterer (verses 20-35)

Contrary to the modern assumption that a person's faith isn't for public use (or even publicly useful), this passage shows us how God's wisdom must make it into every corner of a disciple's life, where it brings a unique kind of flourishing. In order to help us walk in wisdom, we're shown the consequences of setting faith aside in ordinary life through several warnings.

The four kinds of foolish, not wise, practices reveal that knowing what to do, when to act, and where to put up or submit to boundaries won't come if someone isn't first willing to humble themselves and pursue God with faith and reverence.

## GROUP INTRO

Describe a time in your life when you ignored or rejected a warning and you suffered consequences because of it.

## TEXT

1. God cares how we use our resources. Verses 1-5 describe a situation where someone has gotten themselves into a financial trap. Why would an ancient Israelite want to put all of their money on the line to pay a debt for someone they don't know well? Why would this be foolish?

*Leader help: One possible reason is seen in Deuteronomy 15:11. Because God was generous in freely giving Israel the Promised Land, He called them to be generous. But here, God reveals that it would normally (not always) be unwise to put all of your own money on the line in order to pay a debt for someone you don't know well. This is foolish because you don't know the person's character or ability to pay the debt.*

*Our financial decisions matter to God and must be combined with His wisdom. The call here is this: if you've made unwise financial decisions, act humbly and quickly to ask for help.*

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2. In verses 6-11, the sluggard is being compared to an ant. What does the ant do that the sluggard does not? What kind of heart attitude does the sluggard's behavior reveal? Based on your knowledge of the Bible, why is this attitude and behavior offensive to God?

*Leader help: The ant is a self-starter who takes responsibility for obligations, the sluggard has no initiative; the ant is a hard worker, the sluggard is lazy; the ant wisely prepares for the future, the sluggard wastes the here and now.*

*The sluggard's lazy behavior reveals his selfishness and pride. We see what's not a priority for the sluggard: representing God as His image bearer. Being made in the image of God means we're made to work hard (which can look very different for each person). Our talents, passions, and opportunities come from the Lord and it honors Him when we work hard and plan well. For a New Testament parallel, see Romans 12:11.*

*It's important to note that God's Word never states that poverty is always due to laziness. Here the emphasis is on the attitude of the sluggard that's seen in his behavior, and the rebuke is meant to motivate change in him.*

3. Verses 12-15 and 16-19 are linked by the common act of sowing discord. What does it mean to “sow discord”? Why are the attitudes and acts listed in these verses, including sowing discord, hated by God?

*Leader help: Sowing discord means intentionally speaking and acting in a way that brings quarreling, arguing, fighting, and disunity. The basis of human interactions is relationship - starting with a person's relationship with God, then (if applicable) spouse, children, family, friends, authorities, etc. These listed attitudes and acts ruin relationships and bring destruction to God's image bearers and His creation. Because God is holy and loving, He hates sin and evil. He is, by His very nature, opposed to the sin and evil listed in these verses.*

4. Why is it a good thing that there are attitudes and acts that God hates? How does this hint of hope connect this passage to Jesus?

*Leader help: God's hatred of sin shows that He is holy and righteous, and therefore trustworthy since He will never sin or commit injustice. God will also not let evil go unpunished, but will, out of love, bring righteous wrath upon that which He hates. This wrath is either taken by Jesus on the cross or it will be taken by individuals themselves when Jesus returns to judge the world.*



5. Verses 20-35 contain some vivid illustrations about coveting and adultery. What's the relationship between coveting and adultery? What's Solomon's method for combatting coveting and adultery?

*Leader help: Remember that in Scripture, "adultery" is any sexual lust or act outside of the covenant of marriage.*

*Coveting is essentially telling God that He has not been good at being God and needs to give to you what He's given to someone else. Adultery is rooted in this discontentment and proud refusal to give God thanks. The covetous person will not seek satisfaction in God and what He's given to them, but in what God has given to others.*

*Solomon's method is to (1) Fear the Lord (i.e. come to know and trust the one true God), (2) Keep God's Word close, and (3) Receive and adjust your life according to the warnings of God's Word.*

## **APPLICATION**

1. God is not interested in shaming us for foolish financial decisions, but He is calling us to humble ourselves if we've been foolish with finances. What kind of traps can come through unwise financial decisions? What role should we play in one another's financial decisions?

2. Verses 12-19 describe some of the human attitudes and actions that make life difficult. How can we graciously respond to these kinds of attitudes and actions if they show up in our Community Group?
3. How does or should the gospel influence our understanding and application of verses 20-35?
4. Why is it righteous and good for us to hate what God hates? What are some ways we can know if we love what God loves and hate what God hates?
5. Where in your life are you currently discontent and therefore more susceptible to coveting? How can we help one another be grateful and content?

## PRAYER

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for bringing God's Word to us.

Thank God for loving us enough to warn us, and ask Him for help to receive and act upon His warnings.

Admit your failure to honor and thank God.