Proverbs – A House of Wisdom

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PROVERBS

Why read this book?
Giving advice is big business. From daytime talk shows to advice column’s and self-help books, our culture is glutted with knowledge—but often starved for wisdom. One reason is the complexity of life; we need practical counsel that is also spiritual. Proverbs offers this spiritual depth to issues ranging from managing money to the dangers of adultery to learning how to identify true friends. Here you can find wisdom that works and insights that won’t wear out.

Who wrote this book?
Solomon, the wisest king to rule Israel, wrote much of it. Agur, son of Jakeh, and Lemuel (probably a non-Israelite king) are also contributors.

To whom was it written?
The people of Israel, particularly young people just starting out on life’s journey.

When was it written?
Solomon reigned during the tenth century b.c., but many of the proverbs were not compiled and edited until several centuries later—around 700 b.c.

Why was it written?
To show how godly wisdom merges with real life (1:2–6).

What is a proverb?
A proverb, sometimes called a “maxim,” is a truth condensed into a few words and stated in a memorable fashion with application to a variety of situations in life.

What to look for in Proverbs:
Watch for contrasting issues such as foolishness and wisdom, laziness and diligence, adultery and faithfulness, and true and false friendships. Also look for principles of building strong marriages, parenting and relationships on the job. Pay close attention to the differing outcomes of those who follow God’s wisdom and those who don’t.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)
Lay the Foundation for Peace

The fear of the Lord is a foundation you can build on.

The fear of the Lord is an immense and crucial theological concept in the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs. Without that concept, Proverbs could easily be reduced to self-help literature that canonizes the American Dream. This fear is the beginning, or foundation, of wisdom (applied knowledge). The purpose of this study is to help us understand what it means to fear the Lord.

Scripture:
Proverbs 1:7, 9:10

Based on:
“A House of Wisdom,” Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

In this course, we will construct a house called wisdom, which we define as the knowledge of God that leads to living godly in conformity with the divine character. This house will be built in the valley of shalom, which means a state of peace that is found through the blessing of God. Each proverb we read will be a brick, but before we start laying bricks we need to pour the foundation.

In 1958 in Upper St. Clair, Pennsylvania, a town south of Pittsburgh, the town council built a new civic center. It had a post office, fire station, and offices. The townspeople were proud! But within a few months, cracks in the mortar appeared. Windows were hard to shut, and doors stuck. They called in the builders and engineers, who determined that nothing was wrong with the building, but mining explosions miles away were sending vibrations and shock waves through the earth’s strata. These had shifted the foundation. The engineers said, “It’s no use fixing cracks if the foundation isn’t sure.”

It’s no use handing out wisdom if the bricks rest on sand. Jesus said that a house with no foundation will not withstand the storms of life. So we want to lay a strong foundation to build on.

The fear of God is the beginning, the foundation, of wisdom. Read Proverbs 1:7, 9:10.

Discussion starters:

[Q] Have you ever experienced an actual foundation that crumbled? What happened to the structure?

[Q] Define wisdom in your own words. How is it the same as knowledge? How is it different?

[Q] What is the wisest thing you’ve ever done? How did you determine it was wise? What kind of good things did that wise thing produce?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: The fear of the Lord demands our respect, awe, desire to please, and dread of judgment.

The fear of the Lord demands that we respect God. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines respect as having a “high or special regard” for another. Our regard for God should be incomparable to our regard for anyone or anything else. If we hold any other person or principle in higher esteem than God, we are not respecting him.

However, fear of the Lord goes beyond respect. We are also to experience awe at his power and holiness. The same dictionary defines awe as “an emotion variously combining dread,
veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime.” To experience awe is to be overwhelmed by God’s absolute authority over our lives.

This attitude of awe creates in us an anxiety to please God. We are so aware of his power and authority over us that we are careful to do what will honor him, rather than what will bring him sorrow.

Finally, the fear of the Lord brings dread of his judgment. We know that we are full of sin and deserve punishment, so we are afraid to face him, just as Adam and Eve hid from him when they disobeyed (Gen. 3:8).

This attitude of fear would overwhelm us if it were not tempered by God’s perfect love for us. Sometimes we have a warped fear of God because our earthly parents were unreasonable, but the fear of God is the kind of fear we’d have for the perfect parent, who loves us unselfishly and always has our best in mind. This love would cause us to respect, feel awe, want to please, and dread judgment for our poor behavior.

Read Psalm 19:7–14.

[Q] What makes the writer of this psalm (David) fear the Lord? How does he describe fear in verse 9? What does it mean that it is pure and endures forever?

[Q] How does David compare the fear of the Lord to the biblical law?

Leader’s Note: The Quest Study Bible says, “Studying God’s law, with its specific requirements for human behavior and its inevitable consequences for disobedience, leads us to a greater respect for God and increases our desire to serve him.”

[Q] How does this fear of God highlight David’s sin (v.12–13)?

[Q] How does it motivate his behavior (v.14)?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us understand what it means to fear God.

