STUDENTS

A 31 DAY GUIDE
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THE PROVERBS DEVOTIONAL

PROVERBS 1
THE FOUNDATION OF WISDOM

> ***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;***
> ***fools despise wisdom and instruction.***
> ***Proverbs 1:7***

The book of Proverbs begins by establishing its own purpose, aiming to convince the reader of the value of pursuing wisdom. The first six verses list the many benefits of studying Solomon's proverbs, but the following verse is the true heart of both this chapter and the book of Proverbs itself:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

When describing a healthy relationship with God, most of us wouldn't use fear as our key word. It might be love, grace, salvation, or friendship—something that signals closeness or affection. In our culture, fear carries a negative tone that we connect to monsters, catastrophes, and horror movies. But the Bible's use of fear carries a deeper meaning.

Each of us can probably imagine a coach or teacher that you would fear: irrationally demanding, erratically unpredictable, incapable of being pleased or known. That isn't the kind of fear being described in verse 7. God is a loving Father, a faithful King, a Savior who sacrificed his own life for us. Imagine instead the greatest coach you've ever known—the kind of leader whose knowledge you would give anything to gain, whose wisdom would transform your ability, whose strategies could change everything you do for the better. A coach with the kind of championship-winning, dynasty-building, trophy-case-filling aptitude that draws the best of the best to him as long as they're willing to learn his ways and follow his program. His players aren't afraid of him, but they fear missing out on the benefits and opportunities that interaction with him brings. Their fear more closely resembles devotion.

Our God isn't just a coach in our lives. He's so much more than that, but he isn't less than that. He has the best strategies and ideas for how to live our lives. While Solomon was revered for his wisdom, Jesus described his own wisdom as even greater (Matthew 12:42). He was the wisest man who ever lived – don't you think we could learn something? Let his inspired word in Proverbs shape your thinking over the next 31 days, devoting yourself to his wisdom.

1. In the next section of the chapter (v. 8-19), we see how our sinful culture tries to call us away from the way of wisdom. Most of our friends are probably not trying to convince us to join them in armed robbery and murder, like we see in this passage, but **what are some ways that you are being tempted to stray from God's commands? How are those temptations just as dangerous to your heart and future?**

PROVERBS 1
THE FOUNDATION OF WISDOM

2. At the end of chapter 1 (v. 20-33), Wisdom calls out to the "simple" – Proverbs' term for fools. They refuse to listen, content to live in ignorance and despising God's ways. **What efforts are you making to pursue the wisdom of the Lord? How might committing to a daily study like this one help you to align your thinking with his word?**

3. Godly knowledge and wisdom is based on a fear of the Lord – a reverence, trust, and devotion that doesn't want to miss out on his strategies for life. **What are you fearing right now? In these uncertain days, how can our fear of the Lord help us to live courageously?**

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7

PRAYER

God of Wisdom, may we see the value of knowing you. All of our best strategies for life pale in comparison to your universe-building, life-sustaining knowledge. We trust you with our moments, our days, our futures. Help us to turn to you for wisdom rather than the voices of the culture. Encourage and strengthen us with your Spirit as we continue to seek you when everything else in our lives feels uncertain and frightening. Thank you for being Emmanuel – the God who is with us.

PROVERBS 2
WHY CHOOSE WISDOM?

> ***For the Lord gives wisdom;***
> ***from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.***
> ***Proverbs 2:6***

Computer programming, at its most simplistic level, is the process of creating a series of IF/THEN statements. This plays out in the way we utilize these devices—IF you touch an app on your home screen, THEN the app opens; IF you ask Alexa to play a song, THEN the song will play. When there's a problem with the programming, it's obvious. Imagine choosing to open your phone's camera app, but your email opens instead; or if hitting the Delete button on that bad selfie unfortunately sent it to everyone in your Contacts instead.

Our devices can usually be counted on to carry out their programming reliably: IF we choose the right input, THEN the predicted action will occur—and the way of wisdom is even more trustworthy. Look at the use of the word IF in the first four verses of Proverbs 2. Each of these statements is description of an active pursuit of wisdom, insight, knowledge, and understanding – all synonyms in this book that simply describe an awareness of the right way to live. Solomon challenges his son to put all his effort into gaining this, even describing it as a search for hidden treasures. And he promises that IF you pursue wisdom wholeheartedly, there will be results: THEN you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

We can trust in the reliability of the search. IF we seek wisdom, THEN we will find it. But it's always a choice: will we seek the knowledge of God? This is the same dilemma placed before Adam and Eve in the Garden—would they trust in God's wisdom as to the right way to live, or would they eat the fruit in order to seek their own knowledge of good and evil? Each day the choice is before us, and Solomon cries out to his son, and all of us, to seek the hidden treasure of God's wisdom—for in him is the only source of the wisdom that gives life.

1. Read down through the rest of the chapter, looking for the various results that Solomon says will come from seeking the wisdom of God. Some of them will start with THEN. **What benefits result from pursuing an awareness of God's way of living? Who do you know that is experiencing the kind of life that Solomon says is the result of seeking wisdom?**

PROVERBS 2
WHY CHOOSE WISDOM?

2. Some people might think that following God's way means that nothing bad will ever happen to you or that God will give you all the things you want. But the blessings of wisdom here have nothing to do with material benefits or deliverance from suffering; instead, Solomon praises wisdom's ability to help us avoid making our own bad choices. **What kinds of temptations are described in this chapter that wisdom will allow us to escape? What temptations are you facing right now where God's wisdom could guide you?**

3. Look at v. 20-22. In the Garden of Eden, God made a similar promise: IF they chose to trust his wisdom, THEN life and blessing would abound; IF they chose their own way, THEN the result would be death and destruction. Adam and Eve's sin truly cut them off not only from the Garden, but from the presence of God himself. **In what ways are you choosing your own wisdom over God's wisdom today? What would it look like if you decided to pursue knowledge of God as a life-transforming treasure?**

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7

PRAYER

Only Wise God, open our eyes to the worth of knowing you, the only place to find truth and insight. Help us to seek your ways and not our own. Thank you for the treasure of your wisdom—may we give our greatest efforts to seeking you.

PROVERBS 3
THE HERMENEUTIC OF WISDOM

> ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart,***
> ***and do not lean on your own understanding.***
> ***In all your ways acknowledge him,***
> ***and he will make straight your paths.***
> ***Proverbs 3:5-6***

We've been learning a lot of new technical terms these days—social distancing, incubation period, community transmission—so today we're going to talk about one more: *hermeneutics*. This odd word simply means the study of correct methods of interpreting the Bible. Think of a hermeneutic as the lens through which we look at God's Word in order to see it clearly. And in the same way that our glasses will have different lens depending on how we're using them—seeing far away or seeing close up—we will use different hermeneutics for different kinds of texts. Whereas we believe that the Bible is one big story of God's work to redeem his people, it is also a distinct collection of books written by different authors, at different times, for different purposes, and in different styles. And let me just tell you, *style matters*.

How we read is always affected by *what* we read. Your hermeneutic, or method for understanding, for reading your science textbook will differ from how you read your text messages or even an article from the New York Times—your goals, expectations, and purpose will shift depending on the text's style. While there are many different styles found in the Bible, we want to focus on two here: *promises* and *proverbs*. When we find a *promise* of God in the Scripture, we can completely trust that it will come to pass. When God vowed to never flood the earth again or when Jesus assured the disciples of his eventual return, we can know that God guarantees this future event or action. In contrast, *proverbs* should be read simply as general rules for the way the world works.

We tend to have problems when we read *proverbs* with a *promise* lens, assuming that God is obligated to bring these results about for each of us personally. It's true that negative consequences are generally the result of a poor decision; positive consequences tend to follow wise choices. However, these truths can become heartbreaking when seen as universal. Suffering often has nothing to do with our choices. Being wealthy or #blessed is impacted by many more factors than our personal behavior. Let's read these proverbs with the proper hermeneutic today—as wise principles for living that can guide our choices. When we trust in God's wisdom rather than our own, we have the security of knowing that our paths will always lead us directly into his will for our lives. And there is nowhere more satisfying to be.

1. Proverbs 3 talks about many benefits from following the Lord's commands and living with wisdom; look through the chapter and see how many you can find. **What difference can it make when we read these as promises rather than proverbs? How might this distorted hermeneutic distort our view of God and his care for his children?**

PROVERBS 3
THE HERMENEUTIC OF WISDOM

2. This chapter also reminds us that God is the true source of wisdom. **What are some verses you see that express that truth? In what ways are you tempted to lean on your own understanding? Why is it sometimes difficult to believe that God truly knows what is best in our ever-changing world?**

3. There are several verses in this chapter that describe the ways in which wisdom impacts our relationships: with our parents, our neighbors, our enemies, and God himself. **Which of these principles for living could you apply to your life this week? What would it look like to acknowledge God in all your ways even when everything in life feels out of whack?**

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7

PRAYER

Father God, whose wisdom created the world and guides our every step, help us to trust you even when our path is dark and uncertain. Give us eyes to see you clearly in the wisdom of your Word and the correct lens to understand it well. We want to acknowledge you in all our ways, rather than leaning on our own understanding. Thank you for your patience and grace when we struggle. Give us the strength to trust you more each day.

PROVERBS 4
A FATHER'S WISDOM

> ***But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,***
> ***which shines brighter and brighter until full day.***
> ***The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;***
> ***they do not know over what they stumble.***
> ***Proverbs 4:18-19***

What do your parents want for you more than anything else in the world? Most parents want nothing but the best for their children: comfort and character, education and experiences, health and happiness. But as hard as your parents may try, they can't always give you the things that they most desire for you—either because their circumstances make it impossible, or because some desires can only be personally achieved. Your parents can't sit in class with you, build your friendships, or play your sport for you. But none of that changes the depth of their desires for your good.

