

# What You Get *Is* Not What You See



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Proverbs 14; Dan. 7:25; Mark 12:30, 31; Prov. 15:3; Isa. 5:20; Proverbs 15; Matt. 20:26–28.*

**Memory Text:** “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (*Proverbs 14:12, NKJV*).

As Paul had said: “We see through a glass, darkly” (*1 Cor. 13:12*). We see so little, and what we do see always comes filtered through our own minds. Our eyes and ears—all our senses, actually—give us only a narrow view of what’s really out there.

We can be deceived, too, not only about the external world, but about ourselves, as well. Our dreams, our views, and our opinions can give us very distorted images of what we are really like, and of all deceptions, that can be by far the worst.

What should we do then, to protect ourselves from these deceptions? *Proverbs* provides us with basic counsel. We should not trust ourselves, as the fool does. On the contrary, we should trust the Lord, who controls the course of events even when all seems to go wrong. In short, we need to live by faith and not merely by sight, because our sight can be exceedingly deceptive, showing only a small portion of what is real, and then even worse, distorting the little it does show us.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 7.

## The Assurance of the Fool

**Read** Proverbs 14. What does it say about the fool?

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*The fool speaks proudly (Prov. 14:3).* The first depiction of the fool deals with his “proud speech.” The image of the rod associated with the fool’s lips implies his eventual punishment. His proud words have resulted in a blow on his lips, an outcome that is seen in contrast with the lips of the wise, which are preserved (*see also Dan. 7:8*).

*The fool mocks wisdom (Prov. 14:6–9).* Although the fool seems to seek wisdom, in fact he does not believe in it and is skeptical of it. He will not find it because, in his own mind, there is no wisdom apart from himself. Most frightful is his attitude toward violation of the law. What could be more deadly than mocking the idea of sin?

*The fool is credulous (Prov. 14:15).* Paradoxically, while the fool makes fun of those idealists who still believe in the values of wisdom, he has lost his ability to think critically about what he hears; he believes “every word.” The irony of this situation strikes at the heart of secular society. Skeptical people mock God and make fun of religion, claiming that these beliefs are for children and old people, yet they themselves often believe in some of the most foolish things, such as the creation of life on earth by pure chance alone.

*The fool is impulsive (Prov. 14:16, 29).* Because the fool believes that he has the truth within himself, he does not take time to think. His reaction will be quick, dictated mostly by impulse.

*The fool oppresses others (Prov. 14:21, 31).* The mechanisms of oppression and intolerance are suggested in the psychology of the fool. He is intolerant of others and will treat them with contempt (*see Dan. 7:25; 8:11, 12*).

**It’s easy to see the traits of a fool in others, but what about in our own selves? Which, if any, of these character flaws might you need first to recognize, and then seek by God’s grace to overcome?**

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## The Fear of the Wise

**Read** Proverbs 14 again. What does it say about the wise?

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*The wise speak humbly (Prov. 14:3).* The wise restrain the use of their lips. Their silent reflection is motivated by a lack of arrogant self-assurance. The wise give consideration to the other person's ideas; therefore, the wise will take time to think through and weigh the evidence. They are also silent because they are listening, ready to learn from others.

*The wise value learning and knowledge (Prov. 14:6, 18).* It is difficult for the fool to learn, because it is hard for him to sit at the feet of a teacher; in contrast, it is easy for the wise to learn because of their humility. They will thus enjoy the experience of learning and growing. It is also this search for wisdom, for knowledge that they do not have, which makes them wise.

*The wise are cautious (Prov. 14:15).* The wise know that sin and evil exist. Therefore they will be careful where they walk. They will not trust their feelings and personal opinions; they will check things out and ask for advice. Yet they will always be careful about what other people say to them; they will sort out the good from the bad (*1 Thess. 5:21*).

*The wise are calm (Prov. 14:29, 33).* The wise can stay quiet because they do not rely on their "own ways," but depend on "above" (*vs. 14, NKJV*). It is their faith in God that allows them to relax and exercise self-control (*Isa. 30:15*). It is the fear of God that gives them confidence (*Prov. 14:26*).

