

# THE **WAY** OF **WISDOM**

LEARNING TO BUILD A LIFE ON THE  
PRINCIPLES OF PROVERBS



# THE WAY OF WISDOM

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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## INTRODUCTION ///

Welcome to The Way of Wisdom. As you will notice, this 4-part teaching series highlights the book of Proverbs. It is written as a discussion-based curriculum and is designed for a high amount of small-group interaction. Each lesson includes a Scripture Focus and a Main Idea.

In the appendix following these four lessons, you will find a reading chart that breaks the book of Proverbs into four parts. This chart is designed to guide students in a monthly reading of Proverbs (split into four weeks). If your CMI chapter meets once a week, it will be easy to follow this reading program. If you are a CMI leader or teacher, challenge your students to read through Proverbs over the next four weeks. You may even consider having a “Proverbs Celebration” at the conclusion of this series and celebrate those who read the entire book in a month’s time.

## TEACHER’S NOTES ///

As you teach, remember to work towards reaching the following objectives. They will increase your effectiveness as a communicator, provide a standard of excellence, and make it easier for your students to remember the material.

### BE PREPARED

Before you attempt to convey the material in *The Way of Wisdom*, make sure you’re ready.

- Study the curriculum as a whole. Make written notes on your copy and highlight what sticks out to you.
- Consider the setting for your class. Will it be a classroom, auditorium, kitchen table, or living room? Ensure you have enough chairs for your students and provide pens or pencils if the need arises.
- View the handouts before you pass them out so that you will be familiar with the content. Because these lessons are designed to create discussions and personal reflection, the handouts are limited to one or two pages.

- Encourage your students to follow along using the handouts and give time at the end of the session to discuss what was covered.

You may even consider writing certain things on a chalkboard or whiteboard, or possibly displaying the PowerPoint included with this curriculum if the technology is available. Also be sure to remain aware of whom you are teaching. Stay after each session and mingle with your audience. If certain people are new to the Bible, consider spending more time on certain passages. Make yourself available to answer any questions that arise.

## BE PRAYERFUL

If we desire to have a lasting influence and make any spiritual impact on people, we must have the help of Heaven. The week before the course begins, spend extra time in prayer. Clean out your heart in repentance and ask Jesus to guide and direct your thoughts. Pray that your students will understand and remember what they hear. Begin and end each session with a time of prayer.

It is likely that as Jesus leads, certain individuals will express a desire to know more or possibly experience a spiritual new birth if they have not done so already. Prepare your heart to respond if this happens and be ready to tell them about repentance, baptism in Jesus name, and what it is like to be filled with the Holy Ghost. In every situation, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

## BE PASSIONATE

With a topic like God’s Holy Word, we should not act as if it is common. The Bible is more than a book; it is a living Word. As you study it, teach it, and explain it, do so with passion. Be enthusiastic about the privilege of telling college students about its truths. With faith, believe that Jesus will anoint you to rescue those that are lost on your campus. You have what it takes. Your campus is waiting.

## LESSON ONE

# THE BRIDGE

## BETWEEN THE WISE AND THE FOOL

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** *"THE WAY OF THE FOOL IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES: BUT HE THAT HEARKENETH UNTO COUNSEL IS WISE" (PROVERBS 12:15).*

**THE MAIN IDEA** *IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, THERE IS A VERY CLEAR LINE OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE WAY OF THE WISE AND THE WAY OF THE FOOL.*

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Proverbs. It is a book known by many; however, in modern times its principles are lost in a crowd of self-help books, supposed success gurus, and motivational speakers. As we look into its truths, we are shown a path that leads to life. A path built upon godliness, righteousness, and justice that transcends flash in the pan self-help philosophies. The book of Proverbs shows us how to apply God's laws and commandments. Its wisdom speaks to the heart of everyday living.

As we dive into the thirty-one chapters of Proverbs, we will analyze its author Solomon and glean from the divine inspiration that drove him to compile these chapters and their verses.

To begin, it is helpful to establish the two chief characters, or distinctions, in Proverbs. You know them well and have surely been influenced by them both.

- **Character #1** – The fool
- **Character #2** – The wise

According to a study by Dr. Gary La More, the word fool, foolish, or folly occurs ninety-six times in the book of Proverbs. Wise, wisely, or wiser occurs seventy times. Thus, this book, to a great extent, is a comparison of those who are wise and the fool! Interestingly, Proverbs has a lot more to say about the fool than it does about the wise.

Both the fool and the wise follow a unique path. For our benefit, Proverbs is clear to distinguish the difference between these paths. To further understand our characters, let us look at the following scriptures.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture notes of Dr. Gary La More from the study titled, "A Study on the Word Fool from the Book of Proverbs." Lecture given at Grace Missionary Baptist Church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. May 12, 2006

*"THE WAY OF THE FOOL IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES; BUT HE THAT HEARKENETH UNTO COUNSEL IS WISE" (PROVERBS 12:15).*

*"I HAVE TAUGHT THEE IN THE WAY OF WISDOM; I HAVE LED THEE IN RIGHT PATHS" (PROVERBS 4:11).*

It is necessary to notice that in the description of the wise and the fool, two different ways, or paths, are identified:

- the way of the fool.
- the way of wisdom.

