

# PURSUING WISDOM

God promises to provide His wisdom to those who search for Him.

## PROVERBS 8:6-21

### MEMORY VERSE: PROVERBS 9:10

- **READ** Proverbs 8:1–9:18, First Thoughts (p. 64), and Understand the Context (p. 64), highlighting the contrast between wisdom and foolishness. Read 1 Kings 3:7-9, and reflect on how Solomon's prayer relates to people today.
- **STUDY** Proverbs 8:6-21, using Explore the Text (pp. 65–69). List the characteristics of a wise person found in the verses, and evaluate yourself on each characteristic. Complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 58). Examine Matthew 6:33; 7:7-8 to make a New Testament connection.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70–71), More Ideas (p. 72), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Leader Extras tab at [goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps). Consult *QuickSource* for additional questions you can use in leading the discussion and an Object Lesson idea for the study.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog ([LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  A board or chart paper and markers; and  A long piece of rope. For More Ideas (p. 72):  Index cards. Prepare to display the following Pack Items:  **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*); and  **PACK ITEM 4** (*Poster: Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs*). Make copies of:  **PACK ITEM 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*).



## KEY DOCTRINE

### *The Scriptures*

All Scripture is totally true and trustworthy (Ps. 119:140).

# FIRST THOUGHTS

God offers wisdom by which to live life and glorify Him. He has revealed Himself in nature (Ps. 19:1), in His written Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and in Jesus (Heb. 1:1-4). Even though God has taken the step to reveal His wisdom, God's people cannot be passive when it comes to pursuing it. He reveals His wisdom, and simultaneously we must pursue the revealed wisdom of God. This pursuit is critical to spiritual maturity and growth.

(In PSG, p. 55) **If you were granted the opportunity to gain wisdom in one area of life, what would it be and why?**

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## BIBLE SKILL

*Notice repeated words or phrases in a Bible passage.*

Read Proverbs 8:6-21 out loud and notice the number of times in which the pronoun "I" is repeated. How does the voice of wisdom speaking directly to God's people make the appeal to be wise more compelling? Jot down the ways in which Solomon's approach in the passage has a positive effect on the appeal. Also, make note of the ways that the appeal can be misunderstood.

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## PROVERBS 8:1–9:18

Proverbs 8–9 is an appeal to embrace godly wisdom. The appeal is unique because it comes directly from wisdom that has been personified as a virtuous woman. Through personification, an idea comes to life in a literary sense as a person. For example, medicine can be personified as a physician who says, "I am your medicine, and I can make you well."

Solomon used personification as he showed his son the need to follow the way of God's wisdom and to avoid the path of foolish choices. He personified wisdom as an elegant lady of virtue who spoke directly to his son, telling him where he could find her. She hated evil, and anyone who followed her would hate it too. People who took her seriously could expect their lives to be secure and fulfilled. However, a person who rejected or ignored godly wisdom could look forward to nothing but death (Prov. 8:1-36).

The appeal to choose wisdom continued with the presentation of two options, presented as two houses. Wisdom lived in one house, and she invited Solomon's son to a banquet she had prepared. Not only did she invite him, she sent an invitation to everyone who saw the need for wisdom in their lives. She also explained the value of growing in godly wisdom. The wiser people become, the more they want to mature in wisdom. From there, she returned to the bedrock truth about how to become wise. It involves fearing the Lord and knowing Him intimately.

Folly lived in another house. She personified the foolish path that individuals take if they reject the way of God's wisdom. Folly also invited everyone to come to her house. There they could join her for a meal that consisted of nothing more than water and bread. The water had been stolen, and the symbolism of stolen water brought the foolishness of sexual immorality to mind. The guests would eat the bread in secret, which symbolized criminal activity that took place in the shadows (9:1-18).

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

**VALUABLE** (PROV. 8:6-11)

## VERSES 6-9

In Proverbs 7, Solomon warned his son about the immoral woman who would try to seduce him. In this chapter he continued to instruct his son about a woman, but not in a literal sense. This time he used figurative language and portrayed wisdom as a virtuous woman. By using figurative language called personification, he showed his son how to respect the value of God's wisdom and treat it like a precious treasure.

Solomon directed his son to **listen** carefully to what he was about to say. Then he allowed the wisdom of God to speak through the voice of a virtuous woman. Earlier, he had compared wisdom to an elegant lady of virtue who urged young men to give their attention to her (1:20-23; 3:13-20). Now, she talked with Solomon's son herself. She referred to herself by using the personal pronoun **I** as she spoke to him. She identified herself by asserting that she devoted herself to talking about **noble things**. As she talked with Solomon's son, she gave her attention to matters of utmost importance that would lead him to take the path of excellence. As he listened to her, he could count on her to be upright in everything she would tell him.