Activity: Ask each person to pick one of these aspects of the fear of God: respect, awe, desire to please, fear of judgment. Ask them to think of a scenario that would demonstrate what this should look like. For example, to respect God may manifest itself in a desire to set up a family devotion time to instill a respect for his Word in our children. Or to fear his judgment may be to share Christ with a family member who doesn’t know him.

Teaching point two: We should fear God, not our enemies.

The Puritan Pastor William Gurnall said, “We fear men so much because we fear God so little. One fear cures the other.”

In 1717, Louis XIV of France died. Louis, who called himself “the Great,” was the monarch who declared, “I am the State!” His court was the most magnificent in Europe and his funeral the most spectacular. His body lay in a golden coffin. To dramatize his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be very dimly lighted with only a special candle set above the
coffin. Thousands waited in silence. Then Bishop Massilon began to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle, saying, “Only God is great.”


**[Q]** According to Jesus’ words in Matthew, what kind of treatment should we expect from others? Knowing we face this kind of treatment, whom should we fear, according to these verses? Why?

**[Q]** According to the Romans passage, what should we fear? What is the antidote to that fear (v.20)?

*Leader’s Note: What are these verses in Romans referring to? The Quest Study Bible says, “Some say that continuing to sin can result in one’s being cut off from God in the end. Others believe that once people are genuinely saved, they cannot be lost. They say that those who are cut off only had appeared to be saved...We remain in God’s grace not by doing good works, but by seeing our salvation solely as the result of God’s kindness.”*

**[Q]** With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) I shouldn’t have to fear God, since he has accepted me.
2) I fear God because I know I don’t deserve salvation.
3) I fear God because he’s unpredictable.
4) I fear God because I don’t understand him.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?

**Teaching point three: We should express this fear by walking humbly with God and being kind to others.**

Pride and arrogance are always in opposition to God. The first sin was rooted in the pride that Eve could “be like God.” Satan’s rebellion was that same pride with which he tempted Eve. Read Proverbs 8:13.

The other way the fear of God is manifested is in our treatment of others. Only as we treat others better than ourselves can we truly show that we fear God. Otherwise, we are thumbing our noses at him. Read Deuteronomy 10:17–21.

**[Q]** How does pride show that we do not fear God? How can we know if we are walking humbly with God?

**[Q]** Name the things in our Deuteronomy passage that show we fear God. How does reaching out to others in kindness demonstrate the fear of God?

**[Q]** Since God shows no partiality, how should that affect our behavior? How can we avoid showing partiality?
PART 3
Apply Your Findings

Jerry Bridges, in his book *The Joy of Fearing God*, describes the healthy tension between loving and fearing God:

In the physical realm there are two opposing forces called “centrifugal” and “centripetal.” Centrifugal force tends to pull away from a center of rotation, while centripetal force pulls toward the center.

A stone whirled about on the end of a string exerts centrifugal force on the string, while the string exerts centripetal force on the stone. Take away one and the other immediately disappears.

These two opposing forces can help us understand something of the fear of God. The centrifugal force represents the attributes of God such as his holiness and sovereignty that cause us to bow in awe and self-abasement before him. They hold us reverently distant from the one who, by the simple power of his word, created the universe out of nothing. The centripetal force represents the love of God. It surrounds us with grace and mercy and draws us with cords of love into the Father’s warm embrace. To exercise a proper fear of God we must understand and respond to both these forces.

**Q** Do you have this balanced fear of God that is tempered by love? If not, why? What would it take to develop that healthy view?

**Q** How can we know God loves and accepts us?

*Leader’s Note:* We know this through Christ. Consider this illustration written by Rubel Shelly:

In an early scene from the movie Luther, the frustrated monk who would eventually light the fire of spiritual reform in Europe struggles with his fear of a God who knows his sinfulness.

An older priest passing by Luther’s room hears him and enters.

“I live in terror of judgment,” declares Luther.

“And you think self-hatred will save you?” the older priest replies.

“Have you ever dared to think that God is not just?” asks Luther. “He has us born tainted by sin, then he’s angry with us all our lives for our faults, this righteous Judge ... who damn us ... threatening us with the fires of hell! I know! I know I’m evil to think it!”

“You’re not evil. You’re just not honest,” says the priest. “God isn’t angry with you. You are angry with God.”

“I wish there were no God.”
“Martin, what is it you seek?”

“A merciful God! A God whom I can love. A God who loves me.”

“Then look to Christ. Bind yourself to Christ, and you will know God’s love. Say to him, ‘I’m yours. Save me. I am yours. Save me.”’

“I am yours. Save me,” Luther says, clutching a cross the priest took from his own neck and placed in his hand. “I am yours. Save me.”

[Q] Tell the group an area of the fear of God that you need to grow in. Ask them to pray for you concerning that area.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
A House of Wisdom – Study 1

PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

Lay the Foundation for Peace

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PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles**

*Teaching point one: The fear of the Lord demands our respect, awe, desire to please, and dread of judgment.*

*Teaching point two: We should fear God, not our enemies.*

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

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Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?

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PART 3

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—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
A House of Wisdom – Study 2

LEADER’S GUIDE

Clear the Debris of Misunderstanding

Most people react negatively to fearing the Lord, yet we cannot experience God’s fullness without it.