According to Proverbs, there is a wide bridge and a very clear difference between the two. Throughout Proverbs we see this difference.

*"THE WISE SHALL INHERIT GLORY; BUT SHAME SHALL BE THE PROMOTION OF FOOLS" (PROVERBS 3:35).*

Knowing this, we are well within the mark when we say that your life will be made wise or foolish by the path you walk. In this sense, the word "path," or way, describes the choices, habits, and behaviors of a person. According to the Bible, the path made by your everyday living determines whether you inherit glory or shame.

## STOP AND DISCUSS

- When viewing Proverbs 12:15, what do we learn about the fool? What do we learn about the wise? How can we apply this Scripture to ways we make decisions?
- Go around the room and have participants each describe a person that they consider to be a person of wisdom. In each description, talk about the choices, habits, or behaviors that cause this particular person to be wise. Lastly, ask each participant to share how the wisdom of this individual has impacted his/her life?
- Why do you think that in God's plan for the book of Proverbs, He inspired Solomon to write more about the fool than the wise?

## A CASE STUDY: REHOBAM

When King Solomon breathed his last breath, the kingdom of Israel was passed on to his son Rehobam. While Solomon is known mostly for his wisdom and the wealth of his kingdom, Rehobam is known for bringing Israel to its knees and to a place of division.

After spending a generation building the temple and the royal palace, the people of Israel came to Rehobam with a request.

- **Read aloud:** I Kings 12:1-11.
- **Think About It:** How is Proverbs 12:15 relevant to this story?

On the third day, the people returned to the palace.

*"AND THE KING ANSWERED THE PEOPLE ROUGHLY, AND FORSOOK THE OLD MEN'S COUNSEL THAT THEY GAVE HIM; AND SPAKE TO THEM AFTER THE COUNSEL OF THE YOUNG MEN... WHEREFORE THE KING HEARKENED NOT UNTO THE PEOPLE" (I KINGS 12:13-15).*

Following this story into I Kings 12:16-19, we find that ten of the twelve tribes of Israel rebelled against Rehobam. In time, Jeroboam was crowned king of the ten northern tribes. When this occurred, a

kingdom that was once mighty and known for its glory split in two. The people of Israel were never the same.

Interestingly, when we study backwards in Scripture, we find that the “old men” who were ignored by Rehoboam were in fact the advisors and counselors of his father. Perhaps they had faces weathered by many years and their hands were twisted by long days working in the soil. There was nothing fancy or flashy about their appearances. When we read between the lines, it seems that all these old men had left was their wisdom.

When Rehoboam took the other path, he neglected the very thing that God had established to guide his footsteps. Here we see the terrible consequences of ignoring God-centered, biblically-based wisdom and instead walking in the way of the fool.

When an individual turns away from wisdom, he sacrifices all of his progress up to that point. By Rehoboam’s decision, what David, Solomon, and others built over multiple generations was thrown to the wind. In the beginning he inherited a great Kingdom. In the end all that was left were pieces.

A pursuit of wisdom will preserve, restore, and strengthen our lives. However, the other path, the way of the fool, only leads to destruction.

In Proverbs, Solomon describes wisdom as a voice that cries out in the night and in the streets (Proverbs 1:20, 8:1-3). This description of wisdom speaks volumes into our discussion.

We can ask, “Why is wisdom shown to be crying out?” Perhaps it could be because some of the worst decisions we will ever make are made in the darkness away from the safety of God-honoring environments. Could it be because some of the worst decisions we make are made outside of the church and in the streets of the world among those who have no fear or respect of God? Could it be that in those kinds of places and in those times that God’s wisdom cries out the loudest?

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What lessons can you learn from the legacy of Rehoboam? Try to personalize your answer and start your response with the words, “From the life of Rehoboam, I learn...”
- Although the Bible is our ultimate source of wisdom, it does not negate the power of godly influences in our lives. Who are the “old men” or women in your life that you go to when in need?
- When is the last time you have asked a person for advice or counsel? Do you think that you ask for help often enough?
- Using this lesson as a foundation, how would you describe a person who walks the way of the fool (choices, habits, behaviors, etc.)?



**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** *"THE WAY OF THE FOOL IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES: BUT HE THAT HEARKENETH UNTO COUNSEL IS WISE" (PROVERBS 12:15).*

**THE MAIN IDEA** *IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, THERE IS A VERY CLEAR LINE OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE WAY OF THE WISE AND THE WAY OF THE FOOL.*

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- The book of Proverbs shows us how to \_\_\_\_\_ God's laws and commandments.
  - The word fool, foolish, or folly occurs \_\_\_\_\_ times in the book of Proverbs.
  - Wise, wisely, or wiser occurs \_\_\_\_\_ times in the book of Proverbs.

