

# Wise Words *for* Families



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Prov. 5:3-14; 13:22; 14:26; 17:22; 23:13; 31:10-31; Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4.*

**Memory Text:** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (*Proverbs 3:5, 6, NKJV*).

**The Week at a Glance:** The book of Proverbs presents powerful, practical advice for marriage and family to those who will listen.

The book of Proverbs contains a combination of instructions, poems, questions, and wise sayings filled with practical wisdom. Family relationships are directly addressed, and other words of wisdom can be applied to the home. Proverbs is, in fact, cast as a family document in which keys to a godly life are handed down from parent to child. Just as parents might write a letter of advice to a son or daughter going off to college, setting up his or her separate dwelling, or taking a job away from home, so Proverbs is addressed from father to son, “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother” (*Prov. 1:8, NKJV*). Deuteronomy directs parents to share their convictions with the next generation. This is what Proverbs does. In the father's summons, we hear the voice of the heavenly Father calling us to learn.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 11.*

## Love the Right Woman

**List** the problems and consequences involved with a sexual liaison before marriage or an extramarital affair as depicted in Proverbs 5:3-14.

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The godly person reserves (if not married) and preserves (if married) his or her deepest affections and sexual intimacy for marriage. Men specifically are addressed in Proverbs, but the same idea as it relates to women is expressed in the Song of Solomon (*compare Song of Sol. 4:12-15*). The powerful attraction of illicit love must be weighed against the horrific consequences of this sin. Casual sexual liaisons lack commitment and, therefore, fall far short of true intimacy. Material, physical, and emotional resources are squandered. Most important, one must answer to God for the choices made in life.

Sexual intimacy, one of God's greatest gifts to humans, is a privilege of marriage only (*Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Heb. 13:4*). In Proverbs the imagery of nourishing, plentiful water is used as a delicate symbol of the pleasure and satisfaction a married couple ought to obtain in their love together. This is contrasted with the waste that results when there is unfaithfulness. The use of "the wife of your youth" (*Prov. 5:18, NKJV*) indicates that, even when the two grow older, their commitment is to continue. A husband is still ravished ("intoxicated" [*vs. 19, margin, NKJV*]) by his wife's charms.

In the human fallen condition, sexual instincts can lure individuals away from the divine design for sexuality. However, God has also given humanity the power to reason and to choose. These temptations, if not continually suppressed, can become overwhelming. A firm commitment to the divine design for sexuality in marriage can prevent the development of illicit sexual relationships. The choice of lifelong faithfulness to God's design for sexuality in marriage not only is prudent but carries its own bountiful rewards.

**If you knew someone struggling with sexual temptations that could destroy a marriage, what counsel would you give that person?**

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**Key Texts:** *Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 7:3, 4*

**Teachers Aims:**

1. To discuss God's design for human sexuality.
2. To explain the father's and the mother's role in the home.
3. To show how positive attitudes make the home more pleasant.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. The Divine Standard for Sexual Intimacy** (*Phil. 4:13*)

- A. God-fearing individuals reserve sexual intimacy for marriage.
- B. Christians must make a firm commitment to God's plan for sexual intimacy.
- C. Making the right choices can come only through Divine intervention.

**II. A Father's Influence in the Home** (*Prov. 27:23*)

- A. A godly father looks out for the well-being of his children.
- B. A father's influence has a direct impact on the character development of his children.
- C. Children look to their father for spiritual guidance.

**III. A Father's and a Mother's Presence in the Home** (*Prov. 13:24, 31:10*)

- A. Parents' love and respect for each other affects the well-being of their children.
- B. A wise man will seek the Lord's guidance in his role as husband and father.
- C. Loving discipline is vital to leading children down the right path.
- D. A godly woman diligently works to meet the needs of her family.

**IV. The Home Atmosphere** (*Prov. 17:22*)

- A. Cheerfulness makes the home more pleasant.
- B. To avoid suppressed anger, problems in the home should be confronted right away, in the spirit of love and forgiveness.

