



EXPLORATION

Proverbs 14:8-15

Central
TRUTH

Following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

- 8 The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way,
but the folly of fools is deceiving.
- 9 Fools mock at the guilt offering,
but the upright enjoy acceptance.
- 10 The heart knows its own bitterness,
and no stranger shares its joy.
- 11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed,
but the tent of the upright will flourish.
- 12 There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death.
- 13 Even in laughter the heart may ache,
and the end of joy may be grief.
- 14 The backslider in heart will be filled with the fruit
of his ways,
and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.
- 15 The simple believes everything,
but the prudent gives thought to his steps.

*Prepare for your group
meeting by reading the
passage two times.*

Talk it Out

.01 WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU DO TO SEEK HAPPINESS?

.02 DO THESE THINGS ALWAYS PROVIDE THE HAPPINESS YOU HOPE THEY WILL? WHY OR WHY NOT?



This week's **FOCUS**

All people want to be happy. We go to great lengths, in fact, to seek happiness. Some people think that if they could just get the person they like to like them back, then they would find happiness. Others think that happiness comes from being popular, respected, or successful. Still others look to entertainment—video games, books, or TV—to make them happy. While each of these things can certainly be a source of happiness in our lives, none of them are everlasting. Today we will see that God offers a deeper, more fulfilling type of happiness to those who look to Him for the strength they need to walk in wisdom. We will also see the dangers of rejecting God's wisdom. Following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

Explore

OPTIONS

.01 If I had ...

Have your group sit in a circle. If your group is larger than 10–12 students, consider breaking up into smaller groups. Bring a Nerf ball or other soft ball and give it to one of the students in the circle. That student will say, “If I had _____” I would be happy.” In other words, they will share something that would make them happy. Tell them to keep their answers appropriate to your group but stress that there are no wrong answers. They could give simple, small answers like “a Snickers bar” or deeper answers like “world peace.” The student that answers will then throw the ball to another student in the circle who will do the same, throwing the ball to another student, and so on. After every student has had a chance to answer at least once, ask your group as a whole to share with you whether the thing they mentioned would bring lasting happiness. Point out that today we are going to see that following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

.02 How You'd Respond

Prior to your group meeting, compile a list of annoying or frustrating situations your students might face. Examples could include: you get a bad grade on a test you studied really hard for, someone destroys the house you worked really hard on in Minecraft, your team loses a big match or competition, you wake up with gum stuck in your hair, you spill tomato sauce all over your outfit, etc. After sharing each, call on a student to share how they would respond to this annoying situation or circumstance. Ask students which of these things could have been prevented and which could not. While frustration is part of life in a broken world, God promises us that we can avoid a lot of (not all) frustration in life by seeking wisdom from Him. Today we will see that following God's wisdom leads to joy.



CONVERSATION

Read Proverbs 14:8,15.

Take note of the unique order in which we will be studying Proverbs 14:8-15 today. This is due to the fact that this section appears to be a collection of wise sayings that are not necessarily built off of one another in order. We will, therefore, be studying those verses that relate to one another thematically. In this case, verses 8 and 15 both contrast the wise with the fool.

.03 COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE WISE PERSON WITH THE FOOL IN THESE TWO VERSES. WHAT DOES EACH THINK ABOUT AND NOT THINK ABOUT?



Cultural Context: *The way that Proverbs calls us to think about our attitude and actions is as counter cultural today as it was in Solomon's day. For more information, see the Cultural Context note in the Commentary.*

.04 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WATCH YOUR STEPS AND CONSIDER YOUR WAYS? WHAT KEEPS US FROM DOING THESE THINGS?

According to verses 8 and 15, the wise person and the foolish person are quite different. The wise person is careful, thoughtful, and patient, while the fool is careless, reckless, and impatient. These verses indicate that fools are prideful—they rarely give thought to how their actions will impact anyone other than themselves. They don't ask for advice because they think too highly of themselves. The wise person, however, is always considering whether their actions would glorify God and benefit their neighbors. The way of wisdom laid out in these two verses isn't particularly popular today. We live in a culture that doesn't exactly value nuanced, careful thinking. If we are honest, many of us would rather just do what we think is best. Sometimes it just feels like more work than it's worth to consider the impact of our actions on others. Jesus, however, is the greatest example of someone who lived wisely. He always acted out of a desire to glorify God and to serve the people around Him. Challenge your students to consider whether these two considerations factor into their decision making. Following Jesus opens our eyes to the reality that the world does not revolve around us. This is actually good news because as Jesus calls us to follow Him, He invites us to a life of meaningful work and eternal impact.