As we continue to construct our house of wisdom, we have to clear away the debris of misinformation. If we reject the fact that we need to fear the Lord, we don’t have a clear understanding of what it means. Last week we laid a foundation. This foundation will be solid, but it isn’t quite ready. There is still some debris, or misunderstandings, down in the footings. In this study we will identify and eliminate this debris.

Scripture:

Based on:
"A House of Wisdom," Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Haddon Robinson says in his sermon “Wanted: Winners”:

For years the opening of The Wide World of Sports illustrated “the agony of defeat” through the painful ending of an attempted ski jump. The skier appeared in good form as he headed down the slope, but then, for no apparent reason, he tumbled head-over-heels off the side of the jump and bounced off the supporting structure.

What viewers didn’t know was that he chose to fall. Why? As he explained later, the jump surface had become too fast, and midway down the ramp he realized that if he completed the jump, he would land on the level ground, beyond the safe landing zone, which could have been fatal. As it was, the skier suffered no more than a headache from the tumble.

The fear of the slope, the fear of flying too high, and the fear of the fall led him to change course. Fear led to life. The fear of the Lord likewise will turn us from the snares of death.

In C.S. Lewis’ classic novel The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, Mr. Beaver describes the majestic Lion, Aslan, who is a type of Christ. When asked by one of the children if Aslan is safe, Mr. Beaver replies: “Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Discussion starters:

[Q] What comes to your mind when you think of fearing God? Where did you get that idea?

[Q] How is the fear of God different than the fear of any other person? What are some of the problems that occur when we talk about fearing God?

[Q] What does a healthy fear of God look like? How do we balance our fear of God with our trust in him?

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Most of us have some debris in our beliefs.

Many people believe the fear of the Lord is an Old Testament, not a New Testament, concept. However, the New Testament contradicts this belief.

According to the Matthew passage, how does the fear of the Lord give us boldness in proclaiming his Word?

What does it mean that the church in Acts 9 lived in fear of the Lord? What does that look like in practical terms?

If we know those we love are going to face judgment for their sin, how does that fear motivate us?

How do we work out our salvation in fear and trembling?

Leader's Note: This doesn’t mean that we must work for our salvation. Instead it means we live in fear of the Lord because of our salvation.

What is the reverent fear talked about in 1 Peter?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us understand what it means to fear God.

Activity: Looking at each of the Scripture passages above, ask one person to give an example of each one. For example, for the 1 Peter 1:17 passage, a person could say: “I had a chance to take some money at work that didn’t belong to me. Out of fear of the Lord, I refrained.”

Teaching point two: Most of us have some debris in our attitude.

Many people react negatively to the concept of fear, and this is perfectly understandable.

Fear feels bad. We associate those feelings with negative experiences and authorities; therefore, we do not want to transfer those associations to God. Good news! God is not the Gestapo. He says, “Fear not.” Fear of your earthly father may have led to cowering and resentfulness, but the heavenly Father isn’t your earthly father.


Name all the good things that come to us by proper fear of the Lord, according to these verses in Proverbs.

Leader’s Note: Wisdom, understanding, length of life, life, the ability to rest content and untouched by trouble.

Does “length of life” guarantee a long life? Does “untouched by trouble” mean we will have no trouble?

Leader’s Note: You may need to explain that “length of life” doesn’t guarantee we will have a long life. It’s just a general principal that if we live wisely, in fear of the Lord, we will have health and safety benefits that we wouldn’t have if we live unwisely without fear of him. Also having the “ability to rest content, untouched by trouble” doesn’t mean we won’t have trouble, but that it won’t affect us the way trouble affects those who don’t fear the Lord.
[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) I can’t fear God and trust him at the same time.

2) I have to fear God in order to trust him. Otherwise, he’s no more powerful than I am.

3) I can’t fear God and experience his love at the same time.

4) Because I fear God, I’m astounded that he would love me.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?

Teaching point three: The Bible says we should fear because it leads to life.

In the Bible one kind of fear is to be avoided, rejected, or repented of, but another kind is to be embraced because it is clean, proper, and safeguarding.

Fear can work in two ways, as illustrated by Bill White in Preaching Today:

Based on Arthurian legend, First Knight chronicles the rise of Lancelot (Richard Gere) to the round table of King Arthur (Sean Connery) and their fight against the renegade knight Malagant.

During Arthur and Guinevere’s wedding celebration, guests participate in the challenge of the Gauntlet. The Gauntlet is an elevated obstacle course comprised of a hundred moving parts, including whirling balls and swinging blades. No one has ever successfully navigated the Gauntlet before, but the young men line up for the chance to run the course. The prize for making it through is a place of honor at Arthur’s table and a kiss from the queen. The young men suit up in huge padded outfits to protect themselves and then hurtle through the course.

The first three men attempt the Gauntlet—and all fail. One by one, they misjudge the course and are swept aside. When the queen promises a kiss to whoever makes it through the Gauntlet, Lancelot begins climbing the platform without a single pad. With cries of “You’re mad! You’ll kill yourself!” from the crowd, Lancelot continues.

