

ACCEPTING DISCIPLINE

God uses discipline from society, family, and others to shape His people.

PROVERBS 29:1-3,12-20

MEMORY VERSE: PROVERBS 13:1

- **READ** Proverbs 24:23–29:27, First Thoughts (p. 104), and Understand the Context (p. 104), focusing on the contrast between being disciplined and undisciplined. Consider how righteousness, wisdom, and discipline are related.
- **STUDY** Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20, using Explore the Text (pp. 105–109). Utilize a Bible dictionary for better understanding of the word *discipline*. Be prepared to provide information related to how Hezekiah used the sayings of Solomon. Examine Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and Hebrews 12:1-11. If using More Ideas (p. 112), become familiar with the additional verses cited. Review the quotes in First Thoughts.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 110–111), More Ideas (p. 112), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Leader Extras tab at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps.
- **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 Item: **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Key Words in Proverbs*). Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 9** (*Handout: Themes of Proverbs*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Family

Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth (Deut. 6:4-9).

Mention the word *discipline* and people give you all kinds of reactions. To many, discipline connotes drudgery. But few things happen in life that are fruitful and meaningful that do not involve discipline. The athlete, the scientist, the theologian, and the businessman must be disciplined and focused if they are to succeed. In the same way, believers should welcome discipline for the purpose of holiness.

(In PSG, p. 91) **Is discipline essential for the spiritual growth and development of God's people? Explain.**

BIBLE SKILL

Use a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

Develop a compare/contrast chart. On one side of a vertical line, write the words and phrases in Proverbs 29:1-3,12-20 that provide instructions for parents about disciplining their children. On the other side, note the words and phrases in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 in which Paul instructed parents on how to bring up their children in the Lord. What insights did you gain from this comparison?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 24:23–29:27

This portion of the Book of Proverbs can be divided into two sections. The first section (24:23-34) considers two issues: going to court and going to work. A wise judge makes sure favoritism doesn't enter the courtroom. A witness demonstrates wisdom by refusing to commit perjury or use the court as an opportunity to get revenge. When it comes to working, only a foolish person would buy items for personal comfort before purchasing what is necessary to establish a home. Also, foolish people ignore the need to take care of their property. That's why they run the risk of living in poverty.

The second section consists of Solomon's proverbs that had been copied by some of Hezekiah's men (25:1). Hezekiah became king of Judah over 200 years after Solomon's reign came to an end. He earned the reputation of being a king who honored the Lord. When he came to the throne, he repaired the temple in Jerusalem and took away the pagan idols. Under his reign, God's people began to celebrate Passover again as well as the other festivals associated with worshiping Him (2 Chron. 30).

Hezekiah's collection of Solomon's proverbs gives insights from God's wisdom that enable His people to make right decisions. The collection also includes a series of proverbs that shed light on how to deal with difficult people, how to identify and maintain authentic friendships, and the value of discipline. It includes some of the concerns a father has for his children. Furthermore, this section of Proverbs provides instruction on going to court and establishing a home. The theme of the entire section is summarized in two appeals. One appeal is to trust God above everything else in life. The other involves choosing the path of righteousness and avoiding the path of evil.

EXPLORE THE CONTEXT

THE GOAL (PROV. 29:1-3)

VERSE 1

Being disciplined doesn't imply being punished. Granted, growing spiritually as a disciplined believer can be punishing at times, but God doesn't intend for it to be a form of punishment. He wants to render within us a humble willingness to submit ourselves to Him. The difficulty with discipline comes when we decide to be **stiff-necked**. A stubborn mule will stiffen its neck to resist the bridle. Likewise, a stubborn person can refuse to take God's **reprimands** as opportunities to be submissive. God works patiently and lovingly with people so they will yield to Him. Stubborn individuals who have rejected His wisdom demonstrate their rebellion against Him by constantly ignoring His correction.