Discipleship Moment: *Consider sharing with your students about a time when you failed to consider the impact of your actions. You did what you wanted to do without thinking about how your actions would affect the people around you. Highlight the importance of thinking about how our actions will impact our neighbors and encourage your students to learn from your mistakes.*

Leader Pack / ITEM 9: For more on what it looks like to seek wisdom from God, see **The Wise and the Fool** poster.



COMMENTARY

Proverbs 14:8,15

8. Solomon contrasted the wise and the foolish, characterizing the wise as *sensible* and the foolish as gullible. Some translations use the word *prudent*. Solomon was urging God’s people to be prudent in their thoughts and actions. The word prudent often conjures up notions of being a killjoy, unloving, and unconcerned. In reality, prudence involves thinking through an opportunity or a challenge carefully before coming to a decision. A person who practices prudence would be referred to as *sensible*.



CULTURAL CONTEXT

The primary focus of Proverbs is to inform how its readers think and live. This implies that we don’t possess perfect wisdom already—we need wisdom from God because we are sinners who often fail to give careful thought to our actions. People in Solomon’s day faced the same temptation we face today—to make decisions based on what will make us happier, wealthier, more influential, or more powerful. While this might seem sensible to most, Proverbs confronts us with the counter cultural notion that the only life worth living is the one dedicated to God’s glory and the good of the world.

15. Here Solomon contrasted the prudent with the foolish and gullible: *the inexperienced one believes anything, but the sensible one watches his steps*. People can easily be enticed by the next new, shiny thing that comes along. Solomon wanted God’s people to consider their decisions and actions in light of the precepts and principles of God’s Word. He wanted them to avoid being open to ill-considered fads and false gods. Experience can be a great teacher if coupled with the wise counsel of God. But experience without God’s wisdom can cause a person to be gullible and spiritually duped by the many temptations of the world. The wise person seeks to know, understand, and apply the knowledge of God to every life decision.



CONVERSATION

continued

Read Proverbs 14:9-10, 13-14.

Verses 10 and 13 both deal with the reality of grief in a fallen world. Verses 9 and 14 deal with the how we relate to and interact with other people.

.05 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAKE REPARATIONS (V. 9)? WHAT DOES THE FACT THAT WE NEED TO DO THIS TELL US ABOUT OURSELVES?

.06 WHY IS MAKING REPARATIONS AN IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE OF A CHRIST FOLLOWER? HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO LOYALTY (V. 14)?

To make reparations simply means to make things right. It involves making amends for the wrong one person has done to another. For example, if you borrowed a friend's bike and broke it, making reparations would involve paying to have their bike fixed. Or if you hurt someone's feelings because of something you said about them that wasn't true, making reparations would involve setting the record straight and telling the truth. The fact that fools mock those who make reparations tells us that the wise recognize that from time to time they are going to wrong others. When this happens, followers of Christ should be the first to admit their wrong actions and make every effort to make the situation right again.

.07 WHAT DO VERSES 10 AND 13 TELL US ABOUT GRIEF?

.08 WHAT DO VERSES 10 AND 13 TELL US ABOUT HOW WE SHOULD INTERACT WITH THOSE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING GRIEF?

Verse 10 gives dignity to those who are experiencing grief by warning us that no one can fully share in the joy or bitterness of another's experience. In other words, we shouldn't tell those who find themselves suffering loss or overcome with grief to just "pull yourself together." Jesus Himself wept with Mary and Martha at the loss of their brother (John 11:35).

Leader Pack / ITEM 8: Part of what it means to seek wisdom is to understand the delicate nature of human emotion. Verses 10 and 13 speak to the reality of grief, giving dignity to those who are suffering. For more examples of how Proverbs deals with the subject of emotions, see the **Emotions in Proverbs** poster.



COMMENTARY

Proverbs 14:9-10, 13-14

9. Solomon contrasted fools who mock at *making reparation* with the *upright*. The Hebrew word translated *making reparation* can have different nuances of meaning, but the primary usage is as a designation for the guilt or trespass offering (see Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1-10). The *upright* demonstrate a willingness to make a peace offering or to repay others when needed. He referred to this posture of peace as *goodwill*. Making reparation recalls Old Testament law, which was exceedingly clear regarding the need to make things right with those we sin against. For example, a man who cheated, stole, or lied had to make it up to the individual who had been victimized by his actions. Further, he had to present a guilt or trespass offering to the priest. (See Lev. 6:1-7; 7:1.) The contrast Solomon was making in verse 9 was actually the contrast between contentment and discontentment. Foolishness will lead to discontentment, but wise living leads to contentment. This was Paul's point in Philippians 4:10-14, where he spoke of being content in Christ. Contentment in Him means that we can be content *in* our circumstances without being content *with* the circumstances.