His first obstacle is a set of huge swirling balls, which he dodges with graceful timing, correctly judging each threat and carefully moving ahead. Next, he leaps up to grab one of the spinning wheels from which the balls were suspended. He rides the wheel around to the other side, creatively circumventing another set of obstacles. He then faces his biggest threat—dozens of blades slicing through his path. He inches past blade after blade, and at a crucial point he pauses long for just the right opening. Finally, he plunges forward headfirst and dashes to safety.

The king and crowd wildly applaud him. Later, Lancelot tells the king how he successfully navigated the Gauntlet: “It’s not hard to know where the danger is if you watch it coming. Perhaps fear made them [the others who failed] go back when they should have gone forward.”

[Q] Does fear of God tend to move you forward or backward?

[Q] According to the verses in Proverbs 14, what are the advantages to fearing the Lord? How is the fear of the Lord a fortress and refuge? How is it a fountain of life?

[Q] How does the fear of the Lord bring wealth, honor, and life? Are we promised these things as Christians?

**Leader’s Note:** The Quest Study Bible says, “Like other proverbs, this one makes a general observation about life that is usually true. Occasionally, though, God allows God-fearing people to suffer so that he might display his mighty works through them (John 9:1–3). God may also use poverty or poor health to test our loyalties (Deut.8:2), to keep us dependent upon his grace (2 Cor. 12:7–10) or to develop character in us (James 1:2–4).

PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

Isaiah 33:6 says, “He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.”

The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure. The fear of the Lord is a refuge, a secure fortress, and a fountain of life. It is a foundation for a house of wisdom (skillful living), situated in the valley of shalom.

[Q] How is the fear of the Lord the key to this treasure? Explain it in your own words.

[Q] Last week you told the group an area of the fear of God that you needed to grow in. Ask them to pray for you concerning that area again.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

Clear the Debris of Misunderstanding

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PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Most of us have some debris in our beliefs.

Teaching point two: Most of us have some debris in our attitudes.

With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) I can’t fear God and trust him at the same time.
2) I have to fear God in order to trust him. Otherwise, he’s no more powerful than me.
3) I can’t fear God and experience his love at the same time.
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Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? What is the difference between the four positions? What is at stake in each position?

Teaching point three: The Bible says we should fear because it leads to life.

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

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The Power of the Tongue
This small body part can mean life or death.

Your success or failure with the tongue will go a long way in determining whether or not you will dwell in the valley of peace. Communication has great power and consequences. While many other proverbs deal with the specific life-giving or deadly powers of the tongue—such as truthfulness and lying, or soft and angry words—the verses we will examine in this study are more sweeping in their declaration. Our use of the tongue, whether to hurt or to heal, has earthly and eternal consequences.

Scripture:
Proverbs 18:20–21

Based on:
"A House of Wisdom," Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

All of us have been both damaged and edified by words. All of us have damaged and edified others. To experience a life of peace, we must guard our tongues. In our continuing quest to build a house of wisdom, mastering our tongues allows us to lay an entire row of bricks.

This topic touches all walls of the house; that is, it pervades nearly every activity of life.

How you talk, who you talk to, when you talk, what tone of voice you use, and what speech patterns you use, either build up or tear down your relationships.

Discussion starters:

[Q] Without mentioning names, what is the most hurtful thing anyone has ever said to you? What is the kindest thing anyone has said? Why was each thing so powerful in your memory?

[Q] What is the most hurtful thing you’ve said to another? The most helpful?

[Q] How often do you regret things you’ve said? How can you grow in this area?

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Words lead to action.

Words do things. They are not mere symbols. They form perception, influence attitude, and suggest action. Some examples from the silly to the somber are product names in advertising, which lead to a purchase; terms used by both sides of the abortion debate to label the unborn baby and influence votes; and children who are damaged by labels, affecting their future performance.

Read Proverbs 18:20–21. The word translated power in v.21 is yad, which literally means hand. Thus a literal translation is, “Life and death are in the hand of the tongue.” With words we support, direct, lift, massage, shove, and slap.

Pastor Daniel Meyer, from his sermon “Words and Wisdom: Secrets to the Significant Life,” shares this example:

In The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan tells the story of a little girl who has an extraordinary gift for chess. She can see the “secrets” of the chessboard. At age 8 she is a national champion with unlimited potential. Her only liability is her mother, who is sometimes envious of her daughter’s gift and sometimes manipulative as she uses her daughter to fulfill her own dreams of wealth and power.
The mother goads her. Eventually the little girl dares speak back, and the mother responds with silence. For weeks, silence. The little girl wilts in her spirit and begs her mother to forgive her. Finally, the mother explodes, “You are nothing, nothing at all.”

The girl later said: “What she said to me was like a curse. This power I had [her chess ability], this belief in what I had been given, I could actually feel it draining away.... All the secrets that I once saw, I couldn’t see anymore. All I could see were my mistakes, and my weaknesses, and the best part of me disappeared.”

[Q] Explain Proverbs 18:20 in your own words. Why do you think the writer of Proverbs put it in these terms? How does this support our teaching point—that words lead to action?

[Q] What does “those who love it will eat its fruit” mean in Proverbs 18:21?