Observe how much **truth** mattered to her. Nothing other than truth would come out of her **mouth**. With her assertion, she vouched for the validity of God's Word as altogether true. She was not alone in her assertion. Other voices have joined her to insist that God's Word can be trusted because it's the absolute truth. For instance, the psalmists affirmed the truth of God's Word. (See Pss. 86:15; 89:14.) So did Jesus. He proclaimed that truth would set a person free (John 8:32). Of course, He pointed to Himself with what He said. His proclamation affirmed that believers could have confidence in the truth of God's Word.

Wisdom noted that she wouldn't have anything to do with lies. For that reason, she refused to give **wickedness** a voice. She utterly despised evil, and she would not allow anything other than the truth to pass through her **lips**. With her bold assertions, she gave Solomon's son the opportunity to trust what she told him. The same opportunity has been extended to God's people everywhere.

Wisdom pointed to another characteristic of the insights she shared. Solomon's son could count on them to be honest. She had already mentioned that her words would be upright (Prov. 8:6). Now she reinforced the fact that she would be straightforward and irreproachable as she directed him to embrace godly wisdom. She even went further to guarantee that she would not be involved in **deceptive** speech marked by sly craftiness with words. She would not try to mislead him with what she would say to him.

As we study the insights that come our way through Scripture, we become more **perceptive**. Our sense of discernment matures as we examine the truths of Scripture and apply them to our circumstances. That's when we **discover** for ourselves that the **knowledge** given to us from the Bible makes complete sense. Sometimes the truth shines in our minds and

## VERSES 6-9

- <sup>6</sup> Listen, for I speak of noble things, and what my lips say is right.
- <sup>7</sup> For my mouth tells the truth, and wickedness is detestable to my lips.
- <sup>8</sup> All the words from my mouth are righteous; none of them are deceptive or perverse.
- <sup>9</sup> All of them are clear to the perceptive, and right to those who discover knowledge.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Wisdom Personified" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

hearts in a flash, giving us instant insight. At other times, however, the light of truth may flicker dimly for a while before it shines brightly enough for us to see it plainly and clearly. As we encounter the truth of God's Word, we grow more assured that what He says is **right**.

## VERSES 10-11

<sup>10</sup> Accept my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than pure gold. <sup>11</sup> For wisdom is better than jewels, and nothing desirable can equal it.

### VERSES 10-11

The certainty of the truth of God's wisdom gives way to a passionate appeal to embrace it. Embracing His wisdom means that we choose it for ourselves because it's priceless. Based on the certainty that God's wisdom can be trusted to be absolutely true, we understand the need to **accept** it.

Like Solomon's son, we do well to choose wisely the preferences of our lives. We always prefer what our hearts treasure. If we cherish God's wisdom, we will embrace it as a priceless treasure that we never want to ignore or neglect. God's people who have come to love His Word testify that His wisdom means more to us than **silver** and **gold**. Precious metals may produce resources that will give us financial security, but they cannot give us the assurance of His presence and the certainty of His direction. He provides us with a sense of security that enriches us beyond our expectations. Likewise, precious jewels like rubies cannot compare to the incomparable value of God's wisdom. That's why growing Christians desire it above everything else.

(In PSG, p. 59) **Why would someone not consider God's wisdom to be a priceless treasure? What do you cherish about it most of all?**

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## VERSE 12

<sup>12</sup> I, wisdom, share a home with shrewdness and have knowledge and discretion.

### POWERFUL (PROV. 8:12-16)

#### VERSE 12

Solomon continued to speak God's **wisdom** to his son through the voice of the virtuous woman. Reflecting her devotion to godly virtues, she shared her house with **shrewdness**. The Hebrew word for **shrewdness** could evoke notions of craftiness. Such unsavory notions from the word are used in Exodus 21:14 and Joshua 9:14. In the setting of this verse, however, the word suggests the virtue of prudence or foresight. This important virtue would have been essential for developing a plan for successful living.

In addition, she wanted Solomon's son to know she had **knowledge**. She didn't intend to imply by this that she had read widely and developed a vast knowledge of an assortment of topics and issues. Instead, she conveyed the certainty that she had a deep and abiding knowledge of truth. Along with knowledge, she possessed the **discretion** necessary to make sound judgments based on truth. The clarity of her thoughts gave way to excellence in her behavior.