10,13. Because appearances can be deceiving, no one really knows what another person is feeling in his or her heart. Solomon declared that the person who appears to be happy may actually be bitter. We also know that laughter is not to be confused with joy. The Hebrew word translated *sad* can also mean "pain." A person's laughter can mask his pain. That's why Solomon noted that *even in laughter a heart may be sad, and joy may end in grief*. Pursuing godly wisdom results in joy—a genuine joy that comes from an intimate relationship with God. Such joy holds up under the trials of life. Consequently, as believers, we don't need to wear masks to conceal our pain and grief. Instead, we can count on the joy that comes in our walk with God to sustain us even when our hearts ache. Grief awaits all of us, but our joy in Christ will hold us up in times of grief. The desire to be happy is common to all people. But how a person defines happiness makes all the difference in the world. Real, lasting joy comes from knowing and doing the will of God; it comes from being in the center of God's purposes for one's life even when that purpose may take a person through the valley of the shadow of death. (See Ps. 23:4.)

14. The Hebrew word translated *disloyal one* is related to the concept of backsliding. It suggests someone who begins as a follower of the Lord and then turns back. It is the person who takes steps on the path of God's wisdom but returns to a lifestyle guided by his own desires. He *will get what his conduct deserves*. On the other hand, a *good one* (a person who walks in God's wisdom) will get *what his deeds deserve*. This is similar to what Paul said about sowing and reaping. (See Gal. 6:7-10.) The apostle wrote that true contentment is not only found in God, but there is also a deep sense of peace that comes from a clear conscience. A clear conscience comes from avoiding what is sinful and embracing what is righteous. When a person's conscience is clear, that person can be at peace with God. In other words, contentment not only comes from being right with God but from being on the right side of wise decision-making. Living out God's wisdom brings the true reward of lasting contentment.



CONVERSATION

continued

Verse 13 illustrates the complex nature of human emotions, giving dignity to those who experience the vast array of emotions that come from living in a fallen world. Following Jesus requires respecting people and the emotions they are feeling. It involves striving to understand people even though we will never completely understand how they feel. We do these things so that we might better love people in the middle of whatever they are currently experiencing.

Read Proverbs 14:11-12.

.09 WHAT DO THESE TWO VERSES WARN US AGAINST? WHY DO WE NEED THIS WARNING?



Historical Context: *What does verse 11 tell us about the wicked and the upright? Why does it refer to the house of one and the tent of the other? For more information, see the Historical Context note in the Commentary.*

.10 WHY ARE WE OFTEN TEMPTED TO RELY ON OURSELVES RATHER THAN THE LORD WHEN IT COMES TO THE PLANS AND DECISIONS WE MAKE? HOW CAN WE FIGHT THIS TENDENCY?

The implication of verses 11-12 is that human beings have a tendency toward pride. We tend to think that we don't need to seek wisdom from God or from the wise people He has placed in our lives when it comes to making plans or decisions. Verse 12 warns us, in no uncertain terms, that such a path leads to death. In other words, pride and selfishness lead to our own harm and the harm of the people around us. Once again we see that the way of wisdom is the way of humility—admitting our own lack of understanding and our need for God's direction and grace. The more willing we are to admit our need for Christ, the more poised we will be to live for His glory and contribute meaningfully to the good of those around us.

Leader Pack / ITEM 7: This might be a good time to define “righteousness” for your students as it is a synonym for the kind of upright living verse 11 calls us to. See the **12 Words in Proverbs** poster for more information.



COMMENTARY

Proverbs 14:11-12

11. In this section Solomon was using a literary device known as a *chiasmus*. When writers employed this literary device, they wrote the main idea or point in the center of the passage instead of at the beginning or the end. The verses before and after the central point helped to develop it. The main point of this section in Proverbs, therefore, is in verses 11-12. Solomon pronounced judgment on those who ignore God's wisdom and blessing on those who follow God's wisdom.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Tent" and "house" in verse 12 refer to one's entire family. The wicked are referred to as dwelling in a house and the upright in tents. This is a reminder that those who appear to be blessed may actually be under God's judgment and vice versa. In ancient Israel, a family's name was deeply valued (Gen. 19:32; Num. 27:1-4) and according to verse 11, it is the conduct before God of each family that determines its ultimate end. While we do not value names in the same way ancient Israelites did, we need the reminder to submit to God's wisdom and live in a manner that honors Him.