**Leader’s Note:** The pronoun “it” in this verse refers to yad (power/hand). Those who are enamored by this power, or those who use the power, will eat the fruit. They will bear the consequences.

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us understand the power of the tongue.

**Activity:** Pass out sections of a newspaper to everyone in your group. Ask each person to pick one sentence in his or her section of the newspaper that illustrates either life or death by the way it’s worded. Discuss why it illustrates that.

**Teaching point two: Consequences follow our use of words.**

St. John Chrysostom said of the tongue: “Guard this little member more than the pupil of the eye.” Consider how carefully we guard our eyes. If even a little piece of dust blows into them, we are in agony. If we are to guard our tongues more than our eyes, we need to be extremely careful of what rolls off of it.

Bonne Steffen illustrates this from Sabbath Time: Tilden Edwards tells about a family with teenage children who decided, as part of their Sabbath commitments, that they would not criticize each other on Sundays.

As the months went on and they kept this commitment, they realized more and more of their children’s friends were coming over on Sundays just to hang around. No one in the family had talked about this commitment, but somehow other teenagers knew this home was a good place to be.


[Q] Why do you think others wanted to be with the family that committed their Sundays to guarding their tongues? How might the opposite be true if the family criticized each other?

[Q] What other consequences can occur from our speech (both good and bad)?
[Q] Read Matthew 12:36–37. What kind of consequences do our tongues have eternally? What does the word careless mean in this passage?

**Leader’s Note:** It could be referring to blasphemous words considering the context. It certainly doesn’t mean any word we say. However, we are accountable for what we confess about Jesus Christ.

**Teaching point three: To change our speech patterns, we must start with the heart.**

George Bernard Shaw gave an ancient Greek legend a 20th-century twist when he retold the story of Pygmalion. In the legend, Pygmalion creates a wonderful statue of a maiden and begs the gods to give the statue life, which they do.

In 1964, Warner Bros. released the classic musical *My Fair Lady*, based on Shaw’s play. This adaptation features a professor, Henry Higgins, who is the world’s leading authority on speech and diction. He prides himself on being able to identify any Londoner’s residence within a few blocks just by listening to his or her dialect. Higgins often coaches London’s elite in speech and deportment, and the professor’s friend, Colonel Pickering, bets Higgins that he cannot take a Cockney flower girl and pass her off as a lady after just three months of instruction. This challenge is too much to resist for the haughty professor, and he chooses Eliza Doolittle as the object of his experiment.

With drills, lessons, and insensitive threats, Higgins drives Eliza like a slave master. At one point Higgins says, “Eliza, you’re an idiot. I waste the treasures of my Miltonic mind [on you].” Pickering tries to soften the professor’s treatment of Eliza, but to him she is nothing but a laboratory experiment.

The great day arrives, and Higgins unveils his “experiment” at a royal reception. Eliza enters wearing jewels and a gown. She walks gracefully, demonstrates impeccable manners, and dances divinely. Her diction is pure, and her conversation is refined. No one dreams that Eliza is a “guttersnipe,” and she becomes the toast of London. Later, Higgins touts his own genius: “I created this thing out of squashed cabbage leaves.”

After the reception, as Higgins and Pickering unwind in the study, they hardly notice Eliza. Finally she confronts the mighty professor: Yes, he may have changed her dialect, but the kindness of Colonel Pickering changed her heart. He is the real Pygmalion. His gentle affirmation through the months of criticism and toil made the difference.

Eliza then says to Colonel Pickering, “I owe so much to you…. It was from you that I learned really nice manners, and that’s what makes one a lady, isn’t it?”

Pickering bashfully responds, “No doubt. Still he taught you to speak, you know, and I couldn’t have done that.”

Eliza continues: “Of course. That was his profession. It’s just like learning to dance in the fashionable way, nothing more than that in it. You know what began my real education? Your calling me ‘Miss Doolittle’ that day when I first came to [the professor’s study]. That was the beginning of self-respect for me. You see, the difference between a lady and a flower girl isn’t how she behaves. It’s how she is treated. I know that I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins because he always treats me as a flower girl and always will. But I know that I can be a lady to you because you always treat me as a lady and always will.”
Read Matthew 12:33–35.

[Q] How do we know if our hearts are good or evil? What has caused our good or evil thoughts?

[Q] Which statement best describes you:

1) My words reflect my heart.
2) My words don’t reflect my heart. I don’t mean the things I say.
3) My words don’t reflect my heart, because I rarely express myself.
4) My words don’t reflect my heart, because I’m rarely honest about how I really feel.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Is there a right answer? How does changing our heart change our speech patterns?

[Q] According to 2 Corinthians 10:5, how can we conquer evil thoughts?

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

Pray together the words of the following hymn, based on a psalm:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence, O Lord,
And take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
And renew a right spirit within me.

[Q] How could the words of this hymn help you control your tongue? Try praying this throughout the week when you are tempted to say something you know is wrong.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

The Power of the Tongue
This small body part can mean life or death.

