



LifeLight

“

In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” John 1:4

Proverbs



LEADERS GUIDE



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Proverbs describes Wisdom as a tree of life and blessing to those seeking and taking hold of her teachings (Proverbs 3:18). Wisdom's branches are laden with only the choicest of fruits, yielding a crop of righteousness. This in turn blesses others (11:30). As a tree, Wisdom reminds us of two trees in the Garden: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. Through man's foolishness and rebellion, the first tree brought death and separation from God. By dying on a tree, (1 Peter 2:24), Christ opened our way to eat from the second tree: life with God and Christ forever (Revelation 2:7).

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 45.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 47**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;

- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's

study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group’s members). The discussion leader will obtain the leaflets from the director. A congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week’s work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

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Recommended Study Resources for Proverbs

The Lutheran Study Bible, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide, and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

The Lutheran Bible Companion, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. This new resource is a highly visual two-volume handbook that welcomes Christians to a deeper explanation of the cultural and historical contexts of the events captured in Scripture and the Apocrypha.

Ehlke, Roland Cap. *Proverbs* (People’s Bible Commentary Series). Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992. Reprinted by Concordia Publishing

House, 1993. A comprehensive commentary at the lay level, based on the NIV text. Especially helpful in connecting Proverbs to the New Testament.

Kidner, Derek. *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature*. Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1985. Somewhat critical, but insightful at points. Attempts to place the Book of Proverbs within the context of the rest of the wisdom literature in light of twentieth-century study. For a general readership.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains more than 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

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Using Overhead Transparencies

Some lecture leaders like to use a computer-generated presentation or transparencies with an overhead projector. Others find this to be more a hindrance than a help. We recommend that you use PowerPoint, an overhead, or a chalkboard to show at least the outline of each lecture.

The Beginning of Wisdom

1 Kings 3–7; Proverbs 1:1–7

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). This study of Proverbs starts by examining “wisdom,” the wise reign of Solomon, and “the fear of the LORD” in light of the book’s initial admonitions to avoid foolishness and seek wisdom.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. be able to describe several facets of the biblical concept of wisdom;
2. appreciate strengths and limitations of the proverb as a form for communicating truth;
3. be able to differentiate the “fear of the LORD” from slavelike fear on biblical grounds and recognize its importance both in the Book of Proverbs and in their lives;
4. want to be wise in accord with the appeals in Proverbs 1.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 47.

For the Lecture Leader

Proverbs does not provide direct historical background about its authors and their setting. Parts of the Book of Proverbs have a miscellaneous character. Further, if we are not careful, the Gospel can be eclipsed in our discussions by the book’s intensely practical bent. This course attempts to deal with these challenges in the following ways:

First: Passages from 1 Kings, Deuteronomy, and Psalm 72 will be included to provide the historical and cultural setting of Proverbs.

Second: A portion of the course will be heavily oriented to chapters of the book that are theologically “packed”; for example, chapters 1–2, 8, and 9.

Third: The lectures for Proverbs 10–31 will be organized around themes and subthemes. These themes should help us see New Testament and Gospel connections more so than if we would try every week to summarize the multiplicity of points from the middle to the end of Proverbs.

Fourth: This course will obviously not treat each proverb. At its end, we want participants to use Proverbs for everyday life situations. Such an aim requires (1) familiarizing students with the major themes of the biblical book at hand, and (2) helping them to understand how this ancient book communicates its message so they can read it themselves with greater effectiveness.

Prepare yourself for your weekly teaching assignment:

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s blessing upon you for the good of the students as you receive the Word of Life and pass it along to them.
2. Week by week during the course, read for yourself the weekly assignment and all the passages from Proverbs (and elsewhere in Scripture) that are mentioned in the lectures.
3. In addition to your reading for specific class preparation, challenge yourself to read through Proverbs weekly both during the time leading up to the class and while it is going on. You might be surprised at the connections you will see by the end of the course.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are

included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Tom Landry coached professional football's Dallas Cowboys for some three decades. But his remarkable career began years earlier, as a star player on the University of Texas football team. Before going to Dallas, Landry was an assistant coach of the New York Giants' championship teams of 1956 and 1957. Of that time, Landry said, "football was my whole life—it was my religion."

Despite his early success, Landry noted that something was lacking in his life. Through the study of Scripture, the Lord showed Landry a better way (from *The Concordia Pulpit for 1982* [St. Louis: CPH, 1981], 246–47).