In Proverbs 4, we see a father's deepest desire for his sons, building on the foundation of his father's desire for him. These two fathers never mention wealth, fame, education, or strength. All of their attention is laser-focused on one goal for their sons: **get wisdom**. But these fathers know that true wisdom never stands alone. When we pursue wisdom, righteousness will follow—for while wisdom is *knowing* what is right and good, righteousness is *doing* what is right and good. If we seek insight into God's ways, he will help us to not only know them but also to love them and do them. As we grow in wisdom, we will grow in righteousness. And any of the other desires that your parents have for you pale in comparison to a life marked by righteousness and wisdom.

Verses 18-19 paint a picture of two starkly different paths: the righteous way of God's wisdom and the wicked way of man's wisdom. The righteous may only have a faint light to see by when they first begin to pursue God's wisdom, but continuing to follow leads to a deeper, clearer understanding all along the way. When we pursue our own way instead, the path will only take us into deeper and deeper darkness. No Ivy League education, YouTube fame, or Bill Gates wealth will satisfy us on that road. Many of you have bulldozer parents who will do almost anything to help you achieve your goals, while some may feel that your parents are either incapable or unwilling to help you succeed. Our great hope is that everyone who has placed their faith in Jesus has a Father who has already sacrificed his greatest treasure to meet your greatest needs. In this chapter, we hear the desire of his heart for his children: get wisdom! Walk in righteousness! *Ponder the path of your feet—for on his path, all your ways will be sure. (v.26)*

1. When we think of our Father's deepest desire for us, our first guess might not be wisdom—most of us would probably answer that he wants us to have a relationship with him. These two desires are not mutually exclusive, for knowing God is the only true source of wisdom. **What does it look like to pursue wisdom by growing our relationship with God? What could you do today to know him more?**

PROVERBS 4
A FATHER'S WISDOM

2. The father in this chapter wants his sons to grow in wisdom above all else. **What would you guess are your parents' deepest desires for you? What do you most deeply want out of life? What might need to change if you chose to align your desires with what God wants most for you?**

3. Proverbs 4 points out the difference between two roads: wisdom and righteousness vs. wickedness and foolishness. **What darkness have you experienced as a result of following your own way? How could your life look different if you chose instead to follow God's ways?**

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7

PRAYER

Good, Good Father—help us to follow your path. We need your wisdom, your strength, and your courage, for on our own we will always walk in darkness. Shine the light of your Son on us so that we might see your way clearly. Help us to guard our hearts and keep our eyes fixed on you. May our desires be transformed daily until they match yours.

PROVERBS 5
A WARNING OF WISDOM

> ***For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord,***
> ***and he ponders all his paths.***
> ***The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,***
> ***and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.***
> ***Proverbs 5:21-22***

If you saw a child about to run into the street, would you shout to warn them about an oncoming car? If an elderly neighbor told you about the Nigerian prince emailing them, would you make them aware of the scam? If your friend was about to eat the school cafeteria's mystery-meat sloppy joes, would you yank the tray out of their hands? In Proverbs 5, we see the father's counsel from the previous chapters shift from encouragement to a warning against danger.

In this example, his sons are being warned against the temptations of a forbidden woman. But it wouldn't have to be this exact scenario—each reader should wisely apply these warnings to our own circumstances. What are those temptations that are so deadly that you, like Joseph (Genesis 39), need to simply escape? There are times to resist temptation and times to flee; wisdom is needed to know the difference. In each of our lives, we will encounter people, places, and situations that we do not need to continue to visit when the strength of its temptation becomes clear. The consequences in our lives are simply too high—*her feet go down to death.* (v. 5)

But how do we tend to respond when we are warned against temptation in our lives? I imagine that each of us could look back with regret, like the writer in v. 12-14, on a time when we wish that we would have believed the warnings of our teachers, parents, or friends. Listening to their wise words and obeying their instructions could have saved us from humiliation, pain, and disappointment. At the end of the chapter, the author again points out to us the contrast between the two paths. In v. 21, *our ways are before the eyes of the Lord*—seen by him, known by him, helped by him. In v. 22, we are ensnared in the cords of our own sinful choices, unable to escape. There is a danger in our sin more destructive than a computer hack, a raging lion, or even a spreading pandemic—may we heed the warning of wisdom when we first hear his voice.

1. The forbidden woman in this chapter was an apt picture of temptation for a young man in Solomon's culture, but it may not be the most likely example in your life. **What does temptation commonly look like for you—pornography, gossip, selfishness, pride, sexual sin? How can your leader and group encourage and keep you accountable to flee that temptation?**

PROVERBS 5
A WARNING OF WISDOM

2. Read v. 12-14 again, where the author describes his feelings of regret when wise warnings weren't heeded. Think of a time when you experienced a similar feeling. **What would you do differently if you could go back to that mistake? How would you warn someone in the same situation now that you're on the other side?**

3. At times, the idea that our ways are before the eyes of the Lord might feel more negative than positive. We're all guilty of sin, and like Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3), our tendency is to hide in response to our shame. **How does this response reveal our beliefs about both God's character and our identity as his children? How can we shift our thinking in order to grow in gratitude for God's ever-present care in our lives?**

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 1:7

PRAYER

Most High God, I'm so thankful that you look upon the lowly with grace and love. We deserve nothing but destruction, and instead of leaving us to our fate, you chose to enter into our mess in order to raise us up with you. May we remember, moment by moment, that you know our weakness and love us still. Give us ears to hear the warnings of wisdom, hearts that are soft to your truth, and feet that are quick to run from sin.

PROVERBS 6
THIS IS SERIOUS!

> ***Give your eyes no sleep***
> ***and your eyelids no slumber;***
> ***save yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the***
> ***hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.***
> ***Proverbs 6:4-5***

Oftentimes, things don't seem serious until it's gone too far. Just thinking about our current situation, many of us might dismiss the Covid-19 shelter in place recommendation as an overreaction until it's our beloved grandparent in the hospital and we can't visit because the hospital doesn't have the resources to keep you safe. The beginning of Proverbs 6 reminds us that when we find ourselves in a troubling situation, we should seek to resolve the conflict like our life depended on it. In this case, the son finds himself caught in a financial situation that was unwise and where he has no actual control about the outcome. Verse 4 says "give your eyes no sleep" and then verse 5 takes it a step further saying that we should seek to save ourselves like a gazelle running from a hunter.

So let's keep going with this line of thinking. Here we are with no physical meetings – no school, no sports practice, no church on Sunday mornings, no Wednesday night groups. God reminds us to go to the ant (v6), who without a chief, officer, or ruler (v7) still prepares her bread and gathers her food (v8). This is a new challenge for all of us, but even without our teacher, coach, pastor or small group leader being in our physical presence, this does not excuse you from lazy, poor work. The ant is contrasted to the sluggard who sleeps late and takes frequent breaks and eventually finds himself in poverty and want (v9-11).

The remainder of this chapter address the concern about sowing discord with reckless speech and contains additional warnings against adultery. Adultery and sexual sin is discussed extensively throughout Proverbs, and since it's the primary focus of both chapters 5 and 7, today's devotional will focus on these first 11 verses, which just reminds me of how fruitful God's word is. It can be read over and over and life's different circumstances and the promptings of the Holy Spirit continue to bring new life every time.

1. I get it. You've probably not co-signed on a loan for someone who could only qualify with your help, but we've all gotten ourselves into a situation that we should not have been in. Maybe you lied to corroborate a friend's story or passed on a few answers to the test. Do you know why or how that situation got so far? How can your small group or family help you to escape from these situations before it's a life or death fight like the gazelle and hunter (v5)?

PROVERBS 6
THIS IS SERIOUS!

2. In verse 6-11, the ant is contrasted with the sluggard. The transition to doing school, sports, groups and church virtually is something that some people have embraced and others have avoided. If you've been struggling with this new change, what's one positive approach to apply in this next week? What about going to bed earlier, setting a schedule to get all of your work done before you rest, or maybe taking a daily walk or run? What about your spiritual growth – now you can schedule Bible study as daily class!

3. Finally, in the midst of all this practical wisdom, we can find ourselves feeling tremendous guilt because we've screwed up, made sinful choices, justified our laziness or completely avoided God's word altogether until someone made you do this devotional. If so, then now is the time to repent and believe; to embrace the gospel message. Take a moment and read Romans 3:23–25a [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (ESV)

MEMORY VERSE

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. Proverbs 9:9

PRAYER

Father God, I thank you for your wisdom and practical advice, but even more so for your grace and love. In many ways, we've been given more time and less supervision that usual for how we use that time. Father – pleas help me to see specific ways this week to be more like the ant, to prioritize my mental, spiritual and physical health. Amen.

PROVERBS 7

ARE YOU READY - THE WARNING AGAINST THE ADULTERESS!

> ***keep my commandments and live;***
> ***keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;***
> ***bind them on your fingers;***
> ***write them on the tablet of your heart.***
> ***Proverbs 7:2-3***

These first 4 verses remind me of a coach's final words before the big game. They are short, intense and focused in preparation for the battle against the forbidden woman, the adulteress with her smooth words (v5). The message is clear – we are to hold God's word like treasure. As the apple of our eye, bound to our fingers and written on our heart. We are even told to consider wisdom and insight as a sister and friend. Our need to be rooted in God's word to avoid the temptations of daily life was as true thousands of years ago when it was first written as it is true for us today in 2020!

I couldn't read Proverbs 7 without thinking of 1st Peter 5:8, which says, "8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." In the case of Proverbs 7, the enemy is the cunning, deceptive adulteress, but the end is still much the same. Just look at verse 22, "All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter." Clearly, we need to take our opponent seriously.

We've looked at the first verses, indicating our need to prepare, but verses 6-10 tell us a bit more of the story. The young, simple man lacked sense and passed too close to her house (wrong place) at the time of night and darkness (wrong time). And once this young man meets this woman, she aggressively pursues him with her dress, attitude, aggressiveness, seductive speech and any other trick. And it's clear that she's good at it, because many a victim she has laid low (v26). While this passage emphasizes sexual temptation and sin, the warning can be applied to any other sins.

