

# 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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## 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?**

## 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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## 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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## 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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**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.

# The Balance of Life and Death in Chad

by JAMES APPEL

The sun beats fiercely from the brilliant blue sky as we make our way along the well-worn path toward the river. The path disappears into a flooded rice field. Removing our sandals, we wade into the warm water.

Occasionally we pass locals and greet them with a friendly “lapia.” When we arrive at the river, the half-naked children quickly leave their fishing spears to watch the foreigners swim.

The sun sets as we make our way back across the rice paddies, tired but refreshed. A little recreation helps us focus on the difficult tasks we face working in the mission hospital in Béré, Chad.

One morning a baby is brought in with a severe infection in her lower abdomen and legs. Antibiotics fight the infection, and I remove large patches of dead black skin to save the child’s life. Later that day, Sarah, one of our mission nurses, reports that the baby is unconscious. I rush to her and find she is not breathing. Desperately I perform CPR, but it is too late; the child is dead. Sarah is devastated, thinking that somehow the child’s death is her fault. But I blame myself. If I had checked on her more often, maybe I could have saved her. We see death all the time, but this child’s death troubles me deeply.

A young woman comes in with abdominal pain. The nurse suggests a urinary tract infection; I suspect appendicitis. She says she is not pregnant, but I wonder. A pelvic exam suggests an infection of the uterus or fallopian tubes. I wish I had an ultrasound that could identify the source of infection. I put her on antibiotics.

That evening the staff wants to go to the river. I do too. But I stay behind to check on the woman. She is worse. I ask more questions and search the medical books. A urine test reveals she is pregnant. If it is an ectopic (out of uterus) pregnancy, only surgery will save her life. But if I am wrong, she has undergone major surgery for nothing. I pray, then I decide to operate. I find a swollen mass that is about to rupture. I thank God for revealing her problem, even without proper equipment.

What if I’d gone to the river instead of staying with this woman? How does one find balance in a world so overwhelmed with the never-ending needs of a place like Béré?

Your weekly Sabbath School mission offerings make ministry such as that at the outpost hospital in Béré, Chad, possible.

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# teach a teacher to teach

The civil war in Mozambique that ended in 1994 left the country in ruins. The educational system is still recovering, and parents struggle to find a school for their children.

Adventists in Mozambique are working to improve their schools, but they don't have enough trained teachers.

The church is expanding its seminary in Mozambique to a four-year, degree-granting college that will offer education courses, as well as business and religion. But to accomplish this, the school needs classrooms and dormitories for students.

Part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the church in Mozambique to provide teachers for the future. And that is vital for the future of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Mozambique.

## MISSION

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