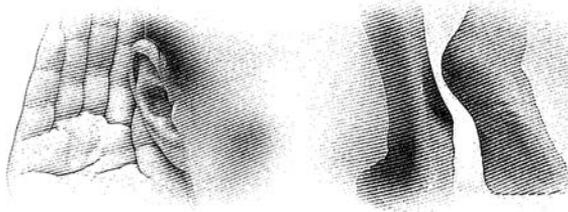


From Ears *to* Feet



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 4, 1 Kings 3:9, Matt. 13:44, Proverbs 5, 1 Cor. 10:13, Prov. 6:1–19.*

Memory Text: “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (*Proverbs 4:26, 27, NKJV*).

Science has demonstrated that hearing impacts how we walk, and that even our balance is influenced by how well we hear. So, instruction, or education—that is, what we hear—is crucial to how we live. “Wisdom is the principal thing,” says Proverbs 4:7.

Yet no matter how good the instruction is, the student must pay attention. Not without some irony an ancient Egyptian teacher noted that the “the ear of the boy is on his back; he listens when he is beaten.” (In Egyptian art, the student was often represented with big ears on his back.)

It's not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know *how to choose* right and not wrong. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in following and obeying what we have learned so that we don't end up walking in the wrong direction.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 10.

Hear!

Read Proverbs 4. What practical truth is found here, and how can we apply this to our own lives as we seek to live in faithfulness to God?

The act of “hearing” marks the first step in education. In Hebrew thought the seat of wisdom or of intelligence is located not in the brain but in the ears. This implies that even before we seek to conceptualize or solve a problem, we first need to hear it. This means we need to listen. When Solomon asks for wisdom, he specifically asks for “a hearing heart” (*1 Kings 3:9, literal translation*).

The first act of wisdom, then, is “to listen,” which suggests that wisdom comes from an external source (in this case, the parents). We cannot discover wisdom by ourselves. The self-made individual is an impossible concept in the domain of biblical wisdom. Wisdom is, first of all, something that we receive, not something we shape with our own skills or that we unearth through our own brilliance and reasoning. The capacity of “paying attention” (Hebrew, “to put one’s heart”) implies the involvement of the heart. The search for wisdom, then, is not merely a cold, objective enterprise. The heart, which is the core of the individual and (in Hebrew thought) the seat of emotions, participates in the search for wisdom.

Read Matthew 13:44 and Jeremiah 29:13. What link can you find between these verses and the search for wisdom as it is expressed in Proverbs 4?

Emotions play a crucial role in our basic existence as humans and thus cannot and should not be ignored in our relationship with God. How do we learn the proper place and value of emotions in regard to our spiritual life? How have your emotions steered you right (and wrong), and what have you learned from those experiences?

Protect Your Family

Once we determine to walk in the way of wisdom, we still need great caution because we will meet obstacles along that way (*see 1 Pet. 5:8*). One of the greatest dangers we face deals with our families, the most precious, sensitive, and intimate domain of life.

Read Proverbs 5. What dangers must we guard against?

The first danger begins with ourselves; it lies in our own words. We should watch our tongues to make sure that what we say does not convey an inappropriate or a mixed message. Our lips should be in harmony with our knowledge and should reflect our spiritual views.

The second danger comes from the other woman or the other man (although the text refers to the danger coming from a “strange woman,” the language should be understood in a generic sense; temptation could come from either a man or a woman) who interferes in the family. Either could seduce a spouse into violating the marriage vows, and who hasn’t seen, or experienced, just how destructive this sin is?

According to the text, the best way to resist these temptations, which often start with alluring words, is to listen to the words of wisdom. By heeding and obeying inspired instruction, we are more likely to stay focused on the essentials and so be protected from adultery or whatever other temptations come our way.

Of course, not only should we keep ourselves from adultery, we should also avoid going to the place where the “temptress” stays (*Prov. 5:10*); we certainly should not approach her door (*vs. 8*).

Finally, perhaps the best protection of all against the temptation to love another woman or man is this: just love your own spouse, “the [wife or husband] of your youth” (*vs. 18, NKJV*). The author of Ecclesiastes resonated with this counsel: “Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun” (*Eccles. 9:9, NIV*). Be thankful for what you have, and you won’t be looking elsewhere.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. With this promise before you, what definitive and practical steps might you need to take, right now, in order to protect yourself from the passions that might be brewing in you?

Protect Your Friendship

Someone once said: “Lord, protect me from my friends; I can take care of my enemies.” The book of Proverbs is concerned with the vulnerability of friendship; it counsels us on how to keep our friends and also, if necessary, how to protect ourselves from them. The Hebrew word for “friend” also means “neighbor,” the one who is close to us, the one who is already a friend or who may become one. Biblical wisdom values human relationships and appeals for thoughtfulness and respect in these relationships.

