

PLEASING GOD

God's people should seek to please Him in their attitudes and actions.

PROVERBS 15:33–16:11

MEMORY VERSE: PROVERBS 15:3

- **READ** Proverbs 15:1–22:16, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (p. 84). Note how our attitudes and actions affect our relationships with God and others. Look specifically for verses that highlight God's sovereignty.
- **STUDY** Proverbs 15:33–16:11, using Explore the Text (pp. 85–89). Examine how the verses are grouped by theme rather than a linear pattern in the PSG. Consult a Bible dictionary for more insight on God's sovereignty. Memorize Proverbs 15:3 as part of your personal study. Reflect on your own response to the questions on page 73 of the PSG: *When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved? What difference did it make to you?*
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90–91), More Ideas (p. 92), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Leader Extras tab at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps. Customize the plan to meet the needs of your group.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; and A board or chart paper and markers. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*); and **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*). Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*).



KEY DOCTRINE

God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures (Ex. 15:11-27).

FIRST THOUGHTS

Children enjoy pleasing the people they love. They know no boundaries when it comes to showing their affection to their parents, grandparents, teachers at school, or neighbors across the street. Their love prompts them to give a hug, a kiss, or a smile. It also causes them to look for ways to please. They'll try to fix breakfast for their parents, sing a new song that they learned for their grandparents, and take gifts to their teachers.

(In PSG, p.73) **When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved? What difference did it make to you?**

BIBLE SKILL

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 2:11-17; Micah 6:8; Philippians 2:5-11; James 4:6-10; and 1 Peter 5:5-6, noting the role humility plays in each passage. How would you define humility based on these passages? What critical actions increase true humility? How do these passages help you better understand Proverbs 16?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 15:1–22:16

In this lengthy section of Proverbs, Solomon continued to stress the clear difference between people who lived to please the Lord and people who rejected Him. The vast majority of the proverbs in this section follow a one-verse format. For instance, Solomon noted that an intelligent person would pursue knowledge, but a foolish individual would feast on indiscretion (Prov. 15:14). At times, however, Solomon elaborated on some of the insights into God's wise ways. For example, he described in a few verses how the Lord would judge the wicked and strengthen the upright (15:25-32).

Solomon went on to show the value of pleasing the Lord (15:32–16:11). He then offered an assortment of persuasive approaches for walking in the Lord's wisdom (16:12–18:24). Near the end of this section he gave a sobering warning about the immense power of the tongue (18:20-21).

The next section of Proverbs invites us to consider some practical applications of God's wisdom to life situations (19:1–22:16). One of the primary topics involves friendships and family. At the heart of a godly person's relationship with friends is a commitment to live with integrity. Likewise, the way a husband treats his wife speaks volumes about how he considers her to be a gift from the Lord to him (19:1-14). We're also invited to consider the needs of the poor and our duty to help them. When we extend grace to a poor person, we're actually lending to the Lord. We can rest assured He will always repay us (19:17).

Solomon turned his attention to kings and offered God's wisdom for them so they could rule well (20:2; 20:8; 20:26; 21:1). He also provided wise insights into the wise way to handle issues and establish priorities. He highlighted the ethical standards God's people embraced as they sought to please Him (21:2–22:16).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WISDOM DEMONSTRATED (PROV. 15:33; 16:8)

CHAPTER 15, VERSE 33

So far, Proverbs has provided us with clear guidance on how to be wise in the Lord. Also, we have learned ways in which God's wisdom can be put into practice in our lives. In this portion of the book, however, we're led in another direction. We're given the answer to one of the most pressing questions about wisdom. If we're truly wise in the Lord, how will we know it? With plenty of alternative sources of so-called wisdom, Christians could be left a little confused about whether we've actually been given God's wisdom. According to this verse, we know we're receiving true wisdom if it causes us to **fear** the Lord. When we say we fear the Lord, we don't imply that His presence terrorizes us. Quite the opposite, having Him in our lives gives us a sublime sense of joyful trust that emanates from His faithful love for us and our response of loving respect for Him.