### VERSE 13

From where did these virtues come? She set out to answer that question by taking Solomon's son back to instruction he had already been given. Previously, he had been taught that wisdom came from God. Fearing God put a person on the path to being wise (see 1:7). To **fear** God meant to love Him in a way that nourished a healthy respect for Him. Fearing God in this way made the difference between growing wise or becoming foolish. Likewise, being wise in the Lord meant loving what He loves and detesting what He detests. For that reason, those who valued His wisdom would hate **evil**. They would also detest the expressions of evil. **Arrogant pride** is at the top of the list. Such sinful pride could prompt people to put themselves on a throne that is rightly occupied only by the Lord. Arrogance would give them permission to do what they pleased since they only lived to please themselves. Eventually, self-serving behavior would give way to moral corruption and **evil conduct**. That's when individuals turned to lying and other forms of **perverse speech**. With their words, they shrouded the corruption that would ruin them in due time.

(In PSG, p. 60) **How does fearing God lead to gaining wisdom? Can you gain true wisdom without a fear of God? Explain.**

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### VERSES 14-16

In the face of these expressions of evil, we have no better choice than to trust God to give us His wisdom. He gives us His wisdom freely as we walk with Him in healthy fear that emanates from loyal love. The virtuous woman portrayed as godly wisdom reminds us of the only true source of **good advice**. God gives His counsel to us when we study His Word, go to Him in prayer, and seek the advice of spiritual siblings in Christ. The counsel we receive can enable us to make **sound** judgments that come from His wisdom.

Our confidence in God's wisdom is reinforced with the statement in verse 14 about **understanding**. The Lord is perfectly capable of giving us the insight we need so we can navigate the challenges in which we find ourselves. By the same token, the Lord is ready and able to help us with the ups and downs of life, because He is strong. His **strength** can enable us. As a result, we won't be overwhelmed when we're greeted by circumstances and opportunities that seem to be too daunting for us.

The virtuous woman went on to display the power of godly wisdom by showing the connection between being wise and ruling well in verses 15-16. She mentioned the kinds of leaders who would have been prominent in the day of Solomon: **kings, princes, and nobles**. A foolish leader could conquer a kingdom by using brute force and naked aggression. However, leading the kingdom to grow in a healthy manner would require something more. It would require wisdom that could only come from God. Walking in Him and seeking His wisdom would bring success to a king's **reign**.

### VERSE 13

<sup>13</sup> To fear the LORD is to hate evil. I hate arrogant pride, evil conduct, and perverse speech.

### VERSES 14-16

<sup>14</sup> I possess good advice and sound wisdom; I have understanding and strength. <sup>15</sup> It is by me that kings reign and rulers enact just law; <sup>16</sup> by me, princes lead, as do nobles and all righteous judges.

Solomon wasn't alone in his line of reasoning about the key to a leader's effectiveness. Others in the Bible made similar assertions. For instance, Daniel pointed out that the Lord placed kings over kingdoms and also removed them (Dan. 2:21). Paul instructed Christians to understand that the Lord established governing authorities (Rom. 13:1). Leaders in government need godly wisdom so they can make sound judgments. In Solomon's day, sound judgments came in the form of **just law**.

## OBTAINABLE (PROV. 8:17-21)

### VERSE 17

<sup>17</sup> I love those who love me, and those who search for me find me.

#### VERSE 17

The woman who personified wisdom in Solomon's instruction to his son turned her attention to all God's people who loved her. Their **love** for godly wisdom came from their growing relationship with the Lord that started when they first gave themselves to Him.

Verse 17 does not suggest that God loves only the person who loves Him first. On the contrary, we love Him because He first loved us. (See 1 John 4:7-10.) Neither does it open the door for the possibility that wisdom is some kind of deity. Wisdom comes to us from God. He lavishes the blessing of His wisdom on anyone who turns to Him and trusts Him to make them wise in Him. New Testament writers offer the same assurance to Christians in search of wisdom. God gives His wisdom to believers who ask Him for it. (See Jas. 1:5; Heb. 11:6.)

### VERSES 18-21

<sup>18</sup> With me are riches and honor, lasting wealth and righteousness. <sup>19</sup> My fruit is better than solid gold, and my harvest than pure silver. <sup>20</sup> I walk in the ways of righteousness, along the paths of justice, <sup>21</sup> giving wealth as an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

#### VERSES 18-21

Wisdom loves God's people who love His wisdom. Furthermore, wisdom has an extravagant blessing to give to anyone devoted to being wise in Him. Two expressions of the blessing are presented in verse 18. The first expression is presented in terms of **riches** and **wealth**. God's people who live by His wisdom will have needed resources. The second expression is described as **honor** and **righteousness**. Being wise in Him sets the stage for living with honor. Living with honor comes by way of being right with God. Taken together, these twin expressions of wisdom's blessing encourage us to rest in the assurance that the Lord can bless our determination to act upon God's wisdom.