Your success or failure with the tongue will go a long way in determining whether or not you will dwell in the valley of peace. Communication has great power and consequences. While many other proverbs deal with the specific life-giving or deadly powers of the tongue—such as truthfulness and lying, or soft and angry words—the verses we will examine in this study are more sweeping in their declaration. Our use of the tongue, whether to hurt or to heal, has earthly and eternal consequences.

Scripture:
Proverbs 18:20–21

Based on:
“A House of Wisdom,” Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

All of us have been both damaged and edified by words. All of us have damaged and edified others. To experience a life of peace, we must guard our tongues. In our continuing quest to build a house of wisdom, mastering our tongues allows us to lay an entire row of bricks.

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Words lead to action.

Teaching point two: Consequences follow our use of words.

Teaching point three: To change our speech patterns, we must start with the heart.

[Q] Which statement best describes you:

1) My words reflect my heart.
2) My words don’t reflect my heart. I don’t mean the things I say.
3) My words don’t reflect my heart, because I rarely express myself.
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Apply Your Findings

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Try praying this throughout the week when you are tempted to say something you know is wrong.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon

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Advice to Youth

Give your life to wisdom, and wisdom will give life to you.

Youth is not defined in the Bible by age, but rather by status (married or not, living at home or not). The verses we will look at in this study describe how the inexperienced and naïve should give their bodies (eyes, ears, heart, feet) to wisdom in order to experience life in its fullest. The Book of Proverbs is written for young people. Those of us who are older need to show our youth how they can apply wisdom in their lives.

Scripture:
Proverbs 4:20–27

Based on:
"A House of Wisdom," Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Throughout this course, we have constructed a house called wisdom, which we define as the knowledge of God that leads to living godly in conformity with the divine character. In this study we will complete the first floor, focusing on advice to youth. We will be looking at the need to give every area of our lives to God.

Richard Young illustrated the need for wisdom humorously in this article in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*:

Potato chips, cheese curls, and candy may be some of your favorite things to eat, but for a few mule deer in Arizona’s Grand Canyon National Park, these foods proved to be deadly. Park rangers had to kill over two dozen mule deer because they became hooked on junk food left by visitors to the park.

Once they get a taste of the sugar and salt, the deer develop an extreme addiction and will go to any lengths to eat only junk food. The result is the animals ignore the food they need, leaving them in poor health and on the edge of starvation. Because of junk food cravings, the deer lose their natural ability to digest vegetation. One park ranger called the junk food “the crack cocaine of the deer world.”

Scripture warns us of the dangers of developing a craving for the things of this world. Such a diet keeps us from hungering for the things of God.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What figurative junk foods do our youth feast on? Which ones do we feast on?

[Q] If you could give one piece of advice to a youth close to you, what would it be? How would that line up with what we’ve been studying in Proverbs?

[Q] How does a craving for this world keep us from hungering for God? Give some examples.

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Give your ears and mouth to wisdom.

Read Proverbs 4:20, 24. In other words, this is saying, “listen up!” *Give* means to extend, like an antenna. So this proverb is instructing young people to listen well to this passage, their parents, and the voice of God through his Word and their conscience.

Emmy-winning actress Patricia Heaton, star of the TV series *Everybody Loves Raymond*, explained in *The Plain Dealer* why she walked out in the middle of the American Music Awards
ceremony. “What was passing for humor basically ranged from stupid to vulgar—and I just thought, ‘I’m not going to be a part of this.’”

Many of us need to have that attitude—that we will listen to and speak what is good rather than evil. We need to trade complaining for thankfulness, sassing for honor, dirty talk for clean speech, and blaming others for taking responsibility.


\[Q\] What does it mean to be imitators of God in what we listen to and speak?

\[Q\] According to these verses, what should be our attitude toward obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse jesting? How would you define foolish talk? Coarse jesting?

**Leader’s Note:** This isn’t referring to lighthearted joking. Rather it seems to be talk that leads us to immorality and greed (v.3, 5) and the desire to tear down rather than build up. Our speech should be motivated by love (v.2).

\[Q\] What kind of things that we listen to can be classified as dark (v.8, 11)?

\[Q\] How can we speak to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (v.19)?

**Teaching point two: Give your eyes to wisdom.**

Read Proverbs 4:21. In other words, look up! Pay attention to, think about, and focus on God and his wisdom. We can only know his wisdom through his Word.

We don’t have to look far to realize that what God wants us to focus our eyes on is different than what we see in the world. *Good Morning America* interviewed former MTV video jockeys about their willingness to let their kids watch MTV:

Mark Goodman said, “My kids are not allowed to watch MTV.... Have you seen what they put on that channel?”

Martha Quinn agreed with Goodman’s no-MTV household rule: “Yeah, my kid doesn’t watch it.” (World, [8-11-01], p.12; source: interview on ABC’s *Good Morning America* on the 20th anniversary of the cable music channel)


\[Q\] What does it mean to ask God to open our eyes to see wonderful things in his law (v.18)?

\[Q\] What does it mean to be “consumed with longing for your laws at all times”(v.20)?

\[Q\] What does the fact that we are strangers on earth have to do with our attitude toward God’s Word (v.19)?