Fearing the Lord involves coming to Him in **humility** when we recognize He has the power and authority to do anything He wants, and we are powerless and helpless. Our helplessness causes us to bow before Him as humble servants who love Him and seek to please Him. When we approach Him in sincere humility, He graces us with His loving presence. In that kind of relationship, we realize that He's given us the distinct **honor** of being one of His children.

CHAPTER 16, VERSE 8

In the same way true wisdom prompts us to fear the Lord, true prosperity causes us to make **righteousness** our priority. The previous chapters in Proverbs direct us to see that the Lord provides for His people who seek His wisdom and act on it. This verse answers the question about the form that God's provision takes. Left to ourselves, we may cultivate the notion that His provision looks like lots of money and possessions. When we're wise in Him, however, we consider being right with Him and living according to His ways a priceless treasure in itself. The intimate relationship that's being nourished has an enriching effect on us. For that reason, we're content with **little** just as long as He's with us on our journey.

Such a God-centered perspective flies in the face of conventional wisdom about wealth. When most folks think about being prosperous, they think about having a **great income**. From their perspective, a mountain of money, an overflowing revenue stream, and a portfolio of wealth would enable a person to live in complete contentment. According to God's wisdom, however, that kind of wealth doesn't make a person content, especially if it's been gathered through acts of **injustice**. For a believer, growing in righteousness leads us to pursue justice over money. But for a person hungry for wealth, justice takes a back seat to profit. They justify injustice if it makes a positive difference to the bottom line.

CHAPTER 15, VERSE 33

³³ The fear of the LORD is what wisdom teaches, and humility comes before honor.

CHAPTER 16, VERSE 8

⁸ Better a little with righteousness than great income with injustice.

How do you view the connection between walking with Him and being enriched? What effect does your view have on your contentment?

ACCOUNTABILITY ESTABLISHED (PROV. 16:1,4-5,9)

VERSE 1

¹The reflections of the heart belong to mankind, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

VERSE 1

When someone develops a plan, he or she generally spends time preparing each step to be taken. The time in preparation involves attention to numerous details. Uninterrupted **reflections** give clarity to the plan. Details of the plan may originate in the mind but eventually make their way to the **heart**. There, they become felt and not just thought. Passion that's stored in the heart transforms details into initiatives that have been fueled by conviction. All **mankind** goes through the same process in establishing and implementing a plan.

However, the final product doesn't depend on a person's attention to details, initiative, or passion. The Lord has the final word in the plans we make. As we gather up our details and organize our ideas, we can count on Him to direct us to the right approach.

Our foolishness drives us to develop plans for ourselves that center on our purposes instead of His.

VERSES 4-5

⁴The LORD has prepared everything for his purpose — even the wicked for the day of disaster. ⁵Everyone with a proud heart is detestable to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

VERSES 4-5

The Lord gives us His direction in keeping with His **purpose**. Accordingly, we do well to acknowledge Him in whatever task we undertake. He's **prepared everything** in our world so His purpose can be accomplished. Therefore, we're foolish when we ignore Him and His purpose. We're foolish when we don't take His purpose in consideration. Our foolishness drives us to develop plans for ourselves that center on our purposes instead of His. By contrast, we're wise when we turn to Him for guidance regarding His plan for us. That's when we're ready to seek His direction and work according to it.

The reach of the Lord's preparation extends to **wicked** people who have rejected His wisdom. He's prepared a day for them in which they will face the consequence of their rejection. The consequence will come in the form of **disaster**.

When a person rejects **the LORD**, his or her heart becomes like soil from which selfish pride sprouts and grows. Like weeds infesting a garden, the seed of pride sown in the **heart** can take control of a person's life. Everyone who allows pride to reign over him or her demonstrates its influence with displays of arrogance or conceit. Such displays disgust the Lord. They're **detestable** to Him, and anyone who gives in to selfish pride will be held accountable. They can **be assured** that His judgment will come their way. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah serves as a prime example of the

certain judgment that awaits anyone who's filled with arrogant pride (Gen. 19). That's why Peter and Jude brought up Sodom and Gomorrah in their letters to Christians (2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7).