Whether you feel like a success or a failure, this Life-Light course will show you a better way. It focuses on a biblical book that deserves much more attention than it often gets: Proverbs. No other Old Testament book addresses itself to human attitudes and insights for life quite like Proverbs. It tells us that any picture of life in which the Lord God has been left out, or relegated to a small part on the side, is desperately wrong. Proverbs shows us a better way: the way of wisdom. (1:1–2) "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel" are "for attaining wisdom."

1 Wisdom

The story is told of an atheist who kept a Bible in his desk drawer. His explanation? "That Book of Proverbs has so much wisdom in it." In purely secular terms, people respect wisdom. They realize that it is not mere knowledge of data. A person is wise who can discern how to deal with other people, conditions, or situations well. A wise person can correct what is wrong, get the best out of the worst, and judge with fairness and accuracy.

In some places Scripture speaks of wisdom as fairly ordinary. For example, those who made Aaron's priestly garments had wisdom (see Exodus 28:3). The Book of

Proverbs does not teach professional skills, but much of its wisdom is intensely oriented to the practicalities of life.

There is more, though. Wisdom can include God's Law. Or it can include relating with God and fitting into the scheme of His mighty acts.

Biblical "wisdom" ranges across all these aspects and still more besides, as we shall discover later. It teaches that God is at work in life's ordinary things. It sees God steadily and sees Him whole. It sees God in every aspect of life, in both good and bad.

At the time of Moses God guided His people's lives through detailed laws of holiness. At the time of Solomon and the other kings of Israel, God spoke to His people through "wisdom literature" like Proverbs, to guide them in the way of life. They could "see" something of the Lord and His ways in the historical books. They could "hear" from the prophets. But books like Proverbs helped them to *understand*.

Do we need understanding any less? Coach Landry would say no. We need wisdom perhaps more now than ever. We need to distinguish success from profit. We need to distinguish what we can do from what we ought to do. We need to focus on "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Philippians 4:8). Only divine wisdom can see the gems of goodness amid the glittering shards of destruction brought by sin.

2 "The Fear of the LORD"

In Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD" is called "the beginning of knowledge." This is the theme verse of Proverbs. A bit later, Proverbs 9:10 says, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

In the Book of Proverbs, "the fear of the LORD" is paralleled with "the knowledge of God" (2:5) or "knowledge of the Holy One" (9:10). It is the opposite of despising wisdom (1:7). Being wise in one's own eyes, hating knowledge, pride, arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech are all set in contrast to "the fear of the LORD," along with being devious, envying sinners, and hardening one's heart.

But what, precisely, does it mean to *fear* the Lord? To cower before Him and wish to escape from Him? *Fear*

certainly can have this meaning, sometimes called “slavelike fear.” Unquestionably, in the Book of Proverbs the Lord is one to be reckoned with.

The “fear of the LORD” is more than slavelike fear. It is “childlike.” The Bible associates “the fear of the LORD” with forgiveness and salvation:

Surely His *salvation* is near those who *fear* Him.” (Psalm 85:9)

“With You there is *forgiveness*; therefore You are *feared*.” (Psalm 130:4)

Proverbs extends this theme: (14:26–27) “He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.”

Sinners can have such confident fear of God only because of Jesus Christ. The people who first heard the proverbs had also heard about the coming Messiah who would be their Savior: Eve’s Offspring who would crush the devil’s head, the Seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, the Prophet like Moses who would bring a better message than that of Moses, the Sufferer whose hands and feet were pierced as He was forsaken by God, the Holy One whom God would not abandon to the grave, the Son of God (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:15–18; Psalm 22:1, 16; 16:10; 2:7). The fear of the Lord, taught by the Word of the Lord, sees God’s promise of salvation amid the displays of His power. The world may nod its head toward God’s glory and say, “Your Majesty!” The child of God, by contrast, bows his or her head and says, “My Majesty and my Savior.” Christ’s saving work forms the reason why the fear of the Lord can be the beginning of wisdom, not the token of death.

Our hearts fear God on account of sin. But because of God’s forgiveness and salvation in Christ our fear can be that of a child and heir, rather than that of a slave. It is the fear of a forgiven sinner.

A house fire trapped a little boy in his second-story bedroom. From outside, his father called, “Andy, jump out the window. I’ll catch you.” Through the smoke, the boy cried: “I can’t see you, Daddy.” His father replied, “That’s all right, son. I can see you. Jump!” The boy said, “Just don’t go away, Dad!” (Adapted from Donald L. Deffner, *Seasonal Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* [San Jose: Resource Publications, 1992], 141.)