1. How are you keeping God's word as the apple of your eye? Doing this devotional is an excellent start, but we live in a world where the temptation never ends and is new every day. List out some of the ways you keep God's word in the forefront of your life? Next time at small group, be ready to share and be open to the ideas of others.

PROVERBS 7

ARE YOU READY - THE WARNING AGAINST THE ADULTERESS!

2. It's clear that the best approach to dealing with the Adulteress is to avoid her completely, but yet we see the young man in the wrong place (her corner) at the wrong time (at night). Once he meets her, then its game over and he's caught by her seductive actions and speech? Are there struggles with sin where you need some help? Ask for this help! Most internet service providers (both home and cellular) have options to limit access to adult content and most devices (computers, phone, tablets) have similar parental controls on them as well. Ask your parent or small group to help set this up for you.

MEMORY VERSE

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
Proverbs 9:9

PRAYER

Father, thank you for your wisdom. Grow my love for you and for your people into the greatest passion in my life. May we have a love for you that makes it easy to avoid the bountiful temptations that surround us. Bring people into our lives that share this love and protect us from the Adulteress or any of the schemes of the devil. Lord, bind your words to my eyes, my hands and my heart. Amen.

PROVERBS 8
WISDOM IS A BLESSING

> ***Take my instruction instead of silver,***
> ***and knowledge rather than choice gold,***
> ***for wisdom is better than jewels,***
> ***and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.***
> ***Proverbs 8:10-11***

Chapter 8 is the personification of Wisdom as a women. Contrary to the forbidden adulteress from chapters 5-7, this woman described as Wisdom as a blessed, wonderful woman. Verse 35 clearly states, “For whoever find me (wisdom) finds life and obtains favor from the LORD.”

This personification is broken into different sections. Verses 4-11 are a call for us to listen to her instruction. Verses 12-21 describe her character traits and purpose. Verses 22-31 point to her divine origin and existence as part of God’s original plan for creation. Finally, verses 32-36 conclude with an appeal to us to listen to Wisdom and keep her ways.

1.In chapters 5-7, the forbidden woman’s ways describe her smooth words as attractive but ultimately as a pathway towards sin and death. Wisdom’s words are both similar “attractive” and yet totally opposite, in that they lead to life. Take time to contrast Proverbs 5:3-6 with Proverbs 8:6-11.

2. Verses 15-16 describe how kings, rulers, prince and nobles use Wisdom to govern justly. Verses 22-31 describe how God possessed Wisdom from the very beginning and uses her to craft all of creation. Verse 32 begins the final call when we are told to listen because “blessed are those who keep my ways.” Reflect on the past 8 days of doing these devotionals. Has anything changed in your view of God, how you interact with people or how you deal with temptation and sin?

PROVERBS 8
WISDOM IS A BLESSING

MEMORY VERSE

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
Proverbs 9:9

PRAYER

Father, we thank you for your good gifts. Your words throughout Proverbs are such a deep blessing and the fact that you offer up insight into your wisdom is so encouraging, because we so clearly need it. Help us to see the good changes in our lives as we seek after you and encourage us to continually do this day after day. Amen.

PROVERBS 9
WISDOM VS. FOLLY

> ***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.***
> ***Proverbs 9:10***

Quick look at Proverbs 9 and we see 2 sections: The Way of Wisdom and the Way of Folly. This is a perfect chapter to emphasize the Observation in the SOAP Bible study method. As a reminder, SOAP stands for Scripture, Observation, Application and Prayer. So here's what we're going to do, make a list of all the qualities attributed to Wisdom.

OBSERVATION
Ask yourself the question, "What do I see?" Write down the things that jump out to you. You're looking for context clues, repeated themes, words, or ideas that will help you as you are making your interpretation.

As part of this exercise, we are supported by the work of past scholars. For each section, we can contrast Wisdom and Folly but we can do so within a clear framework. In each topic, you'll be referred to specific verse. Write down key words or phrases from each of verses in these sections. As a result, we should begin to see a clear picture of how Wisdom and Folly differ.

TOPIC	WAYS OF WISDOM	WAYS OF FOLLY
General Description	See verses 1-3	See verses 13-15
Call to the Simple	v 4	v 16
Invitation to Eat	v 5	v 17
Result of the Invitation	v 6	v 18

continued on next page....

PROVERBS 9
WISDOM VS. FOLLY

Continued...

TOPIC	WAYS OF WISDOM	WAYS OF FOLLY
Description of Teaching	v 7-10	None. Why do you think there is no teaching from folly?
Final Narration	By Wisdom v 11-12	About folly v 18
Total Number of Verses	12	6

Now that you've got your table populated, give thanks to God that he provides the ways of wisdom, protects us from the ways of folly. And for any of us who have spent more time with Folly, this is just another reminder to Repent and Believe, to turn away from our sin and place our faith in the good work of Jesus. Lay those sins at the cross and give thanks for the constant free grace of God, which is available to us every moment.

MEMORY VERSE

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
Proverbs 9:9

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the different ways that you communicate. Help us to read poetry that is thousands of years old and yet written so that we can understand and apply it clearly today. Tune our ears and eyes to the calls of wisdom and steer our feet from the house of folly. Thank you Lord for your great wisdom. Amen.

PROVERBS 10

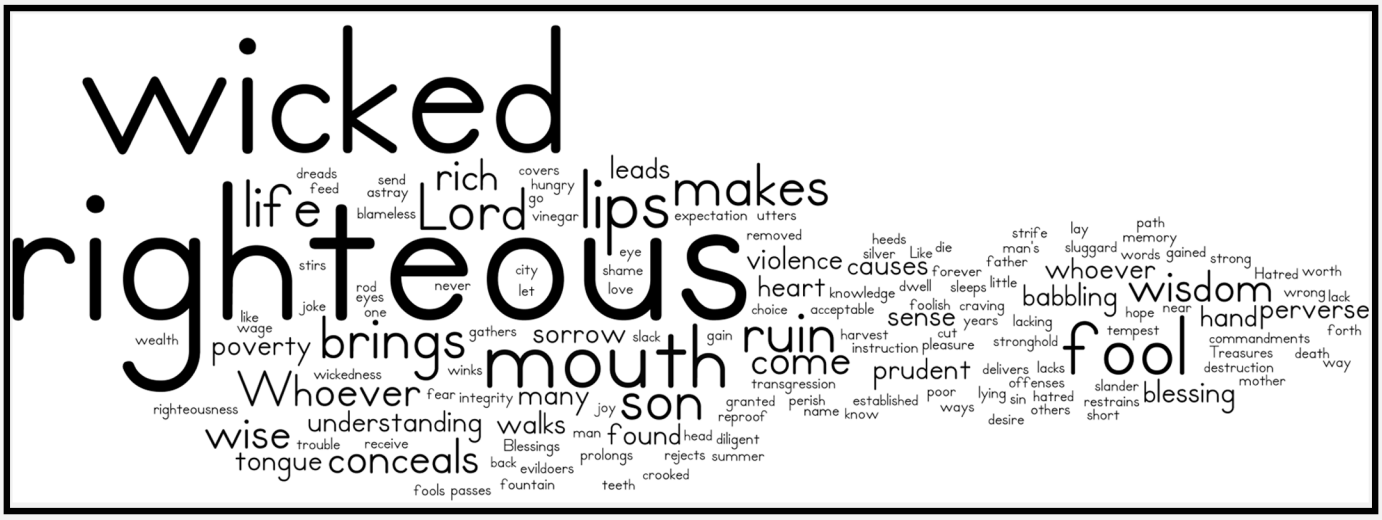
SOAP 2.0 - LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO STUDY GOD'S WORD

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely,
but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.
Proverbs 10:9

Unlike the first 9 chapters, which were longer wisdom poems, chapter 10 begins the longest section of Proverbs (chapters 10-22:16), primarily individual axioms or aphorism often with a witty delivery.

- **Axiom** - a statement or proposition which is regarded as being established, accepted, or self-evidently true.
- **Aphorism** - a concise, terse, or memorable expression of a general truth or principle.

These individual proverbs are typically written in contrasting statements typically describing something positive vs. negative. Taken alone, these are great individual statements, but often with a bit of deeper looking, we can see larger trends appearing with several proverbs grouped together to discuss overarching topics. One way to do this is to leverage technology and move some of your Bible study online. For instance, here's an example of a wordcloud that I used by pasting the text of Proverbs 10 into a wordcloud generator. The size of a word tells us how often it appears in the text, so bigger words repeated the most. Also, most wordcloud generators filter out less useful common words like "the" or "and" to allow for the key words to be highlighted. A quick google search should provide lots of options for these types of word pictures.

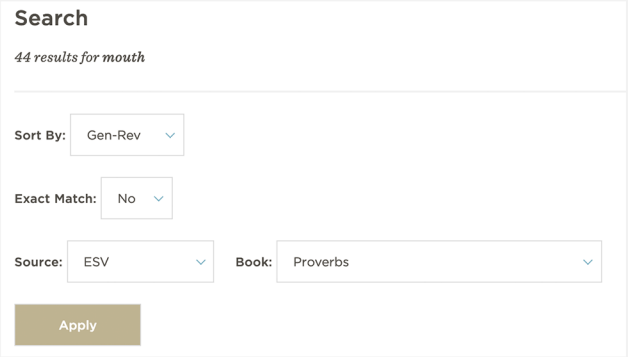


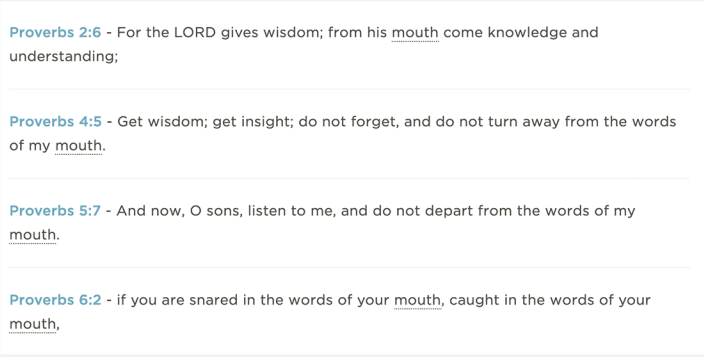
1. Take a look at this picture. We know the contrast is the righteous against the wicked, but in what areas might this chapter focus? I see both lips and mouth as keywords I want to search. What other words stick out to you?

