

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?

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?

The Fear of the Wise

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

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?

“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?

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?

The Joy of the Lord

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

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?

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?

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 (*vs. 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?

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?

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 14:12*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that humans, with their limited perspective, need God's wisdom to avoid being deceived.

Feel: Distrust his or her own wisdom but feel security in God's wisdom.

Do: Seek to learn from and live in the light of God's large and accurate perspective.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: We Need God's Wisdom to Avoid Being Deceived.

- Ⓐ How much accurate information do you know, compared to how much God knows?
- Ⓑ How much experience do you have, compared with God's experience?
- Ⓒ Why are human beings so easily deceived?
- Ⓓ How and why does God share His perspective with us?

II. Feel: We Can Trust God's Wisdom but Not Our Own.

- Ⓐ How does a lack of understanding make you feel?
- Ⓑ What is the danger of feeling overconfident?
- Ⓒ How does your access to a source of absolute and dependable truth (the Bible) make you feel?
- Ⓓ Why do many people ignore or resent the Bible?

III. Do: Learn From and Live by God's Perspective.

- Ⓐ How does the way that you live show how much you value God's perspective?
- Ⓑ Have you ever been deceived by yourself or by others? What have you learned from the results in your life when you took God's perspective, not just your own, into account?
- Ⓒ What are some specific, practical ways in which you can incorporate more of God's perspective into your life?

► **Summary:** The all-knowing God shares His big and accurate perspective to safely guide us through life.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 14*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Things are not always what they seem to be. Many people want the effects of success and happiness without understanding their true nature or causes. They are deceived by believing that they are wise enough to devise their own strategies for arriving at what they think is good. Unaided human wisdom would be inadequate in a perfect world, but it is disastrous in a fallen world, where our warped perspectives make us vulnerable to being deceived by ourselves, other people, and crafty supernatural beings. We can be safe to enjoy true success and happiness only by relying on God’s wisdom, including His definition of success and happiness and His instructions regarding how to gain them.

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 14:12 pictures a person contemplating a road that looks good because it is straight. However, it ends up as a way to die. Outward appearance is not a safe guide. Jesus advised us to choose a difficult and unpopular path in life rather than an attractive and popular highway to destruction (*Matt. 7:13, 14*).

The “way” in which one “walks” can represent that person’s course of action (*1 Kings 2:4*). If people simply do what is right in their own eyes (*Judg. 17:6, 21:25*), without a divine guide or a map from God, they will not see dangers lurking down the road, because they lack sufficient perspective and experience (see the book of Judges). Being sincere and meaning well is not enough to protect them from disaster.

Opening Discussion: In Proverbs 14:1, wise women build their houses (*compare 31:10–31*), but folly (personified) tears down her house with her own hands. Do unwise people want to destroy what belongs to them, or can this be a consequence of their carelessness (*compare 14:16*), even if they think they are doing what is right? One kind of carelessness is simply to believe whatever one hears (*vs. 15*), because human sources of knowledge are unreliable. So, we need to carefully check out what people tell us, including what we hear through television and the Internet.

Questions for Discussion:

❶ Can you think of illustrations in the Bible and in your life of the principles expressed by Proverbs 14:1, 12? What is the relationship between the ideas in these verses?

② How can you enjoy trusting relationships with people without being gullible? What examples of how to maintain this balance did Jesus give us?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Proverbs teaches us how to prevent problems by making wise choices. These choices are informed by accurate identification of the factors involved in a situation that could lead to one kind of consequence or another. Think before you act rather than blindly rushing ahead on the basis of however you feel at the time.

There were many other wisdom writings in the ancient Near East, including the proverbs of other religions and cultures, but the biblical book of Proverbs adds a crucial Holy Spirit–inspired dimension: the only way to enjoy long-term happiness and well-being is to put God first in your life (*Prov. 1:7, Matt. 6:33*). Moses clearly set the choice of life and good versus death and evil before his people (*Deut. 30:15, 16*). Furthermore, following God is not legalism, which misuses the law for purposes that it is not intended, such as to buy salvation from sins already committed or to dominate other people.

Bible Commentary

Proverbs 14 uses examples to profile some major differences between wisdom and foolishness in terms of attitudes, making decisions, behavior (including treatment of others), and speech. These differences depend on whether a person is narrowly focused on personal short-range interests or takes into account the big, long-range picture revealed by God. God sees everything, whether it is good or evil (*15:3*); so, His guidance is reliable, and He can hold everyone accountable for what they do. Although humans make plans, their outcomes depend on Him (*16:9*).