Read Proverbs 6:1–5. What problem does Solomon refer to, and what is the solution? What crucial spiritual principle do we find here, as well?

While the torah urges people to help the poor and to lend them money without charging interest (*Exod. 22:25*), wisdom warns us against unwise financial backing for a friend who is in debt. The duty of charity does not exclude the duty of justice (*Exod. 23:2, 3*). Though we need to be generous when we can, we would be wise to make sure that our charity will not turn into a fiasco (*compare Prov. 22:27*).

Hence, the wise counsel given to us in the proverb. The first caution applies to our words. How crucial that we evaluate the situation and make sure that we can afford to help our friend. If so, only then speak and promise. Indeed, the warmth of our relationship or a moment of emotion may precipitate our commitment, and we may regret it afterward.

No matter how well-intentioned you might have been, it’s crucial to think before you act and before you commit to something that you can’t fulfill. The point is that if we get into a bind, we need to do what we can to fix it, including humbling ourselves, admitting our mistake, and asking for grace.

How do we learn to balance our desire to bear one another’s burdens (*Gal. 6:2*) with the words given to us in this proverb?

Protect Your Work

Read Proverbs 6:6–8. What can we learn from the ant?

Not only do ants work hard (even harder than humans, if one compares the burden they are able to carry to the burden humans can carry in proportion to their respective weights), but ants work independently and do not need to be supervised. The main reason for their hard work is the future. They “anticipate” times of trouble (winter) and prepare themselves for it. So, the ant teaches us the wisdom of thinking about the future when making plans or engaging in an activity. “This is a question that demands consideration by every parent, every teacher, every student—by every human being, young or old. No scheme of business or plan of life can be sound or complete that embraces only the brief years of this present life and makes no provision for the unending future.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 145.

Read Proverbs 6:9–11. What can we learn from the sluggard?

It is the sluggard who has something to learn from the ant, not the other way around: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). While the ants are at work, the sluggards are asleep. While the ants are productive at the harvest, the sluggards keep folding their two hands, a symbol of indolence. The ants surpass themselves by carrying burdens heavier than themselves and by preparing for the future; the sluggards live in the present and are occupied only with themselves.

Though indolence and laziness are condemned here, we must also remember that life consists of more than work and earning money. How does the Sabbath, as presented in the context of the workweek, help us find this proper balance?

Protect Yourself

After having warned us against the particular evils that threaten three domains of life—our family, our social contacts, and our work—Proverbs gives us a portrayal of the wicked. It is a satire full of irony and sharp psychological observation. The two poems (*Prov. 6:12–15 and 16–19*) are parallel and, with the same poetic rhythm of seven, cover corresponding motifs. The wicked person’s inside is described as linked to what is thought in the heart; at the same time it all becomes manifested in what is done on the outside.

Read Proverbs 6:14, 18 and Matthew 15:19. What important point is being made here?

“If you indulge in vain imaginations, permitting your mind to dwell upon impure subjects, you are, in a degree, as guilty before God as if your thoughts were carried into action.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 334.

What warnings are given in Proverbs 6:12–19?

The imagery is ironic. The walking wicked follows the lazy sluggard. The two attitudes seem to be different, and yet they carry the same lesson. Both stay within themselves. Neither one is interested in the instruction coming from outside of themselves. They both follow their own wisdom and inclinations. The sluggards are sleeping, and neither their ears nor their feet function; the wicked have only their feet and their mouths working, not their ears. The result is the same: they will both go to destruction.

Meanwhile, evil has two effects: it harms not only persons sinned against, but sinners, as well. The liars will finally believe their own lies. It is also noteworthy that the ultimate result of wickedness is discord and conflict, which also can affect society. Indeed, the effects of sin rarely, if ever, remain confined to sinners. Others are impacted and usually only for the worse.

How have the sins of others affected your life? Greatly, no doubt. What lessons can you learn from this about how careful you need to be so that your actions don’t hurt others?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Moral Standards,” pp. 326–339, in *The Adventist Home*; “In Contact With Others,” pp. 489–491, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Other Object Lessons,” pp. 117–120, in *Education*.

“The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says. . . .

“One of the chief causes of mental inefficiency and moral weakness is the lack of concentration. . . . With the immense tide of printed matter constantly pouring from the press, old and young form the habit of reading hastily and superficially, and the mind loses its power of connected and vigorous thought.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 189.

“The habitations that the ants build for themselves show skill and perseverance. Only one little grain at a time can they handle, but by diligence and perseverance they accomplish wonders.