SIX THINGS GOD HATES

(PROV. 6:16-19)

- arrogant eyes (v. 17)
- a lying tongue (v. 17)
- hands that shed innocent blood (v. 17)
- a heart that plots wicked schemes (v. 18)
- feet eager to run to evil (v. 18)
- a false witness (v. 19)
- one who stirs up trouble (v. 19)

Note: The first five items move from the top of the body (eyes) to the bottom (feet). At the center of the list is the heart.

VERSE 9

A person's heart is the place in which plans take shape. Therefore, we decide the way we'll go based on what's in our hearts. People who reject Him will choose a way that seems right to them. They will invest in it, and they will believe that it's going to get them to fulfillment. Because they've refused to give their lives to Him, they should only expect the terrible fate of destruction. However, when we place our trust in the Lord, our hearts turn to His plan for us and our eagerness to live it out. That's when we ask Him to take us where He wants us to go and follow Him as He **determines** our **steps** along the way. By taking that path, we grow in Him and experience the blessing of His joy in us.

What can you do to let everyone in your life know that they'll be accountable to the Lord?

MOTIVES MATTER (PROV. 16:2,10-11)

VERSE 2

This proverb serves as a reminder that we may deceive ourselves into believing that we're doing what's right. We may look at our actions and say to ourselves that we're pleasing the Lord. However, He alone knows what's in our hearts. He examines what's there and judges the purity of our reasons for what we're doing. In that way, He **weighs** our **motives**. For that reason, we do well when we make sure that we please Him with our motives.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "It's an Abomination!" in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

VERSE 9

⁹ A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.

VERSE 2

² All a person's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs motives.

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰ God's verdict is on the lips of a king; his mouth should not give an unfair judgment.

¹¹ Honest balances and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his concern.

VERSE 10-11

To help God's people grasp the importance of having the right motive for what they do, Solomon brought to their attention what could be described as the ideal **king**. For the people in Solomon's day, the king's decree had the authority of **God's verdict**. God would direct the king to understand what would be best for the kingdom. In turn, the ideal king would take action based on what God had said to him. What passed through his lips would come from the wisdom of God. By remaining loyal to God, the king would be able to make right decisions. If a king sought God's wisdom and took it to heart, he would be kept from making an **unfair judgment**. In light of that reality, the key to his success as king rested in his relationship to the Lord. If he turned his heart toward listening to the Lord, the motive for his decisions and judgments would please God.

Solomon gave another example of the value God placed on right motives. The example in verse 11 pointed to merchants who tried to squeeze money from their customers. It highlights the dishonesty unscrupulous merchants hid in their hearts. Before customers used coins, they weighed pieces of gold or silver to make their purchases. The merchants who sold items to them would use **balances and scales** to weigh the gold and silver. Dishonest merchants would manipulate the balances and scales so they could collect a little more from the customer. A merchant's honesty said something noteworthy about his motive. The Lord nourished honesty in the merchant's heart. He would be the reason the merchant made sure that the **weights** in the **bag** were accurate. When merchants practiced deceptive methods that would allow them to steal from their customers, they verified that they had rejected the Lord's wisdom.

What actions can you take to ensure that your motives please the Lord?

The key to being content in Him involves determining that we will devote ourselves to pleasing Him.

BLESSING ASSURED (PROV. 16:3,6-7)

VERSE 3

God values our willingness to **commit** what we do to Him. When we make a commitment to Him, we're placing our **activities** in His hands. In other words, we entrust to Him everything we do. Of course, making such a commitment to trust Him completely can be difficult, and we may find ourselves wavering in our willingness to submit everything to Him. As our faith in Him grows, however, so does our confidence in Him. When we begin to see that He takes the **plans** we've made and shapes them so they will honor Him, we come to rest in His faithfulness. We learn that our plans in His hands will be **established**. When we acknowledge He's in full

VERSE 3

³ Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established.

control of our lives, He will make sure that what happens will honor Him and give us a sense of stability. The key to being content in Him involves determining that we will devote ourselves to pleasing Him.