In verse 11 Solomon contrasted the path of the wicked with that of the righteous: *The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish*. Notice that the wicked have what seems to be a more permanent dwelling place—a *house*. The righteous, on the other hand, have only what appears to be a temporary dwelling place—a *tent*. Yet it is the wicked who *will be destroyed* while the *upright will flourish*. In other words, God's people thrive even though it appears they have little according to worldly standards.

12. Again, in verse 12 Solomon makes a contrast. Godly wisdom and joy do not always line up with what the world thinks is wise or with how the world thinks true happiness is obtained.

Some people depend on their own ingenuity or shrewdness to guide them as they choose the way they want to live. They make decisions only on the basis of their opinions, ambitions, or prejudices. They ponder the options before them and make a decision that seems to them to be the right one. Then they set out on the path that seems to make sense to them. But when they set out on a path without being wise in the Lord, they may end up where they did not intend to go. Without the wisdom that comes from God, they will not have the wisdom they need to make the best choices.

What matters most is knowing and doing the will of God. At times following God's will leads to days of peace. At other times knowing and doing the will of God can lead to great sacrifice and difficulty. But what matters is knowing and doing what is right by the Lord as revealed in His Word—not by what we think is right.

CENTRAL TRUTH

Following God's wisdom leads to joy, while failing to do so leads to grief.

NOW WHAT?



.11 HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE JOY OF OBEDIENCE?

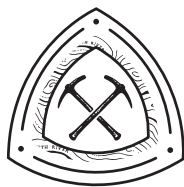
.12 HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE GRIEF OF DISOBEDIENCE? WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EACH?

.13 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT THE EMOTIONS OF THE PEOPLE AROUND US?

.14 HOW CAN WE FIGHT THE TEMPTATION TO DO WHAT SEEMS RIGHT TO US?



The **Student Leader Pack** is available for purchase on lifeway.com/explorethebible. It includes valuable posters that are referenced throughout the Leader Guide, Family Connection guides that equip families to discuss the Bible together on-the-go, a Midweek expository verse-by-verse study of 1–2 Peter which complements this study, and PowerPoint templates with graphics from the quarter study to help prepare slides for teaching.



Daily DEVOTIONS

Challenge your students to choose five days this week to set aside time to dig deeper into God's Word in the devotions included in their Daily Discipleship Guides (item 005646504). These devotions are perforated so that your students can tear them out if you prefer to hold on to their Daily Discipleship Guides for them. A summary of their devotions is provided below so you can review what they will be studying on their own.

Day One

**PROVERBS
14:8,15**

These two verses compare and contrast the way the wise person and foolish person each think about the path they're on. The wise are patient and give careful thought to their choices before acting. They want to make sure their actions glorify God and don't cause harm to themselves or their neighbors. Foolish people, on the other hand, are impatient and gullible, rushing into decisions and believing anything they're told without thought.

Day Two

**PROVERBS
14:9,14**

God cares deeply about how we relate to other people. Reparation means to make things right. Wise people know that when they do wrong, they need to not only apologize, but to also do everything they can to fix their mistake and make things better for the person they wronged. They know that in the end, God will honor their good actions.

Day Three

**PROVERBS
14:10,13**

Sometimes a person can seem happy due to how they act and speak, while deep down they are struggling with sadness, fear, or anger. These verses teach us that the emotions we share with others and the emotions we feel aren't always the same thing, and likewise, we never truly know what's going on in another person's heart. Even our joy can be difficult to fully explain to others in a way they will fully understand.

Day Four

**PROVERBS
14:11-12**

As human beings, we tend to think that we don't need to turn to God or other people for advice. We like to solve our own problems and do things our own way. These verses say that this path leads to death and destruction. The way of wisdom involves having the humility to recognize that we don't have all the answers and that we need God's understanding and guidance.

Day Five

**PROVERBS
12:16-22**

The way of wisdom also involves using words wisely. An old children's saying goes, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." According to these verses, however, unwise words can and do hurt both the person speaking and those toward whom the words are directed. Just like every other part of our lives, our words should be used to honor God and treat others well.



Challenge TO LEADERS

Memorize.

Proverbs 12:22

Connect.

Midway through the following week, send out a group message to your students encouraging them to complete the Daily Devotions. You might even include a note about something you learned or gained from your time in the Word as you have followed along.