PROVERBS 10

SOAP 2.0 - LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO STUDY GOD'S WORD

2. Now, go to esv.org/search and do a search for the word "mouth" and remember to restrict your search to the book of Proverbs or you'll be overwhelmed with options. Here's a quick screenshot from my computer search and results:





Repeat this same action for other key words and populate this table with respect to both positive (righteous) and negative (wicked) phrases associated with that keyword search. Then you can see how a little modern day technology can really help improve our Bible study skills, especially the Observation part of SOAP.

KEY WORD	RIGHTEOUS	WICKED
Mouth		
Lips		
Keyword from Q1:		
Keyword from Q1:		
LORD	Do not go hungry; blessing of the Lord makes rich; adds no sorry; fear of the Lord prolongs life; way of the Lord is a stronghold	Thwarts craving of the wicked; Years of wicked are short; destruction to evildoers

3. Although observation is great, it is not complete without application. Based on the observations you've made, make at least one application on how these words will change the way you interact with God or with others.

PROVERBS 10

SOAP 2.0 - LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO STUDY GOD'S WORD

MEMORY VERSE

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser;
teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.
Proverbs 9:9

PRAYER

Father, thank you for both your ancient wisdom and our modern day technology which provides new, easy to access techniques for study. Help me to use my technology to know you better, to learn more about your character and to experience your great love for me. Amen!

PROVERBS 11
RIGHTEOUSNESS VS. WICKEDNESS

The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness. *Proverbs 11:5*	*The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.* *Proverbs 11:3*	*Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it.* *Proverbs 11:27*

In keeping with a common theme throughout the book of Proverbs, Chapter 11 again presents us with two mutually exclusive paths: righteousness and wickedness. The words righteous/righteousness/upright/good are repeated throughout the chapter while the words wicked/wickedness/evil/crooked are used as their negative contrast. In each situation presented, there is an example of how the righteous would act and how the wicked would act. There is a very clear contrast!

This chapter is broken up into four sections, each describing the actions and attitudes of the righteous and the wicked in their respective situations: 1. Finances (v1-8) 2. Community (v9-12) 3. General Living (v13-22) and 4. Eternal Destiny (v23-31). God cares about how we use our money and resources, how we interact with our neighbors, and how we live our lives. The way that we live indicates whether we seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness or whether we are living only for ourselves which leads to death. Our eternal destiny is not determined by the number of good works vs. bad works that we do, but by whether we have a relationship with God. The Proverbs show us that those who have a relationship with God live one way (righteously) while those who do not live another way (wickedly).

1.Have you ever considered that the way that we use our money matters to God? What are righteous ways that you can use your money? What are wicked ways that you could use your money?

2. Does the way that you speak about and interact with your neighbors show that you care about their wellbeing? Or are your thoughts, actions, and words about your neighbors destructive?

PROVERBS 11
RIGHTEOUSNESS VS. WICKEDNESS

3. Are you in the habit of seeking wisdom from other wise and godly people in your community? Why or why not? Who is someone wiser than you that you can seek advice from the next time that you need it?

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, help me to have the wisdom to know and understand the difference between righteousness and wickedness. As your word says to us in Proverbs 11, "Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it." Help me to be a person who seeks righteousness and who seeks after you in all circumstances, whether it is with my finances, my community, or the way that I live my life in any other way. Thank you for your grace and mercy to us through Jesus and that we can have a relationship with you and live righteously because of Jesus. Amen.

PROVERBS 12

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM, WICKEDNESS AND FOOLISHNESS

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid. *Proverbs 12:1*	*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.* *Proverbs 12:15*	*In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway, there is no death.* *Proverbs 12:28*

Proverbs 12 continues to contrast righteousness with wickedness while providing the reader a deeper look into some of the ways that this looks practically. To begin, Proverbs 12:1 says: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." The righteous person will understand the need for discipline while the evil person will refuse discipline.

As you continue to read through the chapter, you will see how wisdom is connected to righteousness and foolishness is connected to wickedness. Verses 9-14, for example, describe ordinary workers who illustrate either "good sense" (v8) or the "twisted mind" (v9) in their labor. The righteous worker will care for his animal (v10), have plenty of bread (v11), and bear fruit (v12) while the wicked worker lacks mercy (v10), follows worthless pursuits (v11), and covets other evildoers (v12). The latter half of this chapter can be summarized in verse 15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." This section also addresses our speech, revealing that our words reflect what is in our hearts.

We can see clearly in this chapter that righteousness and wickedness are not simply actions of the hands but are rooted in the attitude of the mind and heart. In fact, it is from our hearts and mind that our actions stem. Jesus reiterates this idea in the New Testament when he says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). When we seek the Lord in wisdom with our heart, righteous acts will follow.

1. Do you love discipline? Does this chapter help give you a better understanding why we should love discipline? Provide some examples of why discipline is good.

2. Does the way that you speak indicate that you are seeking to live a wise and righteous life? Or is your speech more consistent with wickedness and foolishness?

PROVERBS 12

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM, WICKEDNESS AND FOOLISHNESS

3. Why is it important that we address the attitudes of our heart and mind rather than just trying to correct our external behavior?

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, help me to love your good and gracious discipline, knowing that discipline is a tool that you use to draw us to yourselves and to keep us from evil and destruction. Please root out the wickedness and foolishness in my own heart that causes my hands and mouth to act and speak in ways that are unpleasing to you. Help me to remember the good news of your gospel that you are a God who changes us from the inside out and that we can know you and have a relationship with you because Jesus is our righteousness. Amen.

PROVERBS 13
A TEACHABLE PERSON

A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. *Proverbs 13:1*	*One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor yet has great wealth.* *Proverbs 13:7*	*Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.* *Proverbs 13:13*

Do you enjoy receiving instruction? Not everyone wants to be taught. But Proverbs 13 begins by telling us that, "A wise son hears his father's instruction." A teachable person knows when to be silent and listen (v3). A teachable person knows that receiving instruction takes diligence (v4). Learning something new is not always easy. In fact, often times, it is hard work which is why the sluggard fails to learn. A teachable person hates falsehood (v5) since falsehood corrupts the learning process. A teachable person seeks the truth. In contract, a foolish person seeks to live their own way without regard for discipline or instruction.

Proverbs 13 also warns us that not everything is always as it seems. We cannot always trust appearances. Verse 7 says, "One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth." We live in a world full of deceit: deceitful people, deceitful messages, deceitful marketing, etc. When's the last time you bought something thinking that it would do something for you or provide something for you and then it failed to deliver? On one hand, we should try to take people at their word. We do not want to live in a way that is overly cynical and skeptical. But it is also wise to remember that we cannot always trust appearances. The Proverb ends by showing us that sadly and ironically, the foolish person, though acting as they know it all and have it all, is not actually satisfied. Meanwhile, "the righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite" (v25).

1. Do you consider yourself to be a teachable person? Are you willing to receive instruction from those wiser than you?

2. In general, are you a good listener? Do you know when to talk and when to listen? Or do you find yourself talking without listening? Why is listening an important trait of being teachable?

PROVERBS 13
A TEACHABLE PERSON

3. Have you ever been deceived by appearances before? Share a time when that happened. Why is it important to use caution when hearing or seeing something that seems too good to be true?

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be a teachable person. Give me the humility to know that I have much to learn and that there are wise people in my family, my church, and my community who can teach me. Help me to be a good listener and to work hard, knowing that wisdom comes to those who seek after it. Give me discernment to be able to know what is true and what is false. Thank you for Jesus, who provides us with the person example of wisdom and righteousness. Help me to be like Christ. Amen.

PROVERBS 14
THE PATH OF WISDOM

Whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises him. *Proverbs 14:2*	*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.* *Proverbs 14:12*	*One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless."* *Proverbs 14:16*

Have you ever been lost in the woods? Do you remember looking for signs or landmarks that could lead you back to the path? Proverbs 14 is a group of statements that can help us find the path of wisdom when we're lost. Verse 12 says "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Rather than attempting to find our own way, we must look to God and seek his wisdom to know the right way to live, to find the path of wisdom.

In verse 2, we are reminded that it is the fear of the Lord that leads us to live a righteous lifestyle. Do you remember what it means to fear the Lord? We do not fear the Lord in the same way that we might fear scary movies, roller coasters, getting a bad grade, or being lost in the woods. As we studied in earlier sections of this book, the fear of the Lord is reverence for him or devotion to him. God is holy. God is perfect. God is sovereign (in other words, in control of all things). God is wise. God is loving. God is merciful. And that's just the short list! The fear of the Lord is our response to who he is, a complete trust in him and devotion to him.

As we saw in Proverbs 12 and other parts of the book, this chapter also provides us with an understanding of how the righteous person uses their money. We see in verse 21 that the righteous person is generous with their money. In verse 23, we see that profit comes from working hard, not just sitting around and talking about it. The chapter ends how it began, focusing on the fear of the Lord: "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death" (v27). It is through this relationship with God that we are able to live a righteous lifestyle. We cannot obtain this righteousness on our own but only from God through Jesus Christ.

1. What are you afraid of? How is the fear of the Lord different from those fears? Why should we fear God? Why is this fear of God a good thing?

PROVERBS 14
THE PATH OF WISDOM

2. When you face a challenging or difficult situation, is your impulse to look to yourself for help? Or are you in the habit of asking God?

3. Are you generous with the money that you have? Why or why not? Why does God call us to be generous with our money?

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for your grace and mercy to me! Help me to look to you when I am lost and in need of understanding. Help me to trust in you, to be devoted to you, to fear you. Help me to remember that by fearing you, I do not need to be afraid of anything else. Help me to be generous in the same way that you have been generous to me. Thank you for your ultimate generosity in providing me a way to have a relationship with you through Jesus Christ. Amen.

