DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

The Way of Wisdom

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Proverbs 1:1 through 9:18

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Proverbs is made up of several collections of concise sayings — frequently in couplet form — that contain moral truths and practical instruction for a truly successful, happy life. The first collection is found in Chapters 1–9.

These chapters consist of fatherly advice given by King Solomon to his son and the young men of Israel on the topic of wisdom. Since the proverbs were drawn from the king's personal experience, this is the most conversational, narrative, and thematic portion of the book. Solomon's purpose was to guide the youth of Israel into an understanding of why wisdom should be valued and folly despised.

Biblical proverbs are not universal in scope nor applicable in every instance. However, the adages and instruction in these chapters relate to our era, as they have to every generation. All who seek true wisdom can benefit from these spiritual insights which point to the Source, value, and benefits of wisdom, as true wisdom and knowledge come from and represent God.

The introduction to the book appears in verses 1-7 of chapter 1. The purpose is succinctly stated in verse 2: "to know wisdom and instruction." From 1:8 through 9:18, Solomon developed the superiority of wisdom over foolishness through a series of admonitions related to wise living, and explanations as to what that entails. Since wisdom is a concept not easily captured in words, he frequently employed the technique of showing how a wise person behaves, rather than describing wisdom itself.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. Solomon expressed the major theme of the Book of Proverbs in our focus verse, which states that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." The word *beginning* as used here means "the first and controlling principle." Given that perspective, how would you define or describe the "fear of the LORD"?

Class responses should bring out that the word "fear" in this context does not imply apprehension, anxiety, or dread. Rather, "the fear of the LORD"

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NOTES

means to honor and respect God, and to live in constant awareness and awe of His power.

You may wish to follow up by asking your class how the fear of the Lord will be reflected in our lives. They should conclude that it will mean making God the foundation for our understanding of the world, our attitudes, and our actions. We will also be careful to be obedient to Him.

2. In the opening statement of Solomon's discourse (Proverbs 1:1-6), he used a variety of words which are synonymous or closely related to the word "wisdom." What are some of these words, and why do you think he employed so many different ways of describing wisdom?

Synonyms, or words related in meaning to "wisdom," *include* instruction*,* understanding*,* discretion*,* knowledge*,* learning*, and* wise counsels. *No doubt Solomon used this variety in order to expand and reinforce the point that true wisdom is not simply amassing information. It is an intrinsic core attitude that affects every aspect of life.*

A deeper look at some of the shades of meaning found in these Hebrew words may be interesting to your class, and will provide a broader perspective of what Solomon was referring to in his many references to wisdom. The word translated "wisdom" is the most inclusive term. It depicts a combination of thoughtful observation, careful obedience, prudent conduct, and alertness to God's will. "Instruction" includes the concepts of correction and discipline. "Understanding" reflects looking to the heart of a matter and being mindful of the impact of the choices being weighed. "Discretion" conveys the thought of careful and wise planning. "Knowledge" implies understanding and doing what God requires fervently and consistently. "Learning" is growth or progress in the comprehension of truth. "Wise counsel" has to do with accurate guidance.

Summarizing these words might lead to describing wisdom as being insight into the underlying causes, significance, and consequences of decisions, actions, and behaviors, which enables us to apply knowledge daily.

3. Proverbs 1:20-33 is the first of many times in the Book of Proverbs where wisdom is personified in feminine terms. In this section, wisdom spoke in the first person and referred to the reader as "my child." How would you summarize the warning given in these verses?

These verses warn of the danger of turning away from the call of God, ignoring His counsel, and failing to heed His reproof. God gives opportunities to repent to all, including those with varying degrees of hardness of heart. However, such opportunities do not last forever. Those who continue to ignore

God's call will find no help outside of God's mercy when calamity comes, and will ultimately suffer eternal punishment for their continued rejection of God. Conversely, verse 33 holds out hope: those who hearken "shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

4. The words "My son…," which open chapter 2, mark the beginning of a new theme. Verses 1-5 present an if – then form of argument: *If* you meet the conditions (described in verses 1-4), *then* you can be certain of the result (described in verse 5). Briefly state the conditions and the result described in this passage.