Because of the blessing that being wise in the Lord can render, we do well to devote ourselves to Him, seek His wisdom, and live it out. According to the truth of verse 19, that's when we'll discover that wisdom's blessing exceeds our most ambitious expectations. It bears abundant **fruit** in our lives, and what's produced in us surpasses **solid gold** in value. When we ponder the value of gold, we cannot begin to grasp completely the superlative value of the treasure that God's wisdom has in store for us. The language of **harvest** also helps us to get a most attractive picture of the lavish yield God's wisdom renders for us when we follow it. The idea of a harvest prompts the image of a celebration. The harvest can be a time of celebration because of the bulging abundance of produce that's being gathered for the future. Similarly, wisdom enables us to enjoy a life of meaningful abundance that's worth more than the purest **silver**.

What we receive from wisdom goes beyond our imagination. Wisdom possesses abundant prosperity. Also, wisdom has marked out the way in which we will receive it. True prosperity doesn't result by using foolish methods that are developed and motivated by self-indulgent greed. On the contrary, the blessing of the true prosperity wisdom gives to God's people comes through a life devoted to **righteousness** and **justice**. Being righteous involves being right with the Lord and living in a way that reflects it. Taking the **paths** of justice means deciding to treat others in a way that the Lord intends for them to be treated. When we think about righteousness and justice, we come to see that they exist as two sides of the same coin. Walking with God nourishes a desire to seek justice for others. Notice that God's wisdom abides in a life devoted to these two priorities. Likewise, the blessing of abundance goes to the person in whom wisdom abides.

Through the voice of the virtuous woman, wisdom gave the assurance that the prosperity she offered would be provided as an **inheritance**. If she said that wealth came as wages, she would have implied that God's people had to work so they could earn the blessing of wisdom. Because they inherited it, however, they received it because of their trust in His wisdom. Instead of making a person earn it, she would be **giving wealth**. She went on to say that she would fill their **treasuries**. In other words, she would supply them with plenty of assets. When they found God's wisdom, they could act on it with the complete assurance that they were making the right choice.

**What's your testimony about the blessings you have received by living out godly wisdom? How often do you share your testimony with others?**

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### THE WISDOM OF PURSUING WEALTH THAT LASTS

- "With me are riches and honor, lasting wealth and righteousness" (Prov. 8:18).
- "Hope placed in wealth vanishes" (Prov. 11:7).
- "Wealth obtained by fraud will dwindle" (Prov. 13:11).
- "Wealth is not forever" (Prov. 27:24).
- "A greedy one is in a hurry for wealth; he doesn't know that poverty will come to him" (Prov. 28:22).
- "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-20).
- "Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God" (1 Tim. 6:17).

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**DISPLAY:** Hold up a long piece of rope, and invite volunteers to share any stories they have about playing a game of tug of war. Enlist two volunteers to hold each end of the rope and demonstrate the game.

**EXPLAIN:** *Our study in Proverbs consistently has Wisdom tugging one direction and Folly the other. Wisdom personifies our relationship with Christ while Folly represented by the immoral woman in our last session is pulling against the path of following Jesus Christ. Ask: How does temptation seem like a game of tug of war?*

**TRANSITION:** *Both believers and non-believers face life-changing decisions daily. In today's study, we will see how God promises to provide His wisdom to those who search for Him.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**CONTEXTUALIZE:** *In Proverbs 5–7, we discovered that sexual sin can have severe consequences. In Proverbs 8–9, we see that we must be in an ongoing relationship with wisdom found in following Christ, not just in our sexual intimacy but also in every area of our daily lives.*

**REFERENCE:** Using **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), note that today we're looking at a portrayal of wisdom. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 64; PSG, p. 56), provide a brief overview of Proverbs 8:1–9:18. Summarize Proverbs 8:1-5 encouraging the group to visualize wisdom standing at a crossroad calling out to people.

**READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 8:6-11**, as the group listens for action words that point to the value of wisdom.

**ASK:** *Why might someone not consider God's wisdom to be a priceless treasure? What do you cherish about it most of all?* (PSG, p. 59)

**TRANSITION:** *Now let's take the passage and examine the verses again, continuing to broaden our understanding of the value of wisdom.*

**READ:** As you reread aloud Proverbs 8:6-11, guide the group to look for parallelism where the second line of the verse enhances the first line.