**Summary:** Reverence for God will strengthen the marriage and the family. Through Divine intervention a couple can guard their marital vows and have loving relationships with each other and their children.

**COMMENTARY**

Many words of wisdom and practical advice exist for couples and families. Spend time in your class sharing some of the advice and wisdom that has been passed down in each other's family.

The following words of advice and wisdom are either from Scripture, Ellen White, or other Christian authors:

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers [or sisters] live together in unity” (*Ps. 133:1, NIV*).

## A Call to Fathers

**Note** the character qualities of fathers described in Proverbs that can have long-term consequences for children:

*Prov. 13:22; 27:23, 24*

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*Prov. 14:26*

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*Prov. 15:1, 18; 16:32*

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*Prov. 15:27*

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*Prov. 29:17*

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The characters of fathers have a direct impact on their children and the legacy they pass on to them. Children look to their fathers for support, devoted affection, guidance, and modeling. Proverbs lauds those fathers who are reliable providers and wise managers of family resources. Many are the ways in which “a greedy man brings trouble to his family” (*Prov. 15:27, NIV*); fathers must be mindful to give priority to family over work. Godly fathers seek to be patient and in command of their emotions. They respect their children’s dependence upon them. They discipline their children but are careful not to abuse their position of authority. Most important, dedicated fathers want to follow God, to be controlled by His love and by the teaching of His Word, that they might guide the feet of their children in the right way.

In the end, the most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. His faithfulness and continuing affection for her, or the lack of these, have a telling effect upon children’s well-being even into adulthood.

In Proverbs, loyalty to God, commitment to marriage and family, and integrity in one’s personal and community life are key themes. Success in everything depends upon the condition of the individual heart. The attractions of sin—whether sex, sloth, wealth, or power—abound, but the wise husband and father looks to God for help to make right choices continually.

**How are the moral principles expressed here important for anyone, whether or not a father? How have your actions, either for good or bad, impacted others, especially children? In what ways might you need to be more careful?**

“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways” (*Ps. 128:1, NIV*).

“ ‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked’ ” (*Luke 12:48, NIV, last part*).

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’ ” (*Eccles. 12:1, NIV*).

“One of the worst feelings in the world is when you realize that the ‘first things’ in your life—including your family—are getting pushed into second or third place, or even further down the list. And it becomes even worse when you realize what’s happening as a result.”—Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Families*, p. 113.

“As long as we’re in the role of judge and jury, we rarely have the kind of influence we want.”—Page 211.

“Communication is an art, and like any art form it requires disciplined practice. Initially, the practice may be tedious and unfulfilling. Many people drop out or look for shortcuts, but those who stick with it are rewarded with deep and fulfilling relationships. Like a musician who has mastered his instrument, they are free to make beautiful music—and communication is the music of marriage.”—Richard Exley, *Marriage in the Making* (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1994), p. 80.

“As surely as we need God’s help to overcome temptation, to master the disciplines of prayer and to mature as men of God, so we need divine enablement to become the kind of husbands and fathers our families need us to be. Even as God willingly helps us in all the other areas of our lives so will He help us become godly husbands and fathers.”—Page 49.

“The church needs to be first and foremost a place where the gospel is preached and where Christ is honored as our Lord and Savior. But God designed the church to be a caring community as well.”—Smalley and Trent, *The Blessing*, p. 190.

“Relationships, not achievements or the acquisition of things, are what matters most in life.”—Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), p. 125.

“Marriage, in a majority of cases, is a most galling yoke. There are thousands that are mated but not matched. The books of heaven are burdened with the woes, the wickedness, and the abuse that lie hidden under the marriage mantle.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 44.

“There must be love and respect manifested by the parents for one another, if they would see these qualities developed in their children.”—Page 216.

“Pity the man who is married to a woman who cannot listen without offering advice.”—Exley, *Marriage in the Making*, p. 53.