**Why is King Rehoboam significant to the history of the nation of Israel?**

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**In I Kings 12:8, who are the "old men" that Scripture speaks of?**

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### FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

In Proverbs, Solomon describes wisdom as a voice that cries out in the night and in the streets (Proverbs 1:20, 8:1-3). Why do you think he describes wisdom in this manner?

When is the last time you have asked a person for advice or counsel? Do you think that you ask for help often enough?

## LESSON TWO

# YOU HAVE NOT BECAUSE YOU ASK NOT

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** *"GET WISDOM, GET UNDERSTANDING; FORGET IT NOT; NEITHER DECLINE FROM THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH. FORSAKE HER NOT, AND SHE SHALL PRESERVE THEE: LOVE HER, AND SHE SHALL KEEP THEE. WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM: AND WITH ALL THY WISDOM GET UNDERSTANDING" (PROVERBS 4:5-7).*

**THE MAIN IDEA** *GOD HONORS OUR LIVES AND BLESSES OUR EFFORTS WHEN WE GO TO HIM FOR DIRECTION AND COUNSEL.*

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In lesson one, we discussed the life of Rehoboam and the consequences of his decision to ignore voices of wisdom. Doing so, he walked the path of the fool and it led to division, rebellion, and eventually war. In lesson two, we will go back in time to the days of his grandfather David.

To begin, we step into a chaotic time in the history of Israel. Saul is on the throne. Though he has united the twelve tribes under his leadership, he has also neglected righteousness. His heart has grown dark and he has consulted a pagan witch. Due to his pride and carnality, God has removed his favor and blessing from Saul's life and has chosen David to replace him as king.

This young shepherd boy became an overnight sensation in Israel with his defeat of the Philistine giant Goliath. In the beginning, Saul welcomed David into his home. However, since then he has grown jealous and feels threatened by David's popularity. Through a series of unfortunate events, David leaves the palace, enters the wilderness, gains a following, and enters into battle with various Canaanite nations. At this juncture, we gain insight into a practice that preserved David, guided him, and gave him strength in battle.

At various times in life, we each will find ourselves in battles. We all have to endure adversity, up-hill journeys, and apparent proving grounds. A common adage is that every great leader endures some sort of crucible; and in a crucible, we see who that leader really is. Nothing is as revealing as adversity and conflict.

We each have causes, however different they may be, that pull us forward in the battlefield of life. Both the wise and the fool endure hard times. Scripture declares that it rains on the just and on the

unjust. (See Matthew 5:45.) However, it is a person's response to the rain that causes that individual to either rise above it or stay stuck in it.

At this point in his story, David has proven himself in battle but not yet as the leader of the four hundred men who recently joined forces with him. In the beginning, Scripture described them as men in distress, in debt, and discontented. (See I Samuel 22:1-2.) In a sense, they were vagabonds and had identified with David's adverse circumstances. In David, they found a leader in whom they could trust, but it was not long before they were all tested in battle.

In the Old Testament, the Philistines were the longtime enemies of Israel. They were a warlike people with an agenda of conquest. It was their giant Goliath that David had defeated with only a sling and a stone. In I Samuel 23, we see the Philistines attacking Keilah, a city in Judah. Whether he liked it or not, the battle had come to his front door. The Philistine threat could not be ignored and, for the first time, David's ragtag army would be tested.

*"THEN THEY TOLD DAVID, SAYING, BEHOLD, THE PHILISTINES FIGHT AGAINST KEILAH, AND THEY ROB THE THRESHING FLOORS" (I SAMUEL 23:1).*

In this sense, the threshing floors represented the fruit of harvest. It was the livelihood and substance of the people of Keilah. With that in mind, David decided to act. However, he did not rush into battle. First, he went to God in prayer.

*"THEREFORE DAVID ENQUIRED OF THE LORD, SAYING, SHALL I GO AND SMITE THESE PHILISTINES? AND THE LORD SAID UNTO DAVID, GO, AND SMITE THE PHILISTINES, AND SAVE KEILAH" (I SAMUEL 23:2).*

David brought his men together and delivered the word he received in prayer. The men were fearful. Could they really do it? Compared to the professional soldiers of Philistine who were groomed for war, they felt small. Though David had received a clear sense of direction, everyone around him told him "No."

*"THEN DAVID ENQUIRED OF THE LORD YET AGAIN, AND THE LORD ANSWERED HIM AND SAID, ARISE, GO DOWN TO KEILAH; FOR I WILL DELIVER THE PHILISTINES INTO THINE HAND" (I SAMUEL 23:4).*

David went to God, yet again, and received the same answer as he did at first. Faithful as He is, God gave direction and wisdom. Even though David's men were inexperienced and apprehensive, God gave them strength and favor in battle.