**Leader’s Note:** The Quest Study Bible says, “Stranger means alien—one belonging to another place. Those who belong to God will not feel completely at home in this world. Their loyalties and longings will be focused on the kingdom of God: They are citizens of
heaven (Phil. 3:20), looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).”

Teaching point three: Give your heart to wisdom.

Read Proverbs 4:21–23. In other words, set a guard around your heart. The term heart refers to our inner person. A wellspring was an underground source of water, which is precious in a dry climate.

[Q] How can you guard your heart? Name some practical ways.

[Q] In what ways is our heart a wellspring of life? How does that which comes out of the heart determine everything else about us?

Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us understand how to guard our hearts.

**Activity:** Ask a different person to read each scenario below. After reading each one, ask the group how this person could guard his or her heart.

- Sheila went away to college. Although she’s a Christian, her new roommate, Jackie, is not. Jackie asked Sheila to go on a blind date that Jackie wanted to arrange.
- Jeff just started a new job. His boss decided to initiate him by sending him to a porn website as a joke.
- Garrett is a freshman in high school. He decided to bring his Bible to school, but everyone made fun of him.

Teaching point four: Give your feet to wisdom.

Read Proverbs 4:25–27. In other words, look ahead to walk straight. The theme of two roads or choices is common in the Book of Proverbs.

Most of us are familiar with Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Less Traveled:*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth
Then took the other as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet, knowing how way leads onto way
I doubted if I should ever come back
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference

[Q] What does it mean to ask God to make our path level (v.26)?

[Q] What is the symbolism on not swerving to the right or left (v.27)? Give an example of a time you swerved and it turned out disastrous, or didn’t swerve and it turned out well.

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

The only way that youth, or anyone else for that matter, can possibly know which way to turn in life is through the wisdom of God’s Word.

In a CHRISTIANITY TODAY interview called “CT Classic: Basic Stott,” John Stott said, “Don’t neglect your critical faculties. Remember that God is a rational God, who has made us in his own image. God invites and expects us to explore his double revelation, in nature and Scripture, with the minds he has given us, and to go on in the development of a Christian mind to apply his marvelous revealed truth to every aspect of the modern and the postmodern world.”

[Q] To be a good example to the youth around you, do you need to work most on your listening, speech, sight, heart, or feet? Ask those in your group to pray for you in the area you mentioned.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
A House of Wisdom – Study 4

PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

Advice to Youth
Give your life to wisdom, and wisdom will give life to you.

Youth is not defined in the Bible by age, but rather by status (married or not, living at home or not). The verses we will look at in this study describe how the inexperienced and naïve should give their bodies (eyes, ears, heart, feet) to wisdom in order to experience life in its fullest. The Book of Proverbs is written for young people. Those of us who are older need to show our youth how they can apply wisdom in their lives.

Scripture:
Proverbs 4:20–27

Based on:
“A House of Wisdom,” Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Throughout this course, we have constructed a house called wisdom that we define as the knowledge of God which leads to living godly in conformity with the divine character. In this study we will complete the first floor, focusing on advice to youth. We will be looking at the need to give every area of our lives to God.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Give your ears and mouth to wisdom.

Teaching point two: Give your eyes to wisdom.

Teaching point three: Give your heart to wisdom.

Teaching point four: Give your feet to wisdom.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The only way that youth, or anyone else for that matter, can possibly know which way to turn in life is through the wisdom of God's Word.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
LEADER’S GUIDE

How to Age Well

A head of gray is a crown of glory at the end of a righteous story.

Old age is not defined in the Bible in terms of years, but in terms of physical capacity. The root of the word old is gray. The Book of Proverbs provides hope and challenge to the mature. This study is about the joy of growing older. God values the elderly. Our society is youth-oriented, but God says gray hair is a “crown of glory."

Scripture:
Proverbs 16:31, 20:29

Based on:
“A House of Wisdom,” Series Builder by Jeffrey Arthurs, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

**Identify the Current Issue**

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.*

Men spend more than one hundred million dollars annually on hair coloring, and over a billion dollars on hair transplants, toupees, and other products to counteract baldness and graying (Kathy Lee-Troup, “Is Beauty the Beast?” CHRISTIANITY TODAY, July 1997).

We don’t even want to get started on the women!

In this course, we have constructed a house called wisdom. In this study, we put the roof on the house. God speaks to the mature among us about the end of our days. As you’ll see in this study, he has plenty to say.

**Discussion starters:**

- **Q** What have you done to fight aging? Why do we feel the need to maintain the appearance of youth?
- **Q** Name an elderly person you admire. Why?
- **Q** What advantages are there to growing older? Name as many things as you can think of.

PART 2

**Discover the Eternal Principles**

**Teaching point one: Old age is tough.**

The Bible frankly acknowledges that our bodies are deteriorating. Read Ecclesiastes 12:1–7 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–4.

- **Q** How can we keep perspective when things keep going wrong with our bodies?
- **Q** How can we look forward to old age knowing these things are coming?

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us gain perspective on old age.

**Activity:** Provide each person with a magazine. Ask them to find a photo of an older person. Simply on the basis of that photo, ask them to tell the group one thing they like about the person.
Teaching point two: Old age is to be honored.