## Correction With Love

**What** does Proverbs teach about the importance of discipline and correction of a child? *Prov. 10:17; 23:13, 14; 29:1; 29:15.*

Parents sometimes discipline their children to impress upon them what is socially unacceptable behavior, to punish for disobedience, or even to express their displeasure when embarrassed. But what is God's intention regarding discipline for these young members of His family? Proverbs sets discipline in the context of hope for the future (*Prov. 19:18*). Godly parents know that children have a sinful nature. Only one power can help them with this, and this power is Christ (see Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 29). The mission of Christian parenting, including discipline, is to lead children to God.

*Supporting a tender plant.* Through Christ discipline is seen not as punishment, nor an expression of authority, but as redemptive correction. God's plan is that loving parents, knowing the strength of sin, guide their children's footsteps to Christ. Caring parents correct kindly and firmly, restraining and guiding children through the early years, much as a horticulturalist provides support to a newly planted tree, until self-control emerges and a youth comes to trust in God and cooperates with the divine plan for salvation, growth, and maturity.

**What** message for parents is found in Proverbs 13:24; 23:13, 14?

All told, just a few verses mention the "rod" (Heb. *shebet*) in the context of disciplining children. Popular within Christian parenting literature is the notion that parental use of the rod should be like that of the heavenly Shepherd who uses it to guide His flock (*Ps. 23:4*). Elsewhere, Scripture points to patient teaching, consistent modeling, good communication, and close relationships for influencing change in children (*Deut. 11:18, 19*). The child's feeling of being loved by his or her parents is vital if discipline is to have its desired effect of being corrective and redemptive (*Prov. 13:24*).

**When discipline has missed its intended purpose by being too harsh or misunderstood, how can parents set matters right with their children?**

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“In truth, you expect too much! A spouse can love you, listen to you and affirm you, but he or she can not be responsible for your emotional well-being. Such unrealistic expectations set you up for disappointment, which often leads to despair, then resentment.”—Page 33.

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (*1 Pet. 1:13, NIV*).

“Every marriage should be romantic. I feel sorry for couples who have let the romance go out of their marriages. However, a marriage needs more than romance to survive. Sitting up all night with a sick

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Proverbs 3:5, 6; 5:3-14; 17:22; 31:10-31*

**1** When we are young, we chafe under the demands and expectations of those who are older than we are. As we get older, we long to live free of any external restraints. Yet, as we get older, we also discover how life is interconnected; rarely can we do something without having that action affect someone else. Who are those whose actions are most likely to affect you directly? Whose lives do you directly touch with your actions?

**2** The story of David and Bathsheba (*2 Samuel 11*) is an object lesson in the disintegration caused by immorality. Instead of making a course correction and admitting his misdeeds, David’s life spirals downward into adultery, deception, and murder. Why is it that we’re so often blind to the heartache caused by pre-marital or extramarital affairs? What is God’s counsel to those tempted to leave what they have for something they hope will be better?

**3** Someone has said, “When your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.” Rather than being one-dimensional, parental discipline uses a variety of methods to guide its charges. What kinds of discipline does God use in guiding us? How do these translate into methods we can use in guiding our children and grandchildren?

**4** Read *Proverbs 21:9, 19; 27:14-16*. Do you see the humor in these proverbs? What examples of humor do you see in Christ’s life and teachings? (*Hint: Read Matt. 7:3-5, 19:24, Luke 11:11.*) You may have to translate these verbal images into visual ones. How does your family use humor to soften the bumps in life’s highway?

## Is Life Better on a Rooftop?

**In** what way does the book of Proverbs sprinkle humor on some of the irritations in domestic living? *Prov. 21:9, 19; 27:15, 16*. What effect does this humor have?

A number of the proverbs consider the ways we treat each other in close relationships. They make their point with a light touch and a flash of wit, like the ones about the insensitive friend who “sings songs to a heavy heart” (*Prov. 25:20, NKJV*) and the early rising family member who “blesses” sleepers “with a loud voice” (*Prov. 27:14, NKJV*). Wives reading these verses about contentious women may want to add some *proverbs* about men! They may retort that such sayings perpetuate the very problem of these proverbs by targeting only women when husbands, who share responsibility for the home atmosphere, are equally capable of contentious behavior. (Imagine what it must have been like living in the home of Caiaphas or Annas!)