“Solomon points to the industry of the ant as a reproach to those who waste their hours in idleness or in practices that corrupt soul and body. The ant prepares for future seasons; but many gifted with reasoning powers fail to prepare for the future immortal life.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 190.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on this idea of how we can help others, even at a personal cost to ourselves. How do we look at what this week’s lesson taught in contrast to this verse: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*John 15:13, NKJV*)?
- 2 What other lessons can we take from the natural world that we can apply to our own lives? Given, however, that the world is fallen, why must we be careful in the lessons we do draw?
- 3 Read through the seven abominations in Proverbs 6:16–19. Why do you think that they are considered so bad in God’s eyes?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 5:11–13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that the wisdom described in Proverbs points to Christ, “the wisdom of God” (*1 Cor. 1:24*).

Feel: Sense the pain of ignoring the wise instructions of God and the hurt that foolish actions bring him or her and loved ones.

Do: Seek Christ as the only solution to his or her foolish heart.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christ Is “the Wisdom of God” (*1 Cor. 1:24*).

A Why are there similarities between the wisdom of Israel and the wisdom of the ancient world?

B Why did Israel fail repeatedly even though they had superior wisdom from God?

C Why do people know what is right yet often fail to do it?

D In the 2,000 years of its history, why did the Christian church choose the path of “destruction and misery” so often, even though it knew Christ’s teachings, as outlined in the New Testament (*Rom. 3:16*)?

II. Feel: The Pain of the Human Bent Toward Folly

A Can you think of a Bible personality who knew the wise thing to do yet chose the path of folly instead? How did it turn out for him or her?

B Have you ever known that something was wrong and did it anyway? How did God work with you to restore you to the path of wisdom?

III. Do: Seek Christ.

A Why is there such colossal moral failure all over the world when people are receiving higher education in greater numbers than ever?

B How has Christ made a difference in your life?

► **Summary:** We can live wisely if Christ lives in us and gives us a new set of desires. For, left to our own, we are invariably drawn to folly.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 5:11–13*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The lament in Proverbs 5:11–13 is a warning to everyone who is on the path of folly. Found at the heart of Proverbs 4–6, this text calls upon the reader to heed the call of conscience before it is too late. Many nations besides Israel had sages, and many of the proverbs in these chapters are, in fact, found in the ancient world: remember the teachings of your parents and elders; do not obey your lower passions; do not lend money to friends; work hard and do not be lazy. The unusual nature of Proverbs 5:11–13 is that it reveals the reason nations and individuals have fallen in spite of having great wisdom. They fell because they developed a proud ear that would not hear rebuke. The point of Proverbs 5:11–13 is that the sooner you confess, “Oh, how I hated instruction,” thereby acknowledging your shortcoming in this area, the sooner you can become wise and avoid the disaster waiting for you.

Just for Teachers: It is important to read Proverbs in light of Christ as the Wisdom of God made flesh. Otherwise, the counsels in Proverbs will be mere advice or maxims. Christ is the only Person in history who was always able to choose the way of wisdom. The Cross is a good example of His amazing wisdom. He chose to go to the cross when, to others, it appeared to be a foolish path of misery and destruction. In stark contrast, many falter because, in their eyes, the path of folly looks wiser. It is important to remember that Jesus was a living Example of the way that the wisdom of Proverbs was meant to be lived out.

Opening Discussion: Why did Jesus insist on going to the cross (see Mark 8:31–34)? How was it wise? How much money could Jesus have made if He had charged for His healings? What would happen to the world if there were a lot of people living like Jesus: doing good without charging a fee, obeying the will of God even when it is disadvantageous to oneself, speaking the truth regardless of the consequence to oneself?

Questions for Discussion:

- ① Why do people sometimes cosign loans for their friends or lend money to them?
- ② Why do many people fail to work like ants if they are not supervised?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It is important to be honest and transparent when teaching this week’s lesson. It is easy to underestimate how difficult it is to live by the wisdom taught in Proverbs. David, who taught the wisdom recorded in Proverbs to Solomon, as well as Solomon himself, who wrote it down for posterity, could not, in the end, live by the wisdom they taught. They could not teach their feet to walk the straight path. Imagine how much more difficult it is for us ordinary people to live by the wisdom of the Bible. The reason David and Solomon are considered wise is that they had humble and willing ears to hear the rebuke and repent when shown their guilt. Specifically, David had the wisdom to confess his sin when he was told, “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7). On what occasion has God spoken to you lately the words, “Thou art the [man or woman]”?