*"SO DAVID AND HIS MEN WENT TO KEILAH, AND FOUGHT WITH THE PHILISTINES, AND BROUGHT AWAY THEIR CATTLE, AND SMOTE THEM WITH A GREAT SLAUGHTER. SO DAVID SAVED THE INHABITANTS OF KEILAH" (I SAMUEL 23:5).*

In the context of this story, we see the truth of Proverbs in action.

*"MY SON, FORGET NOT MY LAW; BUT LET THINE HEART KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS: FOR LENGTH OF DAYS, AND LONG LIFE, AND PEACE, SHALL THEY ADD TO THEE" (PROVERBS 3:1-2).*

*"TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL THINE HEART; AND LEAN NOT UNTO THINE OWN UNDERSTANDING. IN ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS" (PROVERBS 3:5-6).*

*"GET WISDOM, GET UNDERSTANDING: FORGET IT NOT; NEITHER DECLINE FROM THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH. FORSAKE HER NOT, AND SHE SHALL PRESERVE THEE: LOVE HER, AND SHE SHALL KEEP THEE. WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM: AND WITH ALL THY WISDOM GET UNDERSTANDING" (PROVERBS 4:5-7).*

By going to God and seeking His counsel, David preserved his life and the lives of his men. Because



David acknowledged his reliance on God and admitted his need for counsel, God kept him when the battle was raging. In the end, God’s wisdom allowed David to redeem what was lost. The fruit of harvest and livestock was returned to Keilah.

STOP AND DISCUSS

- Go around the room and ask participants to share a battle they are facing. Like the Philistines, what challenges have arisen that threatens your forward progress?
- Why is David a good example to follow when in a crucible or conflict or adversity?
- How do David’s actions relate to the Scripture Focus of this lesson?

GOING FURTHER

David’s practice of seeking God at key moments in his life not only contributed to the salvation of Keilah, but also preserved his footsteps throughout the course of his life.

DAVID ENQUIRED OF THE LORD...	
AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF ZIKLAG	"And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all" (I Samuel 30:8).
AFTER THE DEATH OF SAUL	"And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron" (II Samuel 2:1).
AT THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM	"But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand" (II Samuel 5:17-19).
FOR THE SECOND TIME AT THE VALLEY OF REPHAIM	"And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David enquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer" (II Samuel 5:22-25).
IN RESPONSE TO FAMINE	"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (II Samuel 21:1).

Viewing these examples, there is no doubt what David was doing when he “enquired of the Lord.” By doing this, he was intentionally seeking wisdom. Even though he had position and power, he was not so high on himself that he expected to get through life all by himself. His strength and wisdom was not enough. It’s no surprise that when David put pen to paper and wrote the Book of Psalms, he wrote, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all

the days of my life, to behold that beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). The practice of seeking God before making big decisions, and decisions in crisis, preserved David from negative consequences. Each and every time he asked, God provided an answer.

EVIDENCE OF GOD’S DESIRE TO ANSWER	
<b>I SAMUEL 23:1-2</b>	And the Lord said unto David...
<b>I SAMUEL 23:3-4</b>	And the Lord answered him and said...
<b>I SAMUEL 30:7-8</b>	And he answered him...
<b>II SAMUEL 2:1</b>	And the Lord said unto him...
<b>II SAMUEL 5:17-19</b>	And the Lord said unto David...
<b>II SAMUEL 5:22-25</b>	He said...
<b>II SAMUEL 21:1</b>	And the Lord answered...

Every time David asked for wisdom God answered by providing insight, favor, and knowledge according to David’s needs. Could it be that the reason many do not live lives of wisdom is because they lack a habit of asking God for wisdom? Could it be that the reason so many walk the way of the fool is because they assume battles can be won by their own strength and intelligence? As we shall see in lesson three, God places a high value upon the pursuit of His wisdom.

## FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

- How do the examples provided from the life of David indicate a habit or pattern of behavior?
- The five examples represent many of the challenges we face in life: Loss, death, criticism, opposition by people, physical needs, etc. Which of these five challenges do you identify with the most? How do David’s actions or prayers give you hope?
- • Understanding God’s desire to provide wisdom for your needs and obstacles, end this lesson with prayer. Ask God for specific guidance and counsel. Perhaps it would be best to pray for other participants in your group. In prayer, ask that God would give them insight specific to the battles they are currently fighting.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** *"GET WISDOM, GET UNDERSTANDING: FORGET IT NOT; NEITHER DECLINE FROM THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH. FORSAKE HER NOT, AND SHE SHALL PRESERVE THEE: LOVE HER, AND SHE SHALL KEEP THEE. WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM: AND WITH ALL THY WISDOM GET UNDERSTANDING" (PROVERBS 4:5-7).*

**THE MAIN IDEA** *GOD HONORS OUR LIVES AND BLESSES OUR EFFORTS WHEN WE GO TO HIM FOR DIRECTION AND COUNSEL.*

What are the "threshingfloors" as described in I Samuel 23:1?

We have learned about the city of Keilah and what it represented to the people. If you could identify a Keliyah in your own life and describe a battleground that you have faced or are currently facing, what would it be?