*The wise are compassionate and sensitive (Prov. 14:21, 31).* The two commandments, "You shall love the LORD your God" and "You shall love your neighbor," are linked (*Mark 12:30, 31, NKJV*). We can't love God and at the same time treat other people poorly. The greatest expression of our faith is how we deal with others, especially those in need.

**"We do not realize how many of us walk by sight and not by faith. We believe the things that are seen, but do not appreciate the precious promises given us in His Word."—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 85. What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight? How are we supposed to do that?**

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## “The Eyes of the LORD”

**“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3, NKJV). How does this text make you feel, and why?**

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In the next two chapters of Proverbs, the tone changes. These chapters are more theological than the preceding ones. The Lord is referenced more often than in previous proverbs. We are also told something amazing about Him: that His eyes are in every place (*Prov. 15:3*).

This acute consciousness of the Lord’s presence is precisely what the ancient Israelites called “the fear of the LORD.” The same association is found in the Psalms: “the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him” (*Ps. 33:18, NKJV*). Likewise, Job describes God as the One who looks to the ends of the earth and sees all that happens under the heavens (*Job 28:24*). Because of this, Job concludes that “the fear of the LORD . . . is wisdom” (*Job 28:28*).

This proverb reminds us of God’s ability to see good and evil, no matter where they are. As Solomon understood (*1 Kings 3:9*), true wisdom is the ability to discern between good and evil. On a human level, this awareness should help us to remember always to do good and never evil, for God sees all that we do, even if no one else does. We fool ourselves, thinking that because, for now, we get away with evil, that we really do get away with it. In the long run, we never do.

Let us, therefore, be diligent, for “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (*Heb. 4:13, NKJV*).

**Read Proverbs 15:3, Isaiah 5:20, and Hebrews 5:14. What crucial message do these verses have for us, especially in an age when the very concepts of “good and evil” are often blurred, with people claiming that good and evil are relative or just human ideas that have no objective existence apart from what we say they are? What is so wrong with such a notion of good and evil, and why is it so dangerous to hold?**

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## The Joy of the Lord

**Read** Proverbs 15. Why is joy such an important human asset?

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Scripture does not promise us a life without trials. As Jesus Himself said, “ ‘Sufficient for the day is its own trouble’ ” (*Matt. 6:34, NKJV*). Proverbs 15:15 explains that amid evil days, the one who maintains a merry heart will have a better time of it. Pain, suffering, and trials will come, and often we can’t control when and how. What we can control, at least to some degree, is how we choose to respond.

**Read** Proverbs 15:14, 23. What is God’s part in this joy?

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Although the biblical text does not explicitly mention the reason for joy, the parallel thought between verses 13 and 14 suggests that the “merry heart” is “the heart of him who has understanding” (*NKJV*). It is the heart of the one who has faith and sees redemption beyond the immediate ordeal. This is why faith in God is so important; this is why it’s so crucial that we know for ourselves, from our own experience, the reality of God and His love. Then, whatever trials come, whatever suffering we face, those with understanding can endure, because they know for themselves God’s love.

Proverbs 15:23 brings us another important idea. Joy comes more from what we give than from what we receive. It is the good word shared with others that will bring joy to the giver. Who hasn’t experienced the blessings that come from blessing others, whether in word or in deed or both? As we have already seen in Proverbs, our words are powerful. They can do great good or great evil. And how much better it is when they do great good, not only for the one for whom the good is done, but for the one who does it.

**How well do you know, for yourself, God’s love? What are things you could do that could help open up your heart to this crucial truth? Consider how much better life would be if you knew the reality of God’s love.**

## The Sovereignty of God

We all dream and make plans, and yet things turn out differently, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The Bible acknowledges the value of human responsibility and freedom. Yet the Bible also affirms God's control over the course of events (*see Prov. 20:24, 21:31, and Daniel 2 and 7*).

**What** does Proverbs 16:1 say? How are we to understand this text?

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We prepare and make plans, but the last word still belongs to God. This does not mean that our preparations are worthless. But in the life of faith, if we just submit our plans to God, He will work with them, and our plans will be directed (*Prov. 16:9*) and ultimately established by Him (*vs. 3*). Even the work of our enemies will be used in our behalf (*vss. 4, 7*).