The condition described in verses 1-4 is a heartfelt, focused, single-hearted devotion to discovering and doing what is right. The result in verse 5 is that individuals with that type of devotion will know what to do to please God and how to do it.

Follow up by asking your class why it is so vital to know how to please God. The reason is given in successive verses—living in this manner connects us with the grace and power of God. Notice the verbs which indicate God's grace: He "giveth" (verse 6), He "layeth up" (verse 7), He "keepeth" and "preserveth" (verse 8). Ultimately, God will lead those who honor Him in "every good path" (see verse 9).

5. In chapter 3 Solomon continued to press home the merits of wisdom, outlining six principles for having a good life. Summarize the principles in the following verses:

You may wish to make a list of the principles on a flipchart or dry erase board. They could be summarized as follows:

Proverbs 3:1-2—*A long and peaceful life comes by heeding godly counsel.*

Proverbs 3:3-4—*We obtain favor with God and others if we are merciful and truthful.*

Proverbs 3:5-6—*We will obtain the best direction if we allow the Lord to guide us.*

Proverbs 3:7-8—*We benefit by staying away from evil and arrogance.*

Proverbs 3:9-10—*Those who give tithes and offerings receive God's blessing.*

Proverbs 3:11-12—*We benefit from God's discipline when we understand that He administers it because He loves and cares for us.*

This would be a good time to reinforce the point stated in our lesson background—Biblical proverbs are not universal in scope, nor applicable in every instance. While they present a general truth, they do not offer a guarantee. For example, consider Proverbs 3:7-8. A person may have been faithful to avoid evil and arrogance, but still suffer from poor health.

6. What visual illustration did Solomon use in Proverbs 4:10-19 to portray the importance of wisdom? What specific words contribute to his analogy?

The visual illustration Solomon used was that of two paths: one being the path of wisdom, and the other the path of the wicked. Words such as way, led, steps, run, stumble, *and* go *all contribute to the analogy. You might wish to give the members of your class a printout of verses 10-19, and together identify and circle these words.*

Solomon described the results of taking each path. It could be mentioned that wisdom continues to increase as we remain on the path of the just—it builds upon itself. You may wish to draw your students' attention to verse 18, which portrays the path of the righteous as being one of progressive brightness. We often have heard veterans of the Gospel testify that serving the Lord grows sweeter every day. This is certainly true for those who make a full commitment to serving God with all of their hearts. If your class members have served God for many years, this would be a good opportunity to ask them to share specific ways they have experienced their way growing brighter as they draw nearer the goal.

7. Earlier in his discourse on wisdom, Solomon warned of being delivered from an immoral woman (see Proverbs 2:16-20). In chapter 5 verses 5-14 we read of the peril of sexual sin, and in chapters 6 and 7, similar warnings are repeated. Why do you think Solomon repeatedly addressed this topic?

Class discussion will likely bring out that the frequent repetition indicates the danger is great. Sexual sin was a serious problem in Solomon's day, and certainly is no less serious today. Many have learned to their sorrow that one thoughtless action can bring a lifetime of regret. No doubt Solomon wanted to impress upon his listeners that the best time to learn the dangers of immorality is before temptation comes.

A good follow-up might be to ask your class to list several steps that we can take to avoid sexual temptation and keep our lives pure. Depending upon the age of your class, discussion could go beyond the perils of physical unfaithfulness. This would be a good opportunity to discuss the dangers that exist in today's society related to electronic communication, such as inappropriate texting and emailing with those of the opposite gender, easy access to pornography, or engaging in an emotional affair through social media sites.

8. Chapter 9, the conclusion of Solomon's wisdom speeches, reviews the major themes already spelled out in the first eight chapters of the book. How does verse 10 of this chapter summarize Solomon's message in these nine introductory chapters to the Book of Proverbs?

Verse 10 states: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Once again, Solomon was stating his basic premise: to be truly wise, the fear of the Lord must be the fundamental and preeminent principle of our lives. "Knowledge of the holy" can only be built upon the foundation of a personal relationship with God. When getting to know God better is the defining purpose of our lives, we will continue to learn and grow in wisdom. Discussion of this principle could be an excellent way to wrap up your class session.

CONCLUSION

While wisdom and folly vie for our allegiance, the ultimate choice lies with us. Which call will we answer?