David's practice of seeking God at key moments in his life not only contributed to the salvation of Keilah, but also preserved his footsteps throughout the course of his life.

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<b>AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF ZIKLAG</b>	"And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all" (I Samuel 30:8).
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<b>IN RESPONSE TO FAMINE</b>	"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (II Samuel 21:1).



The practice of seeking God before making big decisions and decisions in crisis preserved David from negative consequences. Each and every time he asked, God provided an answer.

EVIDENCE OF GOD'S DESIRE TO ANSWER	
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<b>II SAMUEL 21:1</b>	And the Lord answered...

David's practice of seeking God at key moments in his life not only contributed to the salvation of Keilah, but also preserved his footsteps throughout the course of his life.

### PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

This week, I plan to pray about the following situations in my life:

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## LESSON THREE

# THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** "HE THAT WALKETH WITH WISE MEN SHALL BE WISE: BUT A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED" (PROVERBS 13:20).

**THE MAIN IDEA** TO UNDERSTAND THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS HAVE UPON OUR DECISIONS.

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TELL ME WHO YOUR BEST FRIENDS ARE, AND I WILL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE. IF YOU RUN WITH THE WOLVES, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO HOWL. BUT, IF YOU ASSOCIATE WITH EAGLES, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO SOAR TO GREAT HEIGHTS. A MIRROR REFLECTS A MAN'S FACE, BUT WHAT HE IS REALLY LIKE IS SHOWN BY THE KIND OF FRIENDS HE CHOOSES.

AN IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE IN SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE IS THEIR IMPATIENCE WITH NEGATIVE THINKING AND NEGATIVE ACTING PEOPLE. AS YOU GROW, YOUR ASSOCIATES WILL CHANGE. SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS WILL NOT WANT TO GO ON. THEY WILL WANT YOU TO STAY WHERE THEY ARE. FRIENDS THAT DON'T HELP YOU CLIMB WILL WANT YOU TO CRAWL. YOUR FRIENDS WILL STRETCH YOUR VISION OR CHOKE YOUR DREAM. WISE IS THE PERSON WHO FORTIFIES HIS LIFE WITH THE RIGHT FRIENDSHIPS.

BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU STOP TO INQUIRE FOR DIRECTIONS ALONG THE ROAD OF LIFE.

-ANONYMOUS

As we are encouraged above, the quality of a person's future is for the most part determined by the quality of his relationships. We will never grow above our daily choices or the quality of our relationships. Who we "hang" with has tremendous implications on our potential. The book of Proverbs speaks often of this truth.

"HE THAT WALKETH WITH WISE MEN SHALL BE WISE: BUT A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED" (PROVERBS 13:20).

The plan of God for a person's life extends to every aspect of that life – even relationships. It is foolish to expect to live the right kind of life while surrounded by all the wrong influences. We find in Proverbs that when we surround ourselves with fools, we walk the path of destruction.

The United States is home to a wide variety of reptiles and insects, many being harmless. Others, however, carry deadly venom in their veins. The Coral snake is the most venomous snake in the contiguous United States. Its bite carries a big punch. If bitten by a Coral snake, a neurotoxin in its venom will quickly begin to affect your ability to breathe. If bitten and not properly treated, death will occur within hours.

Interestingly, many herpetologists indicate that the bite of a Coral snake can go unnoticed. Some victims do not even feel the fangs in their skin. Though a bite happens in only a moment, its effect has tremendous influence. In the same way, negative influences within friendships carry tremendous power. Just like a snakebite, the influence of other people upon us may seem subtle but have the potential to be deadly.

*"A RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS CAUTIOUS IN FRIENDSHIP, BUT THE WAY OF THE WICKED LEADS THEM ASTRAY"*  
(PROVERBS 12:26, NIV).

## STOP AND DISCUSS

- What does it mean to be the companion of fools?
- Do you think the comparison of snake venom to the negative influences of “bad people” is sound? Why or why not? How would you describe a person who is bad for you?
- In the past how have you been negatively influenced to do foolish things? Also, how have you served as a positive influence to the people around you? Provide examples.

## A CASE STUDY: ACHAN

As we turn to Joshua 7, we step into the initial conquest of the Promised Land by the Israelites. Led by Joshua, the people had come to a pagan city named Jericho. Heavily fortified, Jericho was a force with which to be reckoned. However, by the miraculous power of God Jericho was defeated. (See Joshua 6.)

In their victory, God commanded the people to pass by Jericho’s ruins. They were to not even touch the spoils left behind. All of the treasures and goods of the city were to be given as a sacrifice to God, as a testament of His provision and power. At this juncture, a man named Achan steps onto the scene.

Following the Biblical story, we find that Achan covertly made his way into the ruins and rubble of the defeated city. It was there that he picked up a few items and idols and brought them back into his home. Once he returned to his tent, he hid them out of sight.

- **Read aloud:** Joshua 7:1-5.