Bible Commentary

I. The Wisdom of Parents (Review Proverbs 4 with your class.)

This chapter begins with the scene of a father teaching the law of God (vs. 2), the torah, to his children. The law (Deut. 6:7–9) actually requires such parental instruction. The word *torah* originally means “instruction.” But because *torah* is often translated as the word *law*, one sometimes gets the impression that the law of Moses is simply a set of rules. This is not true. In Proverbs 4, the father passes on the Torah to his son in the form of instruction, as though it were a precious gift (vs. 2). He teaches it in the form of secrets of happiness and success. He divides his instruction into three parts: (1) an appeal to walk in his way, which is the law of God (vss. 5–13); (2) an appeal not to enter into the path of those who do not respect God (vss. 14–17); and (3) a promise of life to those who live in integrity and a promise of death to those whose actions and lips speak lies (vss. 18–27). At this point, it would be good to recall the warning of David, the father, found in Proverbs 4 that no one actually chooses the way of wisdom. This point is even more explicit in Psalm 53: “Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (vs. 3; compare Rom. 3:12).

Consider This: How can one give instructions to one’s children so that they can see that they are receiving something precious? When was the last time you felt someone had given you valuable advice?

II. The Loose Woman (Review Proverbs 5 with your class.)

The loose woman described in chapter 5 symbolizes folly. There is no question that the father earnestly desires his son to avoid wasting his resources on prostitutes. But his concern is broader than just abstaining from visiting prostitutes or loose women. Prostitutes appear frequently in the Bible as symbols of spiritual apostasy or general states of immorality (*Isa. 57:3; Jer. 3:2–9; 13:27; Ezekiel 16; 23; 43:7–9; Hos. 1–4; 5:3; 6:10; Nah. 3:4; Rev. 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2*). Similarly, the prostitute in Proverbs 5 symbolizes apostasy.

The word *wisdom*, on the other hand, appears at the beginning of the chapter (*vs. 1*), and the word *folly* appears at the end of the chapter (*vs. 23*) to show a clear contrast between wisdom and folly. The loose woman in chapter 5 personifies folly. The point is that folly, regardless of its manifestation, wears a tempting face and promises pleasure. The central message of the chapter appears in the middle of the chapter (*vss. 11–13*), with a warning of what you will say in the end if you go down the path of folly: “How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof” (*vs. 12*). Which will you choose? Folly beckons you with lying words of flattery, and wisdom calls you with true instruction and reproof.

Discussion Questions: Why does truth often offend? Why are we sometimes afraid to learn about our medical conditions from our doctors even though they are not trying to hurt us? Think of something or someone that you were attached to who was hurting you and your family. How did it feel to have the hurt taken away from you?

III. The Long and Short View of Things (Review Proverbs 6:1–19 with your class.)

Proverbs 6:1–19 consists of four sections. The first section (*vss. 1–3*) warns us not to guarantee our friends’ loans. This warning applies to any act of trying to do things for “friends” out of fear that one might lose their friendship. But in the long run, you will surely be ruined if you keep doing things for them out of pressure.

In the second section of the chapter (*vss. 6–11*), there appears the parable of the sluggard. The story of the ants is placed in the parable (*vss. 6–8*) to provide a contrast. The point of the story is perseverance. The ants persevere because they have a long-range view of things and prepare for the wintertime. The sluggard, on the other hand, has a short-term view of things and tries to avoid any inconvenience that might hinder his enjoyment of life now. The third section (*vss. 12–15*) sums up the foolish person as “wicked” (*vs. 12*). The wicked spend their lives devising “mischief” and sowing “discord” among friends (*vs. 14*). The problem is that they fail to have the long-range view of things and to see that their ruin will come

upon them “suddenly” (*vs. 15*) and that there will be no one to help. In the fourth section (*vss. 16–19*), there appears a list of seven things that the Lord hates. What this list implies is that the fool loves the things that God hates and finds pleasure and happiness in doing them. Why else, Proverbs asks, would he or she do them “continually” (*vs. 14*)?

Consider This: Why do many enjoy watching movies and TV shows that show the behaviors described in the list of seven things that God hates?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The list of seven things that the Lord hates in Proverbs 6:16–19 describes the way of life, especially in job situations, that encourage competition. The seven things are what people do to get ahead in life. But the Lord hates these things, especially the sowing of “discord among brethren” (*vs. 19*).

Application Questions:

- ❶ How can the church always be a community that does what the Lord loves, a place of humility and harmony?
- ❷ What causes a hesitation to do the will of God?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 4–6 point to our desperate need for Christ, the wisdom of God. Jesus says to the church, “Without me ye can do nothing” (*John 15:5*).

Activities:

- ❶ Ask your class to write down the names of those who have offended them. Ask them to write down what it would take to become friends with the offenders again.
- ❷ Discuss with the class the past experience of your congregation—peace and harmony or discord and indifference. Ask them to explain the reasons for the situation in light of today’s lesson.