PROVERBS 15
SPEECH MATTERS

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. *Proverbs 15:2*	*A fool despises his father's instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.* *Proverbs 15:5*	*To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!* *Proverbs 15:23*

Chapter 15 addresses the importance of controlling our tongue. In this section of verses, we see the importance of what we say, how we say it, and when we say it. Our speech matters!

What. Verse 2 says "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly." Verse 7 says "The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools." The content of our speech is important. The wise person encourages speaking truthfully and intelligently. Meanwhile, the fool lies and speaks of foolishness.

How. Verse 1 tells us that "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Verse 4 refers to a "gentle tongue." Along with the content of our speech, the way that we speak to one another is important. Have you ever felt like you knew the right thing to say but you struggled with the right way to say it? Sometimes it can be difficult to know how to speak. That is why we must seek the Lord and ask him how to speak in a way that is soft. Speaking softly does not mean that we shy away from the truth but rather that we speak the truth in a way that our audience will receive it. Speaking harshly will lead our listener to anger and they will not receive our words, no matter how true they are.

When. Not only is the content of our speech and the way that we speak it important, but so is our timing. Verse 23 says "To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!" A word in season refers to the timing of our speech. Sometimes we feel the impulse to speak whatever is on our mind and even the thing we want to say is true and we can say it gently, the timing may not be right. This is what we refer to as now truth and later truth. An appropriate word given at the right time is very good! But a word given at the wrong time, no matter how good it is, may not be received.

So how do we know what, how, and when to speak? Great question! We need to seek the Lord for wisdom in our speech. And we need to follow the example and instruction of the wise, with Jesus Christ being our greatest example. Wise speech is not something we can simply manage on our own strength. But when we seek the Lord, he graciously provides us with the wisdom to know what, how, and when to speak.

1.Does the content of your speech more often reflect that of a wise person or a foolish person?

PROVERBS 15
SPEECH MATTERS

2. Think about a situation where it might be better to wait to speak the truth to someone rather than doing it in the moment. What are some examples you can think of?

3. Our society oftentimes refers to bad language or impure speech as a list of words or jokes we should not say (i.e. cuss words). How can we see from Proverbs 15 that righteous speech is more than just avoiding certain words or phrases?

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the truth that you have given to us. I know that you are wise and that you provide me with wisdom as I seek to know you and be like you. Help me to be wise with my words. Help me to know what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. Help me to choose to honor you in the way that I speak to others and about others. Thank you for the wisdom you give to us in your Word and help me to apply it to my life. Amen.

PROVERBS 16
PLANNING WISELY

Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established. *Proverbs 16:3*	*How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.* *Proverbs 16:16*	*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.* *Proverbs 16:25*

Are you a planner? Do you like to feel like you're in control of your life? If you're like me, you might have a calendar with events scheduled 6 months in advance! Or you might use an app (or two or three) to keep track of your to-do lists or projects or goals. While there is certainly nothing wrong with being prepared and planning ahead, the Proverbs teach us to do so with an openness to God's working in our lives. As Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." The key to planning is that we put God first in our plans.

Furthermore, Proverbs 16:9 says, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." God is already sovereign over our lives (whether we choose to acknowledge it or not) but we are given the opportunity to acknowledge that reality and trust in his plan for us. It can be a mystery at times, trying to understand how to both plan our own way and give God control at the same time. But do not make the mistake of thinking that giving God control means doing nothing. In fact, it means quite the opposite! Because God is in control, we can have complete confidence in making plans for our lives knowing that he is working through our planning!

As we continue to seek the Lord and ask him to give us wisdom and guidance in our lives, he will continue to make clear the plans for our lives. He will give us discernment to avoid the "way that seems right to a man but ends in death" as described in verse 25. It is not always easy to know the right thing to do or the right plans to make, especially when we're in a season of uncertainty when seemingly good plans that we've made have all been cancelled or changed. But God's ways are better than our ways and he invites us to trust in his ways over and above our own.

1. Describe a time in your life when you made plans that ended up changing or getting cancelled. How did you respond? Did your response indicate that you had put God first in your plans? If not, what would it have looked like to put God first in that moment?

PROVERBS 16
PLANNING WISELY

2. What is an area in your life today that you struggle to give over control to God? Why do you think it is so hard for you to give this area over to God?

3. What is a practical way that you can remember to put God first in your planning? (Some suggestions: make a note in your calendar, in your planner, in your apps, etc.)

MEMORY VERSE

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
Proverbs 16:9

PRAYER

Lord, I acknowledge that you are sovereign over my life. Your ways are better than my ways. Help me to truly believe that for my life. Help me to remember to put you first when I begin to make plans, goals, etc. Help me to have discernment when certain ways look right to me but are actually bad for me. I desire to honor you with my life and with my plans. Thank you for the greatest plan of all: the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Help me to live a life like his in order that I may be a light to people who do not know you or trust in you. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

PROVERBS 17
HOW TO BE A GOOD FRIEND

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,
and he who has a cool spirit is
a man of understanding.
Proverbs 17:27

Stay away from bears. Especially if that bear is a mama bear protecting her cubs. A mother grizzly bear will fight anything that threatens her cubs and an encounter with her could destroy anyone. Proverbs 17 warns that encountering a foolish person is actually worse than meeting a wild mama bear separated from her young (17:12). This is because foolishness is wildness.

A fool is wild with words, making fun of the underprivileged (17:5), fueling fights (17:14), and carelessly spreading lies (17:4, 20). Their ways lead to destruction for anyone in their path. It would be better to be friends with a wild mama bear than an untamed fool. The better friend is one who acts and thinks with restraint. This good friend will keep a juicy secret to protect someone's honor (17:9), steps away from a riveting fight (17:14), and shows self-control with her words and knowledge (17:27). A fool is fiercely concerned with self-protection, while the good friend fiercely pursues wisdom.

The good friend is the one who brings peace to moments of chaos and consistency, loving his friends no matter what is going on (17:17). A friend worth having and worth being chooses every word carefully and is said to have a "cool spirit" that brings refreshment to others (17:27). This wise person chooses joy and brings good medicine in a broken world.

A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.
Proverbs 17:22

1. We should always consider both sides of every warning against fools: *Am I this wild fool, causing destruction while I try to protect myself? Do I need to avoid certain fools whose carelessness is dangerous?* Likewise, we look at both sides of the encouragement toward wisdom: *Am I wise with my words, bringing peace to friendships? Am I nurturing relationships with wise and faithful friends?* **Ask God to help you honestly answer these questions and write your reflections here.**

PROVERBS 17
HOW TO BE A GOOD FRIEND

2. *The discerning sets his face toward wisdom but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.* (17:24). In the prophecy of Isaiah, the "suffering servant" (Jesus) says that he will set his face like flint, a very sturdy stone, even in suffering and oppression because he knows that God is completely in control (Isaiah 50:7). When we set our face toward something, we acknowledge that it will be hard, but worth it because our God in heaven is bigger and stronger than what we see and experience on earth. **How can you set your face toward wisdom and the way of faithfulness today? What can that commitment look like for you right now?**

MEMORY VERSE

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.
Proverbs 18:10

PRAYER

Faithful Father, you made us for a relationship with you and with your people. Please give me the wisdom to nurture friendships that glorify you. Reveal to me how I act in foolish ways to protect myself and unknowingly hurt others. Continually restore my faith in you as the uncertainty of this earth threatens to shake it. Just as your son set his face toward you in the moment that saved my life, please help me to set my face toward you so that I can bring your "good medicine" to my friends and the people you put in my life.

PROVERBS 18
THE NAME THAT IS OUR STRONG TOWER

> ***The words of man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook. Proverbs 18:4***

As the fog of the coronavirus pandemic first rolled through America, public spaces fell quiet while the internet seemed to grow louder. Every corner of the digital world is filled with the noise of response as we all still try to feel our way through a seemingly endless cloud without getting too lost in it. In the racket of words on our news feeds, we have seen panic and sensationalism; hope and expectation; generosity and resourcefulness; sorrow and lament; creativity and community; and everything in between. Every response bubbled up from what was already in our hearts.

Proverbs 18 tells us that the fool will respond impulsively with their words (18:2, 13) and will run to wealth and resources when the going gets tough (18:11). A fool will try to conjure up certainty and cling to scraps of stability, but the wise person has stored up the knowledge of goodness and wisdom so that he can respond with words that give life (18:8, 20-21). Even on the days when there in an endless cloud of gray to wade through, wise women and wise men will be able to see clearly above that haze to the Lord who is our strong tower. We can keep reaching toward the refuge that He guarantees us and trust that He can see directly through whatever bewildering haze we are stumbling through and He is in complete control of it all. And it is from this very hope and understanding that our words and responses, whether in lament or celebration, bubble up and bring life.

1. *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and its safe.* (18:10) The ancient Hebrews put a lot of worth in a name. When speaking of the "name of the Lord," they were referring to His character, His faithfulness, His unwavering love, and the promises He made to His people. We are told to *run* to His holy name. **What do you accidentally or intentionally turn to when you want stability and control? What can you do today to RUN to the name of the Lord?**

2. *An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.* (18:15) By taking the time to read Scripture and pray right now, you are already conditioning yourself to seek knowledge and to fill your heart with wisdom! James 1:5 says that if any of us lacks wisdom, we can ask our generous God for it and it will be provided. **Write down a couple of situations, questions, or untouched emotions that you need wisdom to work through. Pause for a moment to pray for specifically for these.**

PROVERBS 18
THE NAME THAT IS OUR STRONG TOWER

3. *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.* (18:21) A single doomsday headline about a toilet paper shortage can send masses of people into a fit of panic buying. While a pastor's honest lament and faithful preaching can bring hope and healing to his listeners. **What are other examples of words that steal peace versus words that give life (Can be from your own life or from something you've seen online)? What is one thing you can do or say this week that would speak life into your community?**

MEMORY VERSE

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.
Proverbs 18:10

PRAYER

Good Father, we have given you many names throughout the ages to describe Your character and the way that You love us and provide for us. Keep reminding me who You are so that my faith in You will continue to grow and stay strong no matter what. Help me to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and confident in Your wisdom.