Slavelike fear is the fear that God will come. Childlike fear is the fear that He will go away.

With childlike fear, Andy could go through his window, for he had an escape from the fire and safety in his dad’s arms. The Book of Proverbs says, (19:23) “The fear of the LORD leads to life.” With this fear we can go safely through the world, escaping its many dangers.

Conclusion

Through the last question on your study sheet you discovered that Proverbs is not one book written by Solomon but a collection of books probably written and collected by a number of people. Keep these various collections of proverbs in mind as you study. Also keep Solomon in mind as the chief author and collector. Look for contrasts between what Solomon wrote and what he did.

Although Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, he still stumbled and sinned. His warnings often echo his personal regrets. What parent hasn’t said “Don’t!” about something they did in their youth! The opening chapters of Proverbs read like a personal confession of this fallen king. When the wise men of Hezekiah combed through Solomon’s many sayings more than 200 years later to make their own collection, they left out his words about cedars and hyssop, animals and birds, reptiles and fish. But they had to include these wise words: (Proverbs 28:13–14) “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD.”

Through the study of God’s Word, Tom Landry also grasped these truths. His life—lived by God’s wisdom—inspired and encouraged his players and fans. It won him broad respect among believers and nonbelievers alike. These are some of the blessings that come with wisdom. But the greatest blessing is the Lord Himself, who is the first and the last. He hears our cry for wisdom and answers not in words alone but in person, the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through forgiveness in Christ we learn not just to fear the Lord but also to love Him. To fear Him is the beginning of wisdom. To love Him is the goal (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Concluding Activities

Make any necessary announcements. Distribute the enrichment magazine and encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 2.

The Way of Life and the Way of Death—Part 1

Proverbs 1:8–3:35

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. be able to contrast the way of wisdom with the way of folly as to their characteristics and their outcomes;
2. value the way of wisdom and want to avoid the way of folly.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 49.

For the Lecture Leader

Hearing God’s Word affects our living. But living can affect our hearing too. We can never improve upon God’s Word, so the effect of our living upon our hearing can turn out negative. Jesus spoke of the seed of God’s Word that falls among thorns. This picture “stands for those who hear, but as they go on in their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14).

The participants in this LifeLight course are probably all Christians. Still, they have a lot to learn from this week’s lesson as it contrasts the way of wisdom with the way of folly. You do too.

Hold your head up as you prepare and teach this week! For as enticing as the way of folly can be, the advantages and inducements of the way of wisdom are far better.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index), or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

A ship’s engine stopped running just as a big storm came blowing in. One woman anxiously ran up to the captain and asked, “Is there any danger?” He answered, “Madam, we must trust in God.” “Oh,” she moaned, “has it come to that?” (Donald L. Deffner, *Windows into the Lectionary* [San Jose: Resource Publications, 1996], xxi).

Forgetting or refusing to trust in the Lord is foolish. Trusting in Him is the way of the wise. One of the most important words in Proverbs is *derek*, usually translated “way” or “path.” It occurs 71 times in Proverbs and is applied to both the righteous and the wicked. As you read the first nine chapters of Proverbs, picture yourself at a fork in the road. On one pathway Folly beckons. On the other, Wisdom calls. The way of life and the way of death stretch out before you.

Chapters 1–7 of Proverbs contain 10 appeals or entreaties to follow the way of wisdom, in which the believer should walk each day. Proverbs constantly contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of fools. As one student of the book put it, “Every conceivable literary device is used to make the black appear jet black and the white, snow white; the wise man never concerns himself with grays.”

1 Becoming Wise: The Setting

The place to gain wisdom initially is in the home. Near the beginning of the Book of Proverbs, the first of the 10 exhortations to wisdom begins: (1:8) “Listen, my

son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching." Among the proverbs collected later in the book are these: (13:1) "A wise son heeds his father's instruction" and (15:5) "a fool spurns his father's discipline." Proverbs emphasizes the role of parents as teachers, in instruction and discipline and also by example.

In the home, wisdom can be instilled early on. When the reformer Martin Luther gave up celibate life by marrying and becoming a father, he began to consider anew the role of Christian parents and the learning children needed. He recognized how valuable the Book of Proverbs could be to families. He wrote of how wise Solomon "amid so many royal duties . . . still undertook to be a teacher, and particularly—as was most needful—to teach and train young people in the way they should act acceptably before God, according to the spirit, and wisely before the world, with body and possessions . . . This book, therefore, ought early to be impressed on the young people throughout the world and put into daily use and practice" (LW 35:262).