Leaving the great victory at Jericho, the people traveled on to Ai. It was there that a much smaller force soundly defeated them. Joshua was shocked. Going to God in anguish, Joshua cried out and sought answers.

- **Read aloud:** Joshua 7:6-7, 10-11.

Knowing that sin was hidden among the people, Joshua called a corporate meeting.

- **Read aloud:** Joshua 7: 13, 16-20.

After discovering that Achan was guilty and responsible for the defeat at the battle of Ai, judgment was cast.



- **Read aloud:** Joshua 7:22-26.

Viewing the life and legacy of Achan, we understand that until the hidden sins of our heart are dealt with our progress is limited. In the presence of bad decisions and bad influences, we are easily defeated by small things.

As we consider the actions of Achan, we are provided a powerful example of a bad influence. In the same manner that Achan put the nation of Israel on the path to destruction, a negative influence leads us on a path of defeat. The company we keep determines the future we live.

If we truly desire progress, we may have to cut away influences that distract us from our stated goals and values. To fulfill a noble vision, we must follow people who have been where we want to go. According to our Scripture Focus, a person who walks with the wise will be wise as well. Desiring to live a life of wisdom, we must avoid unwise companions and instead surround ourselves with the right people.

*"WHERE NO COUNSEL IS, THE PEOPLE FALL: BUT IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELLORS THERE IS SAFETY" (PROVERBS 11:14).*

*"WITHOUT COUNSEL PURPOSES ARE DISAPPOINTED: BUT IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELLORS THEY ARE ESTABLISHED" (PROVERBS 15:22).*

## A DISCUSSION PROMPT FOR TEACHERS

It may be helpful to your students if you share a few examples to illustrate the overall theme of this lesson. Think back on your life and explain to your students how you relate to Proverbs 13:20. Consider sharing a time when you ignored wise advice in a key decision and how it impacted your life (spiritually, emotionally, financially, etc.). Also, consider sharing a past experience when you were given positive counsel and explain how that counsel put you on the right path.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- As students in college, where do we go to find wise, godly counsel?
- How can we tell if a person is influencing us in a negative direction? What are the warning signals that may indicate that we are on the wrong path?
- What does the following statement mean and how do we put it into practice? "To fulfill a noble vision, we must follow people who have been where we want to go." How can we fulfill this statement in practical ways?
- As the lesson concludes, go around the room and have each participant share a future goal or personal value. After doing so, prompt the group to share examples of people that this person could learn from and gain relevant counsel. For example, if a person wishes to complete medical school, they could seek out a doctor whose specialty is similar to their field of interest. Or, if a person desires to overcome an addiction, they should consider discussing the issue with a counselor, therapist, or pastor.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** "HE THAT WALKETH WITH WISE MEN SHALL BE WISE: BUT A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED"  
(PROVERBS 13:20).

**THE MAIN IDEA** TO UNDERSTAND THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS HAVE UPON OUR DECISIONS.

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TELL ME WHO YOUR BEST FRIENDS ARE, AND I WILL TELL YOU WHO YOU ARE. IF YOU RUN WITH THE WOLVES, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO HOWL. BUT, IF YOU ASSOCIATE WITH EAGLES, YOU WILL LEARN HOW TO SOAR TO GREAT HEIGHTS. A MIRROR REFLECTS A MAN'S FACE, BUT WHAT HE IS REALLY LIKE IS SHOWN BY THE KIND OF FRIENDS HE CHOOSES.

AN IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE IN SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE IS THEIR IMPATIENCE WITH NEGATIVE THINKING AND NEGATIVE ACTING PEOPLE. AS YOU GROW, YOUR ASSOCIATES WILL CHANGE. SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS WILL NOT WANT TO GO ON. THEY WILL WANT YOU TO STAY WHERE THEY ARE. FRIENDS THAT DON'T HELP YOU CLIMB WILL WANT YOU TO CRAWL. YOUR FRIENDS WILL STRETCH YOUR VISION OR CHOKE YOUR DREAM. WISE IS THE PERSON WHO FORTIFIES HIS LIFE WITH THE RIGHT FRIENDSHIPS.

BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU STOP TO INQUIRE FOR DIRECTIONS ALONG THE ROAD OF LIFE.

-ANONYMOUS

**In your opinion, what does it mean to be cautious in friendship?**

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**How did Achan influence the progress of Israel?**

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**What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given?**

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## LESSON FOUR

# SOLOMON'S FOLLY

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** *"THE INTEGRITY OF THE UPRIGHT SHALL GUIDE THEM: BUT THE PERVERSENESS OF TRANSGRESSORS SHALL DESTROY THEM" (PROVERBS 11:3).*

**THE MAIN IDEA** *GOD PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON PURSUING HIS WISDOM CONSISTENTLY AND FAITHFULLY THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF LIFE.*

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Ecclesiastes is a book in the Bible that portrays the unfulfilling end of worldly desires. According to one commentary, the author shows from personal experience that all earthly goals and blessings, when pursued as ends of themselves, lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the author is the same author as the book of Proverbs: King Solomon.