*A merry heart helps.* Having a sense of humor in family living is a good thing. Humor lubricates the machinery of living, helping to reduce stresses and strains. “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (*Prov. 17:22, NKJV*). Proverbs takes some of its own medicine throughout the book and gives us permission to chuckle at a few of the behaviors that annoy and irritate. Perhaps when we have smiled (or smarted a bit if the joke is on us), we are in a better place to talk about habits or behaviors that irritate or annoy us. On the other hand, humor should not be used to minimize or bypass issues that need serious attention.

A low-grade fever may be symptomatic of a chronic infection. Quarreling, nagging, and complaining may signal that there is suppressed anger in one or more family members, perhaps related to difficulties with mutuality or communication in the relationship. The complaining partner tries to offset his or her partner’s perceived power, control, and unwillingness to communicate. If the infection is cleared up, the symptoms will go away. In families, rather than avoiding the problem or one another, members build on their love for the Lord and their commitment to one another to communicate their needs and feelings, get to the root of their anger, and clear it up.

**Why is laughter so important for the home? How can it be used for good, or how can it be perverted and used for evil? Bring your answer to class.**

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child is not very romantic, especially by the third or fourth night. Caring for your mate when he or she has the flu is not romantic. Changing dirty diapers is not at all romantic. There are many aspects to marriage that are not romantic and that require more than infatuation to get through. Romantic love is based on feelings; however, genuine love is based on commitment. It is the commitment, not romance, that will carry a couple through the difficult times.”

## Witnessing

Perhaps no book on earth is so full of practical and pithy counsels on marriage and family life as the book of Proverbs. Solomon, the world’s wisest man, understood that homes are the building blocks of society. He recognized that he was dealing with a subject of primary importance.

Solomon’s inspired maxims never were meant to be quoted in jest or used as darts against the opposite sex. Rather, they are meant to function as a handheld mirror to aid us in correct self-knowledge. Solomon’s foundational precept by which husbands and wives each can improve is “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” (*Prov. 3:5, 6*).

For men, Solomon strongly advocates moral purity (*Proverbs 7*) and fervent, affectionate loyalty to one’s own wife (*Prov. 5:15-19*). The observance of these two precepts would prevent most marital problems. Could it be that Solomon has several observations about the stressful behavior of frustrated wives, because so many of them have insensitive and domineering husbands? Certainly in all the world’s religious literature, no more beautiful description of a practical and virtuous wife can be found than in *Proverbs 31:10-31*.

Qualities of the kind described here are best brought out in a woman whose husband expressively and reciprocally is appreciative of her goodness.

“If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?

“A husband and wife should cultivate respect and affection for each other. They should guard the spirit, the words, and the actions so that nothing will be said or done to irritate or annoy. Each is to have a care for the other, doing all in their power to strengthen their mutual affection.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 345.

This kind of home life, which is very rare, illustrates the life-beautifying effects of the gospel.

Solomon’s own moral fall with women (*1 Kings 11:1-4*) demonstrates that we need more than pure wisdom to stay on the right path; we also need grace (*see 1 Cor. 1:30, 31*).

## A Truly Wealthy Wife

**The** book of Proverbs closes with praise for a wife of noble character. Identify the characteristics and qualities that are lauded. *Prov. 31:10-31.*

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The woman described is special, and so is the poetry. Each of the verses, commencing with Proverbs 31:10, begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. One senses from this tribute to a worthy wife that even the whole national alphabet barely provides a sufficient framework to extol her properly!

Proverbs's emphasis on marrying a good partner is reflected in a dictum of the rabbis: "A man's home is his wife." "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones" (*Prov. 12:4, NIV*). Here, at the end of the Proverbs, rolled idealistically into a portrait of one, are many varied skills: clothing manufacture, buying real estate, agriculture, home and financial management. Meanwhile, she cares well for her family. They love her and praise her.