**DISCUSS:** Place the group into three smaller teams. Assign each team two verses from the passage: Proverbs 8:6-7; Proverbs 8:8-9; and Proverbs 8:10-11, and direct each team to discuss their assigned verses and be prepared to share a paraphrase of the verses in their own words. Point them to the comments in the PSG for additional insight. Ask: *How would you describe the value of God's truth when compared to the teachings of others?*

**READ: Direct the group to read silently Proverbs 8:12-16**, reflecting on the attributes of wisdom and what wisdom hates.

**DISTRIBUTE:** Provide each person in the group with **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) and allow time for the group to scan the handout. Call for volunteers to explain any new insights they learned.

**ASK:** *How does fearing God lead to gaining wisdom? Can you gain true wisdom without a fear of God? Explain.* (PSG, p. 60)

**EXAMINE:** Refer the group to the list of bulleted points on page 60 of the Personal Study Guide. Read the bulleted points aloud, and direct attention to the final summary sentence: *In other words, God's wisdom equips His people with sound reason, clear thinking, sufficient knowledge, endurance, patient strength, and faith.*

**TRANSITION:** *In verses 15-16, Solomon recognized how obeying God's wisdom influences all aspects of his reign as king. He reflected that it was God's power and wisdom that led to his success.*

**ASK:** *Why might we fail to speak about the power of sound thinking and wise counsel?*

**READ: Enlist someone to read Proverbs 8:17-21,** as the group listens for the availability of wisdom and the benefits described in these verses.

**REVIEW:** Use **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Wisdom Teaching in Proverbs*) to summarize the different ways Solomon presented wisdom. Then query: *How does knowing that God shares His wisdom motivate you to pursue it?* (PSG, p. 61) Emphasize the Key Doctrine (The Scriptures) on page 61 of the PSG.

**DIRECT:** Lead the group to examine the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 and Matthew 7:7-8, and discuss how these verses connect and confirm the verses in Proverbs.

**ASK:** *What are the dangers of discovering God's wisdom and failing to act on it?*

**TRANSITION:** *In Proverbs 8, Solomon revealed that wisdom is valuable, powerful, and obtainable only if we seek the Lord and obey.*

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**IDENTIFY:** As a group, discuss the characteristics of a wise person based on Proverbs 8. Record the characteristics on a board as they are identified. Ask: *How can the group foster these characteristics within the group?* (PSG, p. 63)

**REFLECT:** Guide the group to determine at least two actions each person could take immediately to aid in their seeking of God's wisdom.

**CHALLENGE:** *God's wisdom found through a relationship with Jesus Christ is the most valuable possession a person can have, but God's Word is clear that we must seek His wisdom and obey His instructions. Like the tug of war demonstrated at the beginning of the session, we must be holding onto the rope and moving toward total obedience as we seek His wisdom.*

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, thanking God for being available to us. Pray that the group would seek Him and pursue wisdom through prayer and studying His Word.



## PRACTICE

- As the group leader, reflect on who is holding you accountable for trusting and obeying God's wisdom.
- Contact anyone absent from the last group session, communicating what the group will study in the next session.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an option to focus attention, lead the group to identify some big football rivalries and some of the emotions and actions that are exhibited when the rivals meet on the field. Explain that each team wants to win bragging rights for the next year. Direct the group to discuss with a neighbor both the positives and negatives of the intense rivalry. Discuss: *If we could declare a winner in just one area of life, what would that area be, and why?*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the study of Proverbs 8:6-21 complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 58) by noting the repeated words or phrases in the verses. As a group, discuss answers to the following question: *How does the voice of wisdom speaking directly to God's people make the appeal to be wise more compelling?* (PSG, p. 58)
- To further supplement discussion of Proverbs 8:6-11, ask: *What might a person pursue instead of God's wisdom in an effort to find truth? What are the limits of each thing you listed?* (PSG, p. 58)
- Discuss how the voice of wisdom speaking directly to God's people makes the appeal to be wise more compelling.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Prior to the session write the nine bulleted statements found under Verses 18-21 in the PSG (p. 62) on individual index cards and distribute them to volunteers to read when called upon. Guide them to read the statements, and then ask the group: *What are you doing to better place yourself in a position to discover and act upon God's wisdom? Who can hold you accountable for taking action and how?* (PSG, p. 63) Return to the rivalry introduction and remind the group that there are always other pursuits trying to vie for our attention.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, examine the lyrics of the third verse of the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," by Henry Sloane Coffin. Prior to the session enlist a volunteer to either read or sing the third verse.