PROVERBS 19
THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD

> ***Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.***
> ***Proverbs 19:2***

This chapter is bursting at the seams with rich themes that we do not want to miss: family relationships, respect for authority, the continued nurturing of our understanding. We are reminded that our knowledge and fear of the Lord keeps us from acting impulsively (19:2), getting angered easily (19:11), or bringing shame to our families (19:26). As we get to know God we not only understand His desire and purpose for ourselves, but we get to know His concern for others. And God really, really cares about the poor.

Built into the laws that God gave the Israelites is the reminder that there will always be poor people among them. He said, "open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). The Old Testaments habitual concern toward the needy and justice for the oppressed is amplified even more in the New Testament as we see Jesus frequently moved with compassion for the helpless and later see the early church building their ministry around care for the marginalized.

Look back at Proverbs 19 and make note of every instance describing the poor person and the wealthy person. We see the reputation of the poor people given value and dignity by God—even when they are abandoned by their friends (19:4,7), lied about in court (19:5), and oppressed by those with all of the resources. We are told that lending to someone in need is really lending to God (19:17) and that anyone who mocks the poor insults God Himself (17:5). God is careful to let us know how important the marginalized are to Him, making way for us to be a people of compassion.

1. *Whoever gets sense loves his own soul; he who keeps understanding will discover good. (19:8)*

Circle or identify each action word in this verse. **What can you do to love your soul? What can you do to discover good? How is this truth different from what we see on tv and online about loving ourselves and searching for goodness?**

PROVERBS 19
THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD

2. Jesus' most famous message to his followers is the Sermon on the Mount. People waiting and hoping for the Messiah to arrive got to see the Son of God and hear His voice while He shared what God cares about most. **Read Matthew 5:2-12. How does this passage offer hope to the poor person described throughout Proverbs 19? Why is it better to be poor but have integrity than wealthy but have no honor?**

3. *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. (19:21)*

As the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Word and get to know God's character, our plans and priorities in life inevitably shift towards His purpose. We hope and pray for this! **What is one plan that you have, big or small, that you can practice offering to God?** Pause and let Him know that you hold your plans, hopes, and dreams with an open hand.

MEMORY VERSE

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.
Proverbs 18:10

PRAYER

Father, Your word says that having life from You makes a way for us to rest satisfied. Help me to rest satisfied in You and Your plans for my life. Help me to love your Word in a way that makes righteousness my natural impulse. Help me to respect the authority figures You have placed in my life in a way that glorifies You. Help me to see the poor and marginalized the way that You see them and give me the understanding to speak up for them and bring truth and beauty to their lives so that we and praise Your name together.

PROVERBS 20
THE LAMP OF THE LORD

> ***A man's steps are from the Lord;***
> ***how then can man understand his way?***
> ***Proverbs 20:24***

Reading through Proverbs to see clear lines drawn between the wicked and the good, the foolish and the wise can make us prone to think that we can simply act right and be righteous by keeping ourselves out of the fool category. We might ask: How do I get out of the fool category and please God? How do I change what I'm doing to look more like the wise person? This is where we get to stop and remember: remember the work that Jesus has done and is doing.

Who can say, "I have made my heart pure: I am clean from my sin?" (20:9) The answer to this question is that no person can say this. All of us have sinned and fall short of God's righteousness and we cannot fix that on our own no matter how much we try (Romans 3:9-20). Galatians 2:20 reminds us that as Christians, it is Christ who lives in us and does His work through us. We have the Spirit of God living inside of us, giving us freedom. If we keep our refuge in His name and depend on His Spirit's work in us, we get to trust that Jesus is our wisdom and righteousness. He is at work in us and His fruit will grow in us. He did the earning and the performing for us.

1. Can we know the motive and character of every person behind every profile we see? Can we determine if everyone we meet is wise for us to learn from? While we are told that we can easily tell who people are by their actions (20:11) we are also told that it takes understanding to see the motives of their heart (20:24) and that not everything we think we see in them is reality (20:8, 14). **Read Matthew 7:15-20. What do you think good fruit looks like in a person? What do you think bad fruit looks from a person or their followers? How can you discern (ask God) who/what is good for you to associate with?**

2. The Spirit of God searches and knows us (20:27) and does the work of growing good fruit in us as we stay connected to God (Galatians 5:16-23). **How does this truth affect how you continue to read the Proverbs? Does it give you any sense of freedom to know that the Holy Spirit both searches you and grows His good fruit in you?**

PROVERBS 20
THE LAMP OF THE LORD

3. *It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows. (20:25)*

This verse cautions us against making commitments to God without thoughtfulness and making light of what we give to Him. Our words and our commitments matter to God. **Have you given anything to God or made commitments to Him that you took too lightly? Name two things in your life that you want to truly commit to Him as holy and pray for the His help in remaining faithful.**

MEMORY VERSE

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.
Proverbs 18:10

PRAYER

Father God, I thank You for not leaving me to do any of this on my own. You have taken the burden of achieving righteousness and placed it on your Son for me. You have given me your Spirit to cleanse my heart of sin and grow your goodness inside of me. And You have given me discernment to recognize Your fruit in others. Help me to rest in the work You have done and not wander back into the false gospel of achievement and earning your favor.

PROVERBS 21
FIND LIFE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HONOR

> ***Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.***
> ***Proverbs 21:21***

As we are still in the thick of our new lives as socially distanced people supposedly with more time on our hands, it seems like everyone has an idea about how this time should be spent. There are quarantine bucket lists; lists of questions to reflect on; lists of things to grieve; lists of things to be thankful for; lists of COVID-19 updates; lists of movies to watch; lists upon lists upon lists of ways to either numb out or make the time more meaningful. How does God want you to spend this time? What is He most concerned with at the end of the day? Thankfully His character and concern for what we set our minds on is entirely unaffected by our time in lockdown.

We see again in Proverbs 21 God's specific concern for justice and for the cries of the poor to be heard and answered (21:13). We see how God judges the wicked and those who obscure power and prevent justice. Verse 20:2-3 show that He is most concerned with the motives of our heart and most pleased when he sees righteousness pouring out from us (keep remembering who is that righteousness in and for us). We are promised that what we pursue is what we will get; if we pursue righteousness and kindness, that is what we will have (21:21). In contrast, we see throughout this chapter and all of Proverbs that if we pursue anything besides the kingdom of Heaven and anyone besides God, we will be left lonely and empty-handed. We are promised an abundant life, joy, honor, and stability when we set our faces towards God and reach for His righteousness in all of our days.

1. **How have you viewed your "extra" time during our days of quarantine—As a gift? As a burden? As another kind of pressure to deal with? Knowing what God most values in our days and time on earth, how can you think differently about what you are doing with your time today? What would it look like to pursue righteousness and kindness even while social distancing?**

PROVERBS 21
FIND LIFE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HONOR

2. *Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. (21:13)*

It can be easy on any day to just keep on moving and assume that someone else will take care of the poor around us. It can be more comfortable to look away or to avoid reminders that there are marginalized people—socially, financially, etc—need something that we may be able to provide for them. **Does this verse make you think of anyone or any topic of justice that you often avoid or don't like hearing about? How can this verse and your understanding of God's concern for justice shape how you approach this topic?**

MEMORY VERSE

The name of the Lord is a strong tower;
the righteous man runs into it and is safe.
Proverbs 18:10

PRAYER

Father, You have given me exactly what I need in order to love people well. You have given me Your righteousness to pour out to others and the gifts of your Holy Spirit to serve other believers. Help me to be wise with my time and my resources so that I can pursue you and joyfully receive all that You have promised to me.

PROVERBS 22
A GOOD NAME

> ***A good name is to be chosen***
> ***rather than great riches,***
> ***and favor is better than silver or gold.***
> ***The rich and the poor meet together;***
> ***the LORD is the Maker of them all.***
> ***Proverbs 22:1-2***

This scene which played out in my high school life might seem familiar to you. I've planned a night hanging out with friends. I told my parents where I would be. I shower off and prepare to leave, as I'm walking out the door I hear my father's voice. "Make good decisions. Remember who you are." My father would often remind me that we share a last name and that name is how people know us as a family. His words to me were meant to remind me that my actions reflect on my family's name.

The original readers of Proverbs 22:1 would understand 'a good name' to mean more than just your family's reputation. To them, your name is your character. Like my father, who connected our last name with our reputations, the original readers of Proverbs would understand a name to be your character.

These two verses should remind us that our character is far more important than any amount of riches. Most people would say that they could use more money, especially in difficult times like what we are going through, but Proverbs emphasizes the role of character or wisdom over wealth. This is not to say that wealth is not desirable, but a good name is that much more desirable.

As Christians, we carry the name of Christ with us. Because we act in His name, speak in His name, pray in His name, and live in His name, our character should be more and more like His.

1. **What matters most to you?** Proverbs makes it clear that wisdom is far more valuable than any riches.

2. If we carry the name of Christ, we should reflect His character. **What are some areas where you might not be showing Christ's character? Jesus calls us to repent and believe in Him, what are some things you need to repent of?**

PROVERBS 22
A GOOD NAME

MEMORY VERSE

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

PRAYER

Father, I know that there are many things in the world that I desire. You tell me in Proverbs that a good name is to be more desired than any riches and that you are Lord over it all. Help me to desire a good name over riches and let me grow as a follower of Christ so that I might reflect His name well.

PROVERBS 23
THERE IS A FUTURE

> ***Let not your heart envy sinners,***
> ***but continue in the fear of***
> ***the LORD all the day.***
> ***Surely there is a future,***
> ***and your hope will not be cut off.***
> ***Proverbs 23:17-18***

When elementary teachers notice that a student often has headaches, their first suggestion to parents is to check the child's eyesight. Students that can't see the board clearly, or can't tell what the teacher is doing at the front of the room, will develop headaches from having to squint. Obviously, students that can't see clearly are going to struggle to do well. About 30-40% of the American are nearsighted, meaning that they cannot see objects far from them. However, we all suffer from a different sort of nearsightedness. None of us can see too far ahead in our lives, and because of that, we often become fixed on what is immediately in front of us.