VERSES 6-7

Solomon identified another blessing God's people receive from Him when they live for Him. They experience the joy that accompanies forgiveness of their sins. Their sinful behavior is **atoned for** in the sense that their sins are covered and pardoned, never to be brought up again. Solomon referred to sins against the Lord's standard of righteousness as **iniquity**. Because of God's **loyalty and faithfulness** to His people, He can be counted on to cleanse us of our sin.

What God's people in Old Testament days knew well, we should know even better because we live on this side of the cross. If we've given our lives to Christ, we can testify that He forgives our sins. We can affirm His unconditional love for us and His remarkable, gracious faithfulness.

His faithful love to us calls us to turn to Him as loyal followers who **fear** Him when we sin against Him, or when we find ourselves giving into **evil**. Our love for Him prompts us to examine ourselves. That's when we ask Him to forgive us and to help us as we renew our eagerness to live in a way that pleases Him.

When believers choose the path that the Lord favors, we can depend on yet another blessing. It's the blessing that comes in our relationships with our **enemies**. Bible teachers have described the exact nature of this blessing in two different ways. Some understand this blessing to flow out of the way we live in the presence of people who detest us because of our walk with the Lord. As they look at us, they will come to respect our lifestyle of integrity even though they may detest our faith in Him. In that way, we make our enemies live in **peace** with us. Other Bible scholars think the blessing of peace with our enemies comes directly from the Lord. He will cause our enemies to live in peace with us. Of course, both perspectives may be correct. The Lord works through His people so we will live in a way that silences even the worst critics of our eagerness to please Him.

Which of these blessings have you experienced lately? What difference do they make in your walk with the Lord?

VERSES 6-7

⁶ Iniquity is atoned for by loyalty and faithfulness, and one turns from evil by the fear of the LORD.

⁷ When a person's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: To begin the session, lead the group to visualize a child whose mother has been out of town for a week. The mother steps into sight at the airport, and the child takes off running as the mother holds her arms open wide.

EXPLAIN: *Just as a child runs to his mother, so we should run to our heavenly Father with our eyes totally focused on Him and His open arms.*

ASK: *When you were a child, how did you try to please the people you loved? What difference did it make to you? (PSG, p. 73) Why did you want to please them?*

TRANSITION: *Today's session will lead us to understand that God's people should seek to please Him in their attitudes and actions.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Utilizing **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*) and Understand the Content (p. 84), set the stage for the session. Remind the group that Proverbs 1–9 set the foundation or heart of the collected Proverbs in chapters 10–29 and that the wisdom described by Solomon is fully revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Highlight the words “delight” and “wisdom” on **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*).

ILLUSTRATE: In the center of a board draw a heart. In the center of the heart write: *Fear the Lord, Trust the Lord, Hold onto Instruction, and Stay on the Path.*

EXPLAIN: *In today's session, rather than focusing on the verses in a linear way, we'll examine the verses linked by themes.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read Proverbs 15:33 and 16:8, as the group listens for a connection between the phrases written inside the heart and the verses.

ILLUSTRATE: Draw an arrow from the heart and write *Wisdom Demonstrated.*

ASK: *What is easier to maintain—humility or a reverent fear of God? Explain.* (PSG, p. 75)

TRANSITION: *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines the sovereignty of God as the “biblical teaching that God possesses all power and is the ruler of all things. God rules and works according to His eternal purpose.”¹ Enlist a volunteer to read Isaiah 45:5-6.*

GUIDE: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) to those who didn't receive one during the previous session. Allow the group time to review the handout, and then lead them to discuss the relationship between fearing the Lord and wisdom.

READ: Lead the group to read silently Proverbs 16:1,4-5,9, identifying words that reveal God's sovereignty and our accountability. Then draw another arrow from the heart and write *Accountability Established.*

DISCUSS: Create groups of two to four to discuss the following question: *How does Solomon's picture of human thinking while God directs the heart illustrate the relationship between personal*

responsibility and God's sovereignty? Guide the group to examine the commentary on Proverbs 16:4 (PSG, p. 76) for insight.