These extensive talents are not to be expected in every woman, nor are they a blueprint whereby husbands should measure their wives. Rather, through describing these capabilities and qualities, Proverbs conveys what is most important and universally relevant for women, as well as for men: the traits of trustworthiness, compassion, reliability, faithfulness, kindness, and industry. The secret of such a life, according to Proverbs 31:30, is that she "fears the Lord" (*NKJV*).

In Proverbs 31:10 the word for "virtuous," or "of noble character" (*NIV*), means "strength," "might," or "wealth." It is translated as "riches" in Psalm 62:10 and describes Joshua's "men of valour" (*Josh. 1:14*). Boaz commends Ruth with the word *virtuous* (*Ruth 3:11*). In Proverbs 31:10 there is a play on the concept of "wealth." True wealth lies in character, integrity, and the fear of the Lord. This vastly exceeds the worth to be found in precious stones.

**Who are some of the women of valor and virtue who have influenced your life? How would you expand the list of character qualities, virtues, and capacities of godly women?**

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—(Stephen Grunlan, *Marriage and the Family: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), p. 74.

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “He was one of the greatest rulers in African history and the creator of modern Ethiopia. Born in 1844, he was captured during an enemy raid and held prisoner for 10 years. Escaping, Menelik II declared himself head of the province of Shewa. He began conquering neighboring kingdoms and developed them into modern Ethiopia with himself as emperor. When Italy tried to take over Ethiopia, Menelik’s army met and crushed the Italians at the Battle of Aduwa. This victory, as well as his efforts to modernize Ethiopia (schools, telephones, railroads), make Menelik world-famous. The emperor had one little-known eccentricity. Whenever he was feeling ill, he would eat a few pages of the Bible, insisting that this always restored his health. One day in December, 1913, recovering from a stroke and feeling extremely ill, he had the entire book of Kings torn from an Egyptian edition of the Bible, ate every page of it—and died.” ([http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible\\_application\\_of.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_application_of.htm))

### Thought Questions:

**1** Like Menelik II, the church sometimes is guilty of ingesting the words of the Scriptures while failing to *apply* God’s Word to everyday life. Find examples of how this is done in not only the church but in the home, as well.

**2** Someone once said, “We have 35 million laws on the books to enforce the Ten Commandments.”—Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 47. Imagine a world where the only laws were the Ten Commandments. What would that do for society? For the validity of the Bible? For other religions and cultures? Would there be revolt or peace? Defend your answer.

### Application Question:

Family or personal worship often becomes routine. Without relevance to changing personal needs and crises in life, worship soon becomes meaningless. Find texts in Proverbs that provide practical ways the Word can be used in your life. Share creative ways of worship with your class.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “Marital Duties and Privileges,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 121–128; “Manual Training,” *Education*, pp. 214–222; “Security Only in Right Thinking,” *The Faith I Live By*, p. 222.

*Keeping the heart in heaven.* “Christians should be careful that they keep the heart with all diligence. They should cultivate a love for meditation, and cherish a spirit of devotion. Many seem to begrudge moments spent in meditation, and the searching of the Scriptures, and prayer, as though the time thus occupied was lost. I wish you could all view these things in the light God would have you; for you would then make the kingdom of heaven of the first importance. To keep your heart in heaven will give vigor to all your graces, and put life into all your duties. To discipline the mind to dwell upon heavenly things, will put life and earnestness into all our endeavors. . . . We are dwarfs in spiritual attainments. . . . [Eph. 4:13.]”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1157.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Many Christians find a support-group network helpful as they seek to *guard their hearts* against temptation. In what way might this augment prayer, Bible study, and reliance on the Holy Spirit?
- ❷ As a class, read your answers aloud to Wednesday’s final question. Discuss the implications of your various answers.
- ❸ In contrast to Proverbs 31, what qualities does contemporary culture tend to exalt in women? How can we as individuals protect ourselves from partaking of that same degrading attitude?

**Summary:** The book of Proverbs passes on the distilled wisdom of generations of godly men and women who have valued loyalty to God and also the freedom of the human will. Appeals are made to the people of future generations to reverence God and make wise choices that will strengthen marriage and family life.