The young learn not only at home but also from their teachers. Sometimes a teacher in the ancient world referred to a student as "my son"; therefore some of these expressions in Proverbs may be the address of a teacher to a pupil instead of a parent to a child. In any case, the book takes it for granted that a child is going to have wise and diligent teachers. In Proverbs 5, a man who has fallen for a wicked woman looks back in regret years later, saying: (vv. 12–13) "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors" (see also Proverbs 15:12).

In our experience, teachers typically have textbooks. Even in antiquity, when actual books were rare, there was still a core of material to be passed on—as in a textbook today. "The sayings . . . of the wise" were handed down by memorization and repetition (Proverbs 1:6; see 22:17; 24:23). Similarly, Proverbs elsewhere refers to the "words of knowledge" (19:27; 23:12). However, "a proverb in the mouth of a fool," simply repeated but not understood and appreciated, is likened to "a lame man's legs that hang limp" and "a thornbush in a drunkard's hand" (26:7, 9). It is useless and even potentially harmful. The wise both remember and reflect upon wise words. Like Solomon, they pray for wisdom.

This can be done anywhere.

There are many opportunities to learn wisdom. As in Proverbs 1, so also in Proverbs 9, wisdom is anything but hidden. From the highest point in the city, the invitation of wisdom goes out (9:3; compare 1:20).

2 Warning: Enticement

A contest in England once asked what was the shortest way to travel from Liverpool to London. The winning answer was to travel with "good company."

God made humans social creatures. He made us to depend on one another and interact. But it is important to recognize that temptations can come to us through socializing. What we regard as "good company" can leave us in very bad places. A secular proverb tells of the effect of bad company on good morals. The Book of Proverbs teaches similarly: (13:20) "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."

At the beginning of Proverbs "my son" is warned that sinners should not make a fool of him. While the wise walk in God's way, fools do the opposite. The Book of Proverbs is filled with an awareness of sin. (20:9) "Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin'?" Obviously, no one can say so, even though some sinners are more open and notorious than others.

In Proverbs 1:11–14, notorious sinners plot to ambush and murder for financial gain. Their greed prevents them from seeing that "they waylay only themselves" (1:18). Birds are not so stupid as to walk into a fatal trap, but fools entangle themselves (1:17).

A word to the wise is sufficient. Ill-gotten gain "takes away the lives of those who get it" (1:19). Don't lose your wisdom and join them.

3 Warning: Don't Reject Wisdom

In the rest of Proverbs 1, wisdom is pictured as calling out to people in the most populated parts of a town: (v. 22) "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?" If they would have listened, (v. 23) "I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you." But they rejected her when she called and ignored all her advice. Wisdom retorts,

(v. 26) “I in turn will laugh at your disaster.” Elsewhere in Scripture, (Psalm 37:13) “the Lord laughs at the wicked, for He knows their day is coming.”

It may be difficult to picture the Lord and wisdom taking delight in the slapstick fall of the wicked. Taking pleasure in the pain of others seems inappropriate, since a later Proverb states, (24:17–18) “Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn His wrath away from him.”

However, we should remember that the Lord looks beyond the ridiculous circumstances fools create for themselves. The Lord sees the lessons people learn through such falls and, no doubt, He smiles. As the Lord explained to Ezekiel, (33:11) “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn!”

Proverbs 1:29—Wisdom is available to all, but only on particular terms. People must fear the Lord to have wisdom. Verses 30–31—Those who turn from the Lord and His wisdom will experience the bitter end of foolishness. Verse 32—Fools destroy themselves. Verse 33—Wisdom concludes, “Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

4 You Need Wisdom

Chapter 2 contains an appeal to follow wisdom. The first verse calls attention to God’s “commands,” referring to all His teachings (see Matthew 28:20). A person is to treasure these words and search for wisdom as for a valuable commodity (see Matthew 6:33). Proverbs 2 announces, *if one seeks wisdom based on God’s Word, then* (1) (v. 5) “you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God,” (2) (v. 9) “you will understand what is right and just,” (3) (vv. 12–15) you will be saved by wisdom from the ways of the wicked (vv. 16–19) adulteresses, and (4) (vv. 20–22) “you will walk in the ways of good men.”

As mentioned a moment ago, wisdom is available to all but only on particular terms. Proverbs 2 reinforces this point. Verse 6 says, “the LORD gives wisdom.” Similarly, the New Testament says, (James 1:5) “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

God gives wisdom. If He didn’t, no one could be wise. For “the wise man is as little wise in and of himself as the righteous man is righteous in and of himself” (O. Weber, *Bibelkunde des Alten Testaments*, 9th ed., tr. Martin H. Franzmann [Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1961], 330). As we have seen, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord—that is, fear tempered by faith in God’s grace and mercy. Such faith is a gift.