I. Wisdom Takes the Big Picture Into Account (*Review Proverbs 14 with your class.*)

Being narrow-minded, shortsighted, selfish, and disrespectful toward God doesn't pay. Such people tear down their houses (*Prov. 14:1; compare vs. 11*), are punished for what they say (*vs. 3*), seek wisdom in vain (*vs. 6*), are deceived regarding which way to go (*vs. 8; compare vs. 15*), are consumed with envy (*vs. 30*), and are banished (*vs. 32*). By contrast, the same verses say that those who are broad-minded look ahead and are unselfish because they are loyal to God, build their houses, are preserved by what they say,

easily gain knowledge, understand which way to go, and are emotionally healthy.

Lest anyone fail to comprehend that the big picture is what counts, in verse 4 the author brings this principle down to a mundane level: one could prefer to have no oxen to care for, but with oxen (the equivalent of a tractor) for plowing, a farmer can grow a lot more.

Consider This: How do the examples of Caleb and Joshua in Numbers 13:25–14:38 and Elisha in 2 Kings 6:11–23 illustrate the value of seeing the big picture? What can we learn from them as we seek to enter the ultimate Promised Land (*Heb. 11:16*) while under attack by evil supernatural forces (*Eph. 6:12*)?

II. God Sees Everything (*Review Proverbs 15 with your class.*)

Proverbs 15:3 observes, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (*NKJV*). Therefore, God is able to help His loyal people (*2 Chron. 16:9*). The psalmist realized that God knew everything about him, even before he was born (*Psalms 139*). Rather than resenting such omniscience as an invasion of privacy, he was grateful and opened his heart with a prayer (*vss. 23, 24*).

Nobody can fool God. He knows when those who offer prayer or worship are sincere or hypocritical (*Prov. 15:8; compare Isa. 1:11–17*). He even knows our thoughts (*Prov. 15:26*). So, rather than avoiding God when we sin (*Gen. 3:7, 8*), we would be better off to confess what He already knows and receive forgiveness (*Ps. 32:1–5*).

Discussion Questions: How does understanding that God knows everything affect your approach to life? Can you trust people who don’t think they are accountable to God? Why, or why not?

III. Humans Plan, but God Directs (*Review Proverbs 16 with your class.*)

Proverbs 16:9 affirms, “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (*NASB; see also 19:21*). Having planned wisely in consultation with others (*15:22, 21:5*), we should realize that humans do not understand or control everything that can affect what will actually happen, even in our age of science and technology.

God gives humans free choice, which is why He needs to instruct, warn, and appeal through the Bible and through His Holy Spirit (*John 16:7–10*). God also influences people through factors in their environment that He controls. For example, although Joseph’s brothers tried to get rid of him (*Genesis 37*),

God set up factors, including a famine, that empowered Joseph to save his family (*Genesis 39–47*). He assured his brothers: “ ‘You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good’ ” (*Gen. 50:20, NKJV; compare Rom. 8:28*).

Consider This: The biblical stories of Daniel and Esther show how God works effectively behind the scenes to accomplish His goals and save His people, in spite of powerful and determined opposition. How do these stories affect you?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help your class members to place their confidence in God, who knows everything about them (*Matt. 10:29–31*) and directs their steps in right paths (*Ps. 23:3*). Even if they go through difficulties, He is with them and leads them to a banquet on the other side (*vss. 4, 5; Rev. 19:9*).

Application Questions:

- ❶ How has God led you in ways that turned out better than your plans? How does this affect your ability to trust Him in the present and future?
- ❷ In what ways have you found that even bad things that happen to you “work together for good” (*Rom. 8:28*) by helping you trust God more and by making you live in hope of a better world?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Proverbs 14–16 show how we need to rely on God’s wisdom to help us choose the way to gain what is best for us. Help your class members to see how they can apply this principle when they meet various situations in their lives.

Activities:

- ❶ Ask class members to share personal stories of God’s providence in their lives and discuss what these stories mean to them.
- ❷ Have your class members make a list of practical items of advice, sharing what they have learned about the “big picture,” such as managing time to open up space in their lives for daily Bible study and prayer, nurturing relationships, resolving conflicts, getting out of debt, and so on.
- ❸ Post this list in the church newsletter or on the church’s Web site.
- ❹ Having studied Proverbs 14–16, write your own modern proverbs that capture some of the same principles.