ASK: *What does living with the reality that we will face God one day look like? Why do people resist being held accountable? (PSG, p. 78) How has your understanding of being accountable to God changed as a result of this study?*

EMPHASIZE: *There are things we can't completely understand about the connection between God's sovereignty and our free will. It remains one of the mysteries of Scripture.*

TRANSITION: *Have you ever done something because you thought you had to, but inside you were groaning and complaining or thinking it was silly?*

ILLUSTRATE: Draw another arrow from the heart and write the words *Motives Matter*.

READ: Read aloud Proverbs 16:2, listening for how our actions and our hearts are known by God.

ASK: *Why are our motives so important? To what degree might our motives be more important than our actions? (PSG, p. 79)*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 16:10-11, as the group listens for two examples of how God is pleased with the right motivation.

HIGHLIGHT: *These verses reveal that honesty and dependency on God in leadership and in relationship with others is the proper motivation.*

REMINDE: *The collected Proverbs of Solomon are short, pithy principles—not promises—that reveal typically true generalities. There are many variables in life that point to no guarantees.*

ILLUSTRATE: Draw another arrow from the heart and write *Blessing Assured*.

READ: Invite someone to read Proverbs 16:3,6-7, as the group looks for the results of trusting the Lord as revealed in Jesus Christ.

ASK: *How has your response to the question on page 80 of the PSG changed as a result of today's discussion?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

TRANSITION: Using the completed drawing and the bulleted points under In My Context (PSG, p. 81), summarize the truths gained in studying Proverbs 15:33–16:11.

REFLECTION: Lead the group to examine the second set of questions on page 81 of the PSG: *Ask God to reveal areas in your life that are dominated by pride. Confess your pride and ask Him to help you grow in humility toward Him.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for being sovereign. Thank Him for providing guidance in how to live in an ever-changing world. Ask Him to cleanse our hearts and let our actions reflect a motivation of true love for Him. Pray that He will help us demonstrate wisdom in all that we do.

1. "Sovereignty of God," *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 1494.



PRACTICE

- Consider how you would explain God's sovereignty to others. Reflect on how knowing God is sovereign affects your everyday decisions.
- Evaluate your own willingness to serve and what motivates you to lead the group.
- Pray specifically for individuals in the group whom you know are dealing with challenges that are affecting their relationships with God or others.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an alternative, lead the group to respond by moving to a designated area in the room based on if they agree or disagree with each of the following statements: *God's sovereignty and our responsibility go hand in hand. God is sovereign in some things and will hold all people accountable. All things good and evil are under the sovereign control of God.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the study of Proverbs 15:33–16:11, create teams of two to four to explore the Scriptures included in the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 78). Divide the verses between the teams. Direct them to note the role humility plays in each passage and be prepared to report their findings to the group. Discuss as a group how the passages help us understand Proverbs 16.
- To further apply Proverbs 6:1,4-5,9, guide the group to reread these verses. Stress the importance of our attitudes and the condition of our hearts. Emphasize that none are without sin, and we're all accountable to God. Call on a volunteer to read the information under Six Things God Hates (PSG, p. 77). Allow time for the group to reflect on their own lives and heart attitudes that need God's renewal.
- Direct attention to Proverbs 15:3, the memory verse for this session. Challenge the group to memorize this verse to support them during times when their hearts are wanting to stray from God's intended path. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*) to those who need one.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Prior to the session, enlist volunteers to role play scenarios when someone is doing something with the wrong motive, and then change the role play to model a right motive. Guide the group to evaluate their lives in the areas of stability, God's forgiveness, and peaceful relationships with others. Then direct them to share with a neighbor one action they can take to grow in each of these areas before closing in prayer over these actions.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

As people arrive for the session, have "Sovereign," by Chris Tomlin, playing in the background or enlist a volunteer to sing the song to begin the session.