Sin often looks fun or enticing. There is no limit to the sinful activities the world offers up to us. If we are looking to only please ourselves or make ourselves happy, the options seem never-ending. Following Jesus was never a promise of an easy life, and Scripture tells us that we will struggle against sin as long as we live. If we're honest with ourselves, sometimes sin looks fun, even to the point where we might envy sinners. It would be easy to be like everyone else, to pursue whatever we think would make us most happy. However, we cannot be nearsighted.

Nearsighted Christians forget that "there is a future." Scripture tells us that Jesus will return and will fully establish His Kingdom. This life is not all that we have. Understanding that Christians have a future with Christ should be an incredible encouragement! We become nearsighted Christians when we fall into the temptation of thinking only of what we can see in front of us. While sin might make us happy for a time, the fear of the Lord that we have been reading about in Proverbs is far more to be desired.

1. **Do you find yourself envying sinners? What does it look like for you to envy sinners?**

PROVERBS 23
THERE IS A FUTURE

2. **How can you avoid nearsightedness? How can you remind yourself that 'there is a future'?**

3. **Why is it an encouragement to know that 'there is a future'?**

MEMORY VERSE

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

PRAYER

Father, I confess that at times I do grow envious of sinners. I know that I can be near-sighted and only focus on what is immediately in front of me. Thank you that we have a promised future united with You in Your Kingdom. Help me to live like I do have a future with you. You are far more worth my time, life, and attention than anything of this world that might distract me from You.

PROVERBS 24
HONESTY AND REVENGE

> ***Be not a witness against***
> ***your neighbor without cause,***
> ***and do not deceive with your lips.***
> ***Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me;***
> ***I will pay the man back for what he has done."***
> ***Proverbs 24:28-29***

This saying is so straightforward and to the point that it is hard to miss the message: speak and deal honestly. But notice that this saying connects lying with payback. Verse 28 tells us to not be a false witness against our neighbor, nor should we deceive with our speech in any manner. From an early age, we are taught not to lie, but this saying goes further than simply not lying and teaches us to not speak against our neighbor without a cause.

To be a 'witness against your neighbor without a cause' is legal language. The imagery is of a court room where one neighbor takes the witness stand against another neighbor to lie about him or her. If you were to be a witness in a case against someone that wronged you, you might be eager to get payback, but the wise person deals honestly even when presented with the opportunity to get revenge.

Revenge feels natural. If someone wrongs me, it's only fair that I can get even with that person. However, Jesus showed us a better way by instructing us to "turn the other cheek." If we equate revenge with being fair, we will struggle to understand the mercy and grace offered to us by Jesus. See, we don't actually want what is *fair*. It was not fair for Jesus to die in our place for us, but because of His love for us He did so any way. That same Jesus that died for us teaches us to be wise by dealing with others honestly and not seeking revenge.

1. **How have you spoken against others without a cause?**

2. **Do you take opportunities for revenge on others when you can?**

PROVERBS 24
HONESTY AND REVENGE

3. **How can we be Christlike in our interactions with others instead of seeking revenge?**

MEMORY VERSE

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

PRAYER

Father, I thank you that You do not deal with us like we sometimes deal with others. Instead of enacting revenge on us, You deal with us with grace and mercy. Help me to speak honestly of others and show them the grace and mercy that you have extended to us.

PROVERBS 25

TOO MUCH SUGAR DOES NOT HELP THE MEDICINE GO DOWN

> ***It is not good to eat much honey,***
> ***nor is it glorious to rseek one's own glory.***
> ***A man swithout self-control***
> ***is like a city broken into and left without walls.***
> ***Proverbs 25:27-28***

This saying seems so strange at first glance. "Who eats too much honey?" you might be thinking. But put yourself in the shoes of an ancient Israelite who didn't have much sugary sweet food. We have too much sweet food, but ancient peoples had barely anything sweet. Every parent has probably told their kids that they can't eat too much candy or it will make them sick. Honey was a type of sweet treat. We could think of it as "too much sugar makes you sick." Maybe a modernized version would say something along the lines of "It is not good to eat too many Reese's Peanut Butter Cups."

The same way that too much sugar can make us feel physically ill, seeking our own glory makes us spiritually sick. Just as we were not created to survive on sugar alone, we were not created to glorify ourselves. The book of Genesis tells us that God created us as His image-bearers, meaning that we were put on earth to expand worship of Him over the globe. We do not live as we were meant to when we only seek to glorify ourselves.

Notice that verse 28 shows us what happens when we only seek to glorify ourselves, we are compared to a city without walls. It might be difficult to imagine a wall that runs around an entire city, but it was very common in ancient cities to build a barrier as a primary defense against attacks. A city without walls is broken and defenseless; it would not last long, doomed to be destroyed. That is some very strong language connected with just glorifying ourselves. To live to only glorify ourselves would lead to our destruction, as it disconnects us from the Creator who gives life. Fortunately for us, Jesus invites us to glorify Him by repenting of our own self-seeking and turning toward Him, that is the medicine that will cure the ill brought on by 'eating too much honey.'

1. **What does "seeking one's own glory" look like in your life?**

2. **Why does the writer connect seeking one's own glory with lack of self-control? Why does this lack of self-control lead to destruction like a city without walls?**

PROVERBS 25

TOO MUCH SUGAR DOES NOT HELP THE MEDICINE GO DOWN

3. **How do you seek to glorify God instead of yourself?**

MEMORY VERSE

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you are a God worth bringing glory to. I understand that You have created us to bring glory to You, I am sorry that I seek to glorify myself at times. Thank you that Jesus has been glorified and invites us to glorify Him as well. Help me to live to bring glory to You and You alone.

PROVERBS 26
"IT'S JUST A PRANK, BRO!"

> ***Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death***
> ***is the man who deceives his neighbor***
> ***and says, "I am only joking!"***
> ***For lack of wood the fire goes out,***
> ***and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.***
> ***Proverbs 26:18-20***

Proverbs has much to say about the power of speech. We've already read most of the Proverbs, did you notice how often speech is addressed? Scripture will use terms like lips, mouth, or tongue to represent someone's speech. God also tells us that speech is powerful, like a small rudder that turns large ships or a small spark that starts a great fire. Our words might be something we consider inconsequential, but they can have major effects.

Speech can be like a weapon that does great damage, like we see in verse 18 where language is compared to a deadly weapon like a firebrand or arrow. The imagery is a madman who throws about flaming logs or sharp arrows, not worrying about the damage he is doing. Typically when we hear warnings about our language, we think about how our mean words might hurt someone, but in this passage we see that even our joking words can do damage. Think of how many times you've heard someone say something horrible about someone, only to follow it up with "I'm joking!" Or if you've spent much time on YouTube watching prank channels, you've probably seen one of the pranksters go too far with their joke. Whenever these pranksters go too far, they inevitably end up having to yell 'It's just a prank, bro!" to calm down their target. There is nothing wrong with joking around, but even our well-intentioned jokes have the ability to do damage to others.

This saying tells us what our words can do to others, but it also shows the opposite- what not speaking can do. The same way that joking can damage others, gossip or fighting can have disastrous consequences. Proverbs compares cutting off speech in order to end fighting like adding no more fuel to a fire. The fire will eventually burn out without fuel, just as we can cut off fighting or gossiping by not partaking in it. If we are to be serious about loving God and loving others, we need to consider how we speak and how we know when to not speak. We have a great opportunity to love others by through word and action.

1. Think of a time when a joke actually hurt you. **Do you think that any of your joking might have hurt someone in the same way, even if accidentally?**

PROVERBS 26
"IT'S JUST A PRANK, BRO!"

2. **Why do you think this Proverb compares speech to dangerous weapons?**

3. **How can you stop putting fuel on the fire when you hear gossiping or fighting?**

MEMORY VERSE

A man without self-control
is like a city broken into and left without walls.
Proverbs 25:28

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you have given us the ability to speak with others and with you. Help me to be wise with my speech, both knowing when to speak and when not to. I want the way I speak to build up and encourage others so that I might love You and others like You have called us to. Let my words be a blessing and not a harm to others.

PROVERBS 27
WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING?

> ***Do not boast about tomorrow,***
> ***for you do not know what a day may bring.***
> ***Proverbs 27:1***

One time I took a personality test and my results had the statement that I could be "overconfident and underprepared." The accuracy of this makes me laugh all the time. I can pinpoint a lot of these overconfident times in my life. Whether it is the time I boldly tried out for the basketball team (after never playing in my life) and did not make a single shot the entire try out. Or the time I went into a chemistry quiz thinking I would probably remember enough and ended up with a score of 11%. I bet that you can think of some of these scenarios in your own life. Something that you have bragged about your ability only to be unable to actually pull it off.

Then there are all the things that we really can't control even if we wanted to! Hurricanes, viruses, school shootings, health issues, family crisis's, friend conflicts and so many others.

The Bible warns us here not to boast about what we think tomorrow (or anytime in the future) will bring because the truth is we never really know. Even if you are super confident in your skills and talents, you don't really know if they will be enough to get you through. We can even look back at our life just last month and not have any idea of what was in store for the world.

In all this uncertainty there are some things that we do know. Deuteronomy 31:6 reminds us of God's promise to his covenant people Israel: "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, **for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."** While this promise was originally given to the nation of Israel, we know that because of Jesus, God is with us. Jesus coming to earth was a manifestation of that promise. The Bible tells us over and over that even in the mystery of tomorrow, and whatever it holds, the one thing that we can boast in is that God is with us. He will not leave us or abandon us. He will be with us in the midst of things we cannot control, even when our own abilities fail.

1. God spends a significant part of the bible assuring that he is present with his people. Read the following verses: Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 12:2; Isaiah 41:10; Zephaniah 3:17; Matthew 28:20; Hebrew 13:5; Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 4:6-7; Psalms 94:19; Luke 12:22-26; Psalms 27:1; Revelation 1:17

What do you think God is trying to tell us here about our tomorrows and the uncertainty that the future holds? How do these verses make you feel comforted?