In the first few verses of Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (1:2-3). Many scholars believe that as he wrote these words, Solomon was lamenting the fallen condition of his world. He had inherited a glorious kingdom, but over the course of time had wavered and disobeyed the Word of God for his life. Some even believe that his heart was in a backslidden state during the writing of Ecclesiastes. After marrying many pagan women, the influences of their idols had caused Solomon to condone worship of other gods.

Viewing the decline of Solomon, the following questions can be asked: How did the father of biblical wisdom end up turning away from God in the manner that he did? Is wisdom enough? How did someone so wise end up in moral failure? As we seek to answer these questions, it is necessary to go back to the very beginning of Solomon's leadership.

In the first three chapters of I Kings, Solomon succeeded David on the throne of Israel. In the beginning, God came to Solomon in a dream.

- **Read aloud:** I Kings 3:5-15.



When given the opportunity to receive anything he wanted, Solomon unselfishly asked for the wisdom and understanding necessary to lead the people. Let us not miss the significance of this request. Essentially, God granted Solomon a blank check. Yet, his response was simple. Give me wisdom.

Scripture records that this request pleased the Lord. In this, we discover that God places a high value upon the pursuit of His wisdom.

## STOP AND DISCUSS

- If you were granted a blank check from heaven, what would you ask for?
- How is Solomon's request a reflection of his attitudes, desires, and motives?
- Why do you think God places such a high value on the pursuit of His wisdom?

## INTEGRITY IS A WALK

A few chapters after God's appearance to Solomon in a dream, He came to the king a second time. The construction of the Old Testament temple had just been completed and all of Israel was ecstatic. In I Kings 8, Solomon prayed a prayer of dedication. God responded with a very clear challenge. As He did for Solomon's father David, God issued a covenant of blessing that hinged upon the king's ability to follow His commandments.

*"AND THE LORD SAID UNTO HIM, I HAVE HEARD THY PRAYER AND THY SUPPLICATION, THAT THOU HAST MADE BEFORE ME: I HAVE HALLOWED THIS HOUSE, WHICH THOU HAST BUILT, TO PUT MY NAME THERE FOR EVER; AND MINE EYES AND MINE HEART SHALL BE THERE PERPETUALLY. AND IF THOU WILT WALK BEFORE ME, AS DAVID THY FATHER WALKED, IN INTEGRITY OF HEART, AND IN UPRIGHTNESS, TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED THEE, AND WILT KEEP MY STATUTES AND MY JUDGMENTS: THEN I WILL ESTABLISH THE THRONE OF THY KINGDOM UPON ISRAEL FOR EVER, AS I PROMISED TO DAVID THY FATHER, SAYING, THERE SHALL NOT FAIL THEE A MAN UPON THE THRONE OF ISRAEL" (I KINGS 9:3-5).*

In this challenge, God told Solomon that if he would walk with integrity then his life, kingdom, and household would be established. In other words, if he would live a life of integrity (a life unimpaired by lies), if he could muster enough courage to be the same person by himself that he was out in the open, and if he was true about himself at all times then God would respond in kind and give the work of his hands permanence and stability.

This challenge was similar in nature to the one given by David at Solomon's coronation. Speaking on behalf of God, David declared that if his son would walk consistently, then his house would be strong.

- **Read aloud:** I Chronicles 28:7-10.

After such a solid start in life and ministry, one would think that Solomon would go on to have a great life, would build God's kingdom with abandon, would make God's name glorious in his time, and what he started would live on in descendants. Most of these goals were accomplished; yet, as we see in Ecclesiastes, Solomon faltered along the way.

Just two chapters later, I Kings 11:33 records that Solomon broke the law of the Lord and loved many strange women. These pagan women in turn stole his heart away from serving the Lord.

"They have forsaken me... and have not walked in my ways," Solomon has not done "that which is right in my eyes." He has not "kept my statutes or my judgements, as did David his father."

When faced with difficulty and adversity, David often turned to the Lord and inquired of Him. This was a habit that preserved his character.

Lamenting over the moral failures of the king, God reveals that Solomon has not followed the path of his father. It seems that he started out well and pursued God's wisdom faithfully so that he could lead the people. However, over time Solomon simply stopped seeking God and instead allowed a perverse spirit to destroy him. In the face of countless idols brought into his life by many pagan women, he began to trust in his riches in labor rather than God. When he labored for his own desires, rather than God's, he became spiritually poor.

*"THE RICH MAN'S WEALTH IS HIS STRONG CITY: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE POOR IS THEIR POVERTY. THE LABOUR OF THE RIGHTEOUS TENDETH TO LIFE: THE FRUIT OF THE WICKED TO SIN" (PROVERBS 10:15-16).*

It's no surprise that at the end of it all, Solomon lamented over his many worldly pursuits. With eternity in mind, everything he saw was vain. No riches or material possessions can compare to the riches of God's eternal glory.