One of the paradoxes of Proverbs is that people can and should pursue wisdom, but finally wisdom remains God’s gift. As we pursue wisdom through the study of God’s Word, He gives us wisdom first by giving us Christ. Though wisdom gives much practical advice, remember that such insight of itself does a person little good! Proverbs has more than this life in view, as Solomon says: (15:24) “The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave.”

This is just the reason Christ walked among us, to seek and to save the lost and grant them life everlasting.

5 The Appeal in Chapter 3

Proverbs 3 is the third appeal. After a brief introduction emphasizing the importance of wisdom’s teaching, there are several commands, each two verses long, centering on submission to God.

One of the most famous passages in Proverbs is in verses 5–6, which forms a good commentary on the “fear of the LORD” without mentioning that phrase. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” When the well-known missionary David Livingston was asked how he could do his work in Africa, he responded by quoting these verses. The trusting relationship with God that they depict is not something sinners do by their own reason or strength. It is brought about by God Himself. He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, that is, not counting our sins against us. He sent the message of reconciliation into the world through His church (2 Corinthians 5:19–20).

Fearing the Lord, the wise do not consider themselves wise. (Proverbs 3:9) They honor Him with their wealth, for He gives everything. (Verse 8) He takes care of their bodily sustenance, and (v. 12) does not omit discipline. The New Testament quotes verses 11 and 12, underscor-

ing the point that the LORD's discipline of His faithful is a father's discipline (Hebrews 12:5–6). (Hebrews 12:8) "If you are not disciplined . . . , then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." Such discipline is intended not to break our faith, so to speak, but to make it. We Christians can receive God's discipline as that of a father because His Son, Jesus Christ, died and rose for us as our Brother.

Proverbs 3:13 focuses on the basis for a life of submission to God: wisdom. The word *blessed* occurs as the first word in verse 13 and the last in verse 18. This device marks off a section. The word *blessing* would remind the Israelites of a famous biblical contrast: the blessings and curses God promised in the covenant. To be blessed meant more than to be happy. The Hebrew word for "bless," *barak*, literally means "to bend the knee." A Hebrew would bless his or her master by kneeling in adoration. Hebrew masters blessed their servants by laying their hands on them and telling them the benefits of their relationship. The blessing of Jacob and Esau by their father Isaac (Genesis 27) gives a perfect example of this process. The father-son relationship depicted in Proverbs 1–7 corresponds beautifully with this understanding of blessing. By teaching wisdom, the father bestows on his son the means by which he will receive not just material benefits, but most important, the benefits of God's covenant. Those who have wisdom are indeed blessed, for wisdom is better than wealth (3:13–16). Reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, 3:18 calls wisdom a "tree of life." Wisdom gives life, as well as riches and honor (3:16). Personified wisdom has qualities of God Himself. In fact, "by wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations" (3:19).

The rest of Proverbs 3 discusses the manner in which the committed life manifests itself. (Verses 21–26) It translates into security for oneself. (Verses 27–32) It also results in wise treatment of others.

There are two ways, those of wisdom and of folly. Verse 33—The Lord blesses the one but curses the other. Even as wisdom laughs at the disaster of fools (see 1:22), so the Lord (3:34) "mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble." This verse is quoted by both Peter (1 Peter 5:5) and James (4:6). Peter cites it to warn against pride, while James revels more in its promise of grace.

Conclusion

Like the wise captain in the introduction, Solomon urges you to trust in God. It has "come to that," for whether you see skies that are blue or pitch black, the Lord urges you to live by His wisdom. Solomon began his reign with wisdom. He experienced excellent conditions for economic growth, peace, and glory during his reign. But despite these good conditions his life ended up on the rocks. The siren song of folly and the rocks of sin and temptation threaten you no less. Even though you steer your course in the way of wisdom today, folly will still be there to entice you tomorrow.

Trust in the LORD. With holy wisdom and righteous purpose He will guide you safely. Each day He will meet you at the crossroads of life and point you toward the way of the cross, the way of life under the blessing of His cross. He knows the paths of righteousness like no other. He walked that way some 2,000 years ago and has led millions of other people since. (Proverbs 3:5–6) "Trust in the LORD will all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

Concluding Activities

Make any necessary announcements. Ask whether participants are enjoying the enrichment magazine. Continue to encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 3.