PROVERBS 27
WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING?

2. Reflect on uncertain times in your past. Big and small things that didn't end up how you thought they would. **In what ways was God with you even when things didn't go as you thought they would?**

3. **How do we daily fight against the urge to rest in our own confidence and plans? How can we better trust God in uncertainty?**

MEMORY VERSE

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER

God, As I face uncertain times today and in the future may I first remember that you are with me in all circumstances, and are big enough to care for all my needs and feelings. Forgive me for the times that I boast, forgive me for the ways that I panic, forgive me for the ways that I turn to things that are not you for comfort & security. Thank you for the grace to cover the ways I distrust you and give me wisdom to remember that you are always with us. Grow my trust in you so that even when my plans look different than I thought I am secure in you.

PROVERBS 28
GREED SPREADS CONFLICT

> ***A greedy man stirs up strife but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.***
> ***Proverbs 28:25***

I am sure you can think of a lot of things that might hurt a friendship. Jealousy, lying, and selfishness are some of the more obvious ones, but I don't think I would've thought to put greed on that list. Verse 25 tells us that "a greedy man stirs up strife." Strife is basically another word for conflict.

James 4:1-3 gives us some more insight into how greed can affect a relationship. "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." A greedy person will always seek out more of what they want. They will set aside anything that makes them a good friend to seek their own passions. You can see how this could cause conflict in a relationship.

When we examine our own lives, we may not have labeled our deep desires for popularity, academic or athletic success, approval from others, etc. as greed, but it can all be defined as an unhealthy desire for our personal gains.

God has given us an excellent tool to combat greed in his generosity to us. Through his son Jesus, God has given us the generous and undeserved gift of salvation and we can imitate God by being generous to others. The more we practice generosity with our money, our time, and our talents, the easier it will be to forsake our own greedy motivations and act unselfishly.

1. We can be greedy about way more than money. **What are some things in your life that you see an unhealthy desire for or could turn into something you greedily seek?**

2. The Gospel Transformation Study Bible notes say, "Greed spreads conflict, while generosity spreads friendship." **How has generosity from others enriched your friendships? How you can act selflessly to others to deepen your relationships?**

PROVERBS 28
GREED SPREADS CONFLICT

3. The sin filled world we live in will always tell us to look out for ourselves over others. **How do we combat greed and seek generosity in our daily lives?**

MEMORY VERSE

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER

God, forgive me for the many things that I chase after besides you. Thank you that you gave me perfect Jesus to save me from my sinful self. Change my heart to want what you tell me is good and not the things that the world tells me is good. Free me from the desire to seek things that are only for myself and instead may I pursue generosity and selflessness. Continue to change my passions to be the same as yours.

PROVERBS 29
PRIDE VS. HUMILITY

One's pride will bring him low,
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.
Proverbs 29:23

We have all been in that place where you were caught doing something wrong. I am sure that you can think of a few situations; not home when you should have been, late for practice, unprepared for a class, called out for something you said behind a friends back. There are tons of other situations but whenever I am caught doing something wrong my first instinct is to lie. I want to save face and pretend I lost an assignment, not that I totally blew it off. That I didn't really say that thing about my friend, it was just a joke. I want to keep my image intact.

This is all about pride. The dictionary defines pride as "a feeling or deep pleasure in or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements." The world that we live in values how we look to others. We are constantly seeing people being publicly praised for what they accomplish and how talented they are; people are celebrated for beauty and abilities. It can feel like these are the ones that are the teacher's favorites, get the best parts, have the most followers. If we are following the ways of the world there is no way I am admitting to my own faults. I would never acknowledge the ways that I have failed, the times when I don't have the ability or skill, and especially not when I willingly make the choice to do the wrong thing.

But the Bible shows us a radically different way. In God's kingdom we see that God values and honors humility; a modest opinion of one's own importance. God wants us to trade our desire to focus on our own image for one that wants to magnify God's image in our lives. God loves when we humbly come to him and confess the ways that we have failed and trust that Jesus is all we could ever want or need.

1.Jesus says is Matthew 23:11-12 "The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." **In what ways can you anticipate being a humble servant will be hard for you? Will there be people who will be difficult to act humbly to like your parents, your siblings, your competitors?**

2. One of the most practical ways we can practice humility is to confess our sins to one another. **How can you lead in your small group and set an example of confession? How can you react to others confessions like Jesus would?**

PROVERBS 29
PRIDE VS. HUMILITY

3. 1st Samuel 16:7 says "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

What does that tell you about the way God sees us? How does it comfort you to know that God sees your heart and not what the world sees?

MEMORY VERSE

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER

God, Thank you for seeing my true self. No matter what image I am trying to put out into the world you know the truth in my heart and love me anyway. Forgive me for the lies and the way I strive for the approval of others. Help me to fight against my prideful desires. Change my heart until I am a willing, humble servant seeking only to make more of you and less of myself.

PROVERBS 30
WEARY AND WORN OUT

> ***The man declares, I am weary, O God;***
> ***I am weary and worn out.***
> ***Surely I am too stupid to be a man.***
> ***I have not the understanding of man.***
> ***I have not learned wisdom,***
> ***nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.***
> ***Proverbs 30:1-3***

Most of the Proverbs we have read so far start off with a lot of confidence! It is clear in these that we are about to read wise words that should be listened to and acted on. But Proverb's 30 starts out VERY differently. We are hearing from a man who is full of lament for his own limitations. "I am weary, O God. I am worn out. Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of man. I have not learned wisdom." This is not at all the voice of certainty that we have heard throughout this book!

This is one of my favorite chapters in Proverbs because this is often who I am. I am much more likely to approach God as someone who knows nothing, someone who has "not learned wisdom." I make the same mistakes over and over. I can't seem to do the things that God wants me to do, I am too selfish to serve others, I lack obedience and discipline, I can't measure up. I hear wisdom and truth and continue to turn away and do what I want.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved." Even here in Proverbs 30 written hundreds of years before Jesus is born, God is giving us a glimpse of our need for Jesus. We will never be good enough; we will never have enough wisdom or knowledge of God to save ourselves. We can follow the wisdom in every one of these proverbs and without Jesus we are still dead in our own sin. We must except the free gift of grace that God gives us through Jesus to fully experience life with him. No amount of wisdom will save us, only grace will save us.

1.Verse 4 asks some questions where the obvious answer is God. These verses remind me of another part of the bible were God answers Job after he questions God. I know it is a little long but take a minute to read Job 38-39. **What do these verses teach you about who God is? How does reminding yourself of a God who is still in control comfort you in times of trouble?**

PROVERBS 30
WEARY AND WORN OUT

2. Verses 5 & 6 say "Ever word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar." **What is God saying to us here about his word the Bible? Why is it so important that we personally read and know the word of God?**

MEMORY VERSE

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER

God, thank you for grace. Thank you for being a father that I can humbly come to in my own stupidity, in the middle of sin, right as I disobey you and your word. Thank you that you don't love me less because of the things that I do but only long to give me grace through your son Jesus. God, show me who you are today. May I look around our world that can feel so out of control and see your presence. God may I get a glimpse today of your great love for us and respond to that love by surrendering to you.

PROVERBS 31
WHAT DOES A WISE PERSON LOOK LIKE?

> ***Strength and dignity are her clothing,***
> ***and she laughs at the time to come.***
> ***She opens her mouth with wisdom,***
> ***and the teaching of kindness***
> ***is on her tongue.***
> ***Proverbs 31:25-26***

At the end of Proverbs we spend most of the last chapter examining the life of a woman who fears the Lord. Verses 10-31 are written in an acrostic poem using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Throughout these verses we read a list of what is surely the best person ever! She is trustworthy, useful, and is talented, she is smart and good at business, she works hard all day, she is generous and kind to the needy, she takes care of her whole household and they all praise her! Some people may read this list and feel inspired but others (me) read this and would like to go back to my couch and Netflix because there is no hope I can be her. I might as well step over all my unfinished work and my many failures and just quit trying.

If we aren't careful with how we apply the book of Proverbs we can see the whole book like a to-do list. A list of things to do that will make us good. Here at the end, we have to go back to what we learned when studying chapter 3 about our hermeneutic or method for understanding what we are reading. We learned that proverbs are general rules for the way the world works, not a list of promises that will magically make our life great if we make the right choice.

Proverbs give us a guide for living in the world and wisdom for how to make our lives look more like God intended them. This knowledge is so useful and good! We want to make wise choices and Proverbs can help us live more Godly lives. We must take what we read in Proverbs with the understanding that we will never be good enough without Jesus. Even on our most obedient, very best day we still are in desperate need for the saving grace of Jesus. Our reading of Proverbs should leave us with a desire to seek wisdom so that we better know the God who loves us and rescued us. Hopefully with the correct lens we can see the woman in Proverbs 31 as an example of the joyful and selfless life of a wise person who is being shaped into who God wants her to be. Relying not on herself and what she can accomplish but living a life of dependence on the one true God.

1. You made it through all of Proverbs! A whole book of the Bible! **What do you think that you learned from studying a book of the bible from beginning to end?**

PROVERBS 31
WHAT DOES A WISE PERSON LOOK LIKE?

2. **What do you think is the most important thing you learned from the book of Proverbs? How will this change how you live your life going forward?**

3. Now that studying your bible is a daily habit DON'T STOP! **What are you going to study next?**

MEMORY VERSE

Every word of God proves true;
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Proverbs 30:5

PRAYER

God, Thank you for the book of Proverbs. Thank you that I can come to your word in humility and receive direction and understanding of how my life can look as a follower of you. Forgive me for my unwise and selfish ways. Please continue to refine my life so that every day I grow in wisdom and everyday I look more and more like you. God may I never look at your word and see a check list of things I need to do to be good enough. May I remember my need for the forgiveness and saving grace of Jesus and rest on his goodness alone.