Understanding the potential for failure, God was sure to stress the significance of integrity at the start of Solomon's ministry. David, his father, also spoke highly of being constant, steadfast, and faithful. As a walk, integrity is a daily pursuit. It is pursuing God's wisdom and righteousness consistently and faithfully, in spite of life's difficulties. When God appeared to Solomon in a dream and made available His riches and glory, Solomon responded in humility. Following his story throughout 1 Kings, it seems that Solomon lost the humility that he had in the beginning. Surrounded by his own earthly riches, the priority of spiritual riches was lost.

*"WHEN PRIDE COMETH, THE COMETH SHAME: BUT WITH THE LOWLY IS WISDOM. THE INTEGRITY OF THE UPRIGHT SHALL GUIDE THEM: BUT THE PERVERSENESS OF TRANSGRESSORS SHALL DESTROY THEM" (PROVERBS 11:2-3).*

*"A GOOD MAN OBTAINETH FAVOUR OF THE LORD: BUT A MAN OF WICKED DEVICES WILL HE CONDEMN. A MAN SHALL NOT BE ESTABLISHED BY WICKEDNESS: BUT THE ROOT OF THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL NOT BE MOVED" (PROVERBS 12:2-3).*

In time, Solomon became the fulfillment of the book of Proverbs. Though he started out as the poster child for wisdom, he became a tall example of a life lived foolishly. As a companion of the wicked, he became wicked.

The point here goes beyond pursuing God's wisdom. It consists of pursuing God's wisdom faithfully and consistently throughout the course of life. In the good and bad, it is praying a prayer like Job.

*"THAT WHICH I SEE NOT TEACH THOU ME: IF I HAVE DONE INIQUITY, I WILL DO NOT MORE" (JOB 34:32).*

As David cried out to God in prayer, true wisdom is revealed when we submit our human will to God's will. Wisdom is seeking *His* path rather than our own.

*"SHEW ME THY WAYS, OH LORD; TEACH ME THY PATHS. LEAD ME IN THY TRUTH, AND TEACH ME: FOR THOU ART THE GOD OF MY SALVATION; ON THEE DO I WAIT ALL THE DAY" (PSALM 25:4-5).*

*"SEARCH ME, O GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART: TRY ME, AND KNOW MY THOUGHTS: AND SEE IF THERE BE ANY WICKED WAY IN IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING" (PSALM 139:23-24).*

If you can pray prayers like this in a world driven by carnal desires and sinful pleasures, then truly you are wise. True wisdom is saying "yes" to the right things and "no" to the wrong things. According to Proverbs, wisdom is honoring God first and foremost and it is walking away from evil. Turning from the way of the fool and to the way of the wise is to turn from the path of destruction and walk the path of life. Will Solomon's folly be your own? That is completely up to you.

## FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

- How is the full life of Solomon a reflection of both the wise and of the fool?
- What does it mean to say that Job 34:32 is a prayer of the wise?
- If you could give a one-sentence summary of Solomon's folly, what sentence would you choose?
- Can you relate to the life of Solomon? Explain your answer. Though there are many lessons we can learn and apply, which lesson is the most influential to you?

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS** "THE INTEGRITY OF THE UPRIGHT SHALL GUIDE THEM; BUT THE PERVERSENESS OF TRANSGRESSORS SHALL DESTROY THEM" (PROVERBS 11:3).

**THE MAIN IDEA** GOD PLACES A HIGH VALUE ON PURSUING HIS WISDOM CONSISTENTLY AND FAITHFULLY THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF LIFE.

- 
- Who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes? \_\_\_\_\_

**When God came to Solomon in a dream, what did the king ask for?**

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**What does it mean to say that integrity is a walk?**

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**Proverbs 10:15-16**

The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The labour of the righteous tendeth to \_\_\_\_\_; the fruit of the wicked to \_\_\_\_\_.

**FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

**How is the full life of Solomon a reflection of both the wise and of the fool?**

**If you could give a one-sentence summary of Solomon's folly, what sentence would you choose?**



# APPENDIX

## THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: A READING GUIDE

### WEEK ONE

Chapter 1 _____	Chapter 5 _____
Chapter 2 _____	Chapter 6 _____
Chapter 3 _____	Chapter 7 _____
Chapter 4 _____	

### WEEK TWO

Chapter 8 _____	Chapter 12 _____
Chapter 9 _____	Chapter 13 _____
Chapter 10 _____	Chapter 14 _____
Chapter 11 _____	

### WEEK THREE

Chapter 15 _____	Chapter 19 _____
Chapter 16 _____	Chapter 20 _____
Chapter 17 _____	Chapter 21 _____
Chapter 18 _____	Chapter 22 _____

### WEEK FOUR

Chapter 23 _____	Chapter 28 _____
Chapter 24 _____	Chapter 29 _____
Chapter 25 _____	Chapter 30 _____
Chapter 26 _____	Chapter 31 _____
Chapter 27 _____	





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