Billy Graham, at almost 90 years old, is still preaching. Immanuel Kant wrote his famous philosophical work at 74. Goethe finished Faust at 80. When Michelangelo died at 87, he was still supervising construction of St. Peter's Cathedral and had started another pieta.


[Q] Why do you think God commanded the young to rise in the presence of the aged? What practical way can we apply this today?

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

1) The elderly have to earn the right to be heard.
2) All elderly people deserve respect.
3) There is no difference between respect for the elderly and the young.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Do you find yourself agreeing with more than one statement? Why or why not?

Teaching point three: Old age is a sign of God’s blessing—sometimes.

Proverbs 10:27 says, “The fear of the Lord adds length to life...” The Bible tells us to honor the aged because their longevity is a sign of God's blessing, and because they are wise. But hold on...is that always true? Can you think of exceptions? I’m sure all of us can think of an older person who has turned rancid instead of mellowing with age. Why then does the Bible make a blanket statement about the virtues of the aged? Well, it doesn’t.

Old age is not enough. It must be righteous old age. Read Proverbs 16:31.

Lew Gervais shared this wonderful example of righteous old age in MEN OF INTEGRITY:

Bill is wild haired; his wardrobe for college is jeans and a T-shirt with holes in it. He recently became a believer while attending a campus Bible study.

Across from campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. One Sunday Bill decides to go there. He walks in late and shoeless. The sanctuary is packed. Bill heads down the aisle looking for a seat. Having nearly reached the pulpit, he realizes there are no empty seats, so he squats down on the carpet. The congregation is feeling uncomfortable.

Then from the back of the church, a gray-haired elder in a three-piece suit starts walking toward Bill with a cane. The worshipers don’t expect a man in his 80s to understand some college kid on the floor. With all eyes focused on the developing drama, the minister waits to begin his sermon until the elder does what he has to do.

The elderly man drops his cane on the floor and with great difficulty lowers himself to sit next to Bill.

“What I’m about to preach,” the minister begins, “you’ll never remember. What you’ve just seen, you’ll never forget.”
How can we live a righteous life? What must we do now to please God at the end of our life?

List the qualities you would like to see God build into your life before you die. Share with the group at least one thing on the list.

Teaching point four: Your twilight years can be your most productive time for the kingdom of God.

Robert Lewis shared this in “Noble Masculinity” (LEADERSHIP JOURNAL, Spring 2002, p. 28):

Robert Bly said, “If you’re not being admired by other men, you’re being hurt.” That struck a chord with me. As I talk with men about their struggles, I realize many men are languishing because nobody is recognizing the noble things in their life. Men need male cheerleaders. If no one cheers for nobility, men are going to collapse back into a dumbed-down masculinity that follows the cheers of the world—obsessive careerism, selfish pursuits, and ignoble deeds. We try to cheer men on—for the right things.

I had one man tell me, “I’m old. I’m sick. I have no purpose in life.”

“Oh, no,” I told him. “You’ve got a lot of things you can do.”

“Like what?”

“Tell younger men your story.”

He objected. “Nobody would want to listen to me.”

“You’ve got 70 years’ experience, and here’s a generation of guys who haven’t had anybody to share real life with them.” He sputtered, but said he’d meet with a younger man if he had the opportunity.

Later at a Men’s Fraternity meeting, we were talking about teammates in life. I told them the story of this guy and that he was available. Young guys came up after the meeting wanting to meet with him, and to this day, the older man meets with five or six guys a week and has a waiting list of more.

Read Psalm 92:14.

What kind of fruit would you like to bear in your old age?

How could your retirement actually be the most useful time of your life?

How might one who is older have more impact than someone who is young?

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

Glenn and Shirley Baas wanted to make their retirement years count. They thought about going on the mission field but couldn’t find the right fit. So instead they began to befriend international college students at a nearby campus. They have taught international students how...
to drive, visited them in the hospital, prayed for them, and invited them to church. They are full-time missionaries in their own home.

Mary Merchant always wanted to be a schoolteacher but could never find the time or money to go back to school. So upon retirement, she volunteered as a full-time aid at the local Christian school.

Wendell Hueber is a great carpenter. Although retired, he is going on his first mission trip to China to help construct facilities for a camp.

[Q] Do you have heroes like the ones mentioned above? Tell us about them.

[Q] List fun ways to use your time during retirement that would also benefit the kingdom of God.

—Study written by Jeffrey Arthurs, with JoHannah Reardon
A head of gray is a crown of glory at the end of a righteous story.

Old age is not defined in the Bible in terms of years, but in terms of physical capacity. The root of the word old is gray. The Book of Proverbs provides hope and challenge to the mature. This study is about the joy of growing older. God values the elderly. Our society is youth-oriented, but God says gray hair is a “crown of glory.”

Scripture:
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Based on:
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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Old age is tough.

Teaching point two: Old age is to be honored.

Q With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:
1) The elderly have to earn the right to be heard.
2) All elderly people deserve respect.
3) There is no difference between respect for the elderly and the young.

Teaching point three: Old age is a sign of God’s blessing—sometimes.

Teaching point four: Your twilight years can be your most productive time for the kingdom of God.

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