Though these are not simple ideas to grasp, especially when we face difficult situations, they should give us comfort and help us learn to trust God, even when things seem to go terribly wrong, and when our plans don't turn out as we had hoped. The key point for us is to learn to surrender all to God; if we do that, we can be sure of His guidance, even in the hardest times.

**Read** Proverbs 16:18, 19. What is the place of ambition in human success?

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As always, the Bible warns against pride. After all, as fallen beings, what do we have to be proud of? What vice is more contrary to God than pride, the first sin? (*See Ezek. 28:17.*) Jesus emphatically taught about the iniquity of seeking to be great, and He urged His disciples to seek humility instead (*Matt. 20:26–28*).

**Read** Proverbs 16:33. What is the place of chance in human success?

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The Bible does not make room for chance. For even when one thinks that the course of events is dictated by chance, we can trust that God is still in control.

**As we seek to understand why things happen, how does the reality of the great controversy help us work through some difficult issues regarding why things happen as they do?**

**Further Study:** “From the beginning Satan has portrayed to men the gains to be won by transgression. Thus he seduced angels. Thus he tempted Adam and Eve to sin. And thus he is still leading multitudes away from obedience to God. The path of transgression is made to appear desirable; ‘but the end thereof are the ways of death.’ Proverbs 14:12. Happy [are] they who, having ventured in this way, learn how bitter are the fruits of sin, and turn from it betimes.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 720.

“Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father’s house? Those professed Christians who are constantly complaining, and who seem to think cheerfulness and happiness a sin, have not genuine religion.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** Discuss the idea that we have only a limited view of reality. What does this mean? What things are out there that we know are real, yet we just can’t sense them, in any way? For instance, how many radio waves (cell phone calls, satellite programs, radio programs) are in the air all around you right now, and yet you can’t see, hear, or feel them at all? How should the existence of such realities help us to understand how limited our senses are? How should this understanding help us to realize the reality of other things that we can’t see, such as angels?
- 2** Why is it important to understand the reality of human free will and free choice, even if God is ultimately in control? Though these concepts (human free choice, God’s sovereignty) seem to be in contradiction, both are taught in the Bible, so how can we reconcile them?

## “They Deserve a Chance Too”

When Paul and Christie Brown moved into a less-than-desirable neighborhood in Elkins, West Virginia, they didn't know that their home would become a magnet for young people.

“I've always been youth focused,” says Paul, “so when the neighborhood kids wanted to hang out with our kids at the house, we said, ‘OK, but there are rules:

“ ‘1. Respect. You will treat yourself and others respectfully, with no swearing and no name calling.

“ ‘2. No lying. You lie to me, and it's done—you are out the door.

“ ‘3. Health and dietary issues—no drugs, no alcohol, no unclean meat.’ ”

Once the young people understood about clean and unclean foods, they tried sharing what they had learned with their families. “The grandfather would be cooking a groundhog,” says Paul, “but the kids would tell him, ‘No! We're not going to eat that!’ ”

Before long, the visitors were asking to move in with the Browns. “Brayden spends every weekend at our house,” says Paul. “It's his Sabbath retreat and gets him away from his house.” During the week, Brayden tries to avoid his abusive, alcoholic stepfather as much as possible.

Hunter and Wyatt are two others who spend more time with the Browns than at home. Coming from difficult situations, both of the boys feel safe with Paul and Christie, whom they consider to be their surrogate parents.

“I try to treat all the kids as if they're my kids,” says Paul, “because they deserve a chance too.” That includes providing clothing, bicycles, and various other items. “Even the vehicle I drive—an extended-cab truck—is based on how many kids we're looking after, so we can take them to and from school.”

With parental permission, the Browns have taken Brayden and Hunter with them to Pathfinders and to church and are even paying for them to attend the local Seventh-day Adventist church school. Unfortunately, Wyatt's mother will not give permission for him to join in these activities; but for Brayden and Hunter, their experience has been life changing. On November 2, 2013, both boys, along with the Browns' son, Payton, were baptized at the Elkins Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“We've been living here for three years now,” Paul says, “and my wife really feels that the Lord put us in this neighborhood. It's not where we would have chosen, but we are sure that the Lord led us here.”

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*\* All names of neighborhood children have been changed.*



# DRAINING THE STYX

**Shawn Boonstra**

**2015 Sharing Book**

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