The future for such rebellious individuals promises to be devastating. A series of rebellious responses to the Lord's wisdom brings certain and sudden destruction. As they continue to harden their minds and hearts against God, He allows them to face the shattering consequences of their stubbornness. They're **beyond recovery** because they've gone too far. Nothing else will be done to help them.

VERSES 2-3

The dismal outcome for a person who rejects God's discipline stands in stark contrast to the optimistic future for God's people who have been made **righteous** because they placed their trust in Him. They will **flourish**, and as a result, the people in their families and their communities **rejoice**. A person who genuinely loves the Lord shows it in the way he or she treats others.

When a **wicked** person takes over a community or a kingdom, the outcome is not the same. Instead of rejoicing, the people who live in his or her shadow find themselves groaning over their predicament. They're troubled by what's going to happen next to them. Power and authority in the hands of a person who has rejected the Lord can produce misery for people who live under his or her influence. They lament when they ponder the hazards of living under the rule of a self-absorbed individual who has no concern for them.

Verse 3 continues to show the difference the Lord's discipline makes in a believer's life. The resolve to live in a way that pleases the Lord emanates from a genuine love for His **wisdom**. Becoming more disciplined involves giving more attention to seeking His wisdom and following its path. A person who takes such a wise path **brings joy** to his or her parents.

Anyone who rejects the Lord's discipline can expect a heartbreakingly fate. Self-indulgence will put them on the path of satisfying their lusts. The expression of lust in this verse happens to be **prostitutes**. Of course, lust takes a wide range of forms, but its outcome always takes the shape of destruction. Entire family fortunes can be wasted on a self-absorbed child's foolish indulgences.

VERSE 1

¹ One who becomes stiff-necked, after many reprimands will be shattered instantly—beyond recovery.

VERSES 2-3

² When the righteous flourish, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, people groan. ³ A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but one who consorts with prostitutes destroys his wealth.

What lessons have you learned recently from the Lord's discipline? How have the lessons enabled you to grow spiritually?

THE AVAILABILITY (PROV. 29:12-14)

VERSES 12-13

12 If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials will be wicked. **13** The poor and the oppressor have this in common: the LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

A **ruler** in the days of Solomon had the power to influence the lives of everyone under his reign. Citizens who lived in his kingdom didn't have a voice in their government. They had no other choice but to submit to their ruler's sovereign authority. In such a setting in which complete control rested in one person, the integrity of the ruler made the difference in whether the people under his authority would be mistreated or treated well. Accordingly, the level of his integrity would be influenced by the advice he received. If he listened to godly counsel from people who walked in God's wisdom, he would be encouraged to make decisions marked by a commitment to be upright. However, if he brought corrupt advisers into his administration who told him **lies**, he would be prone to making bad choices. They would lie to him if they thought it would help him. Or they would tell him lies in order to help themselves. Listening to their lies would have a contaminating effect. The king would not rule with integrity. Instead, his reign would be cursed with corruption. His **officials** who followed his leadership would be **wicked** as well.

The influence of a king's advisers serves as a fitting backdrop for the wisdom offered in verse 13. The **poor** represent people who have no power. When a person who has no integrity gains power, that person can become an **oppressor** of the poor who can't defend themselves. On the surface, the poor and oppressor appear to have nothing **in common**. But in another way, they're alike. Poor people and their oppressors have the same potential to turn to **the LORD** and to trust Him enough to seek His wisdom. The **light** of His wisdom can drive out spiritual darkness so they can see the right path. The Lord will give them insight so their **eyes** can be open to His direction for them.

VERSE 14

14 A king who judges the poor with fairness—his throne will be established forever.

VERSE 14

For a **king** who valued integrity, making righteous judgments would be a priority. A corrupt ruler would render judgments and issue decrees that favored only his political allies or strengthened his power base in some way. He would not think twice about abusing **the poor**.

In contrast, a righteous ruler lived with the conviction that poor people needed to be treated with **fairness**. Instead of making them invisible, he would see them as citizens who deserved respect. Therefore, his judgments involving them would be guided by truth instead of power. Because he gave attention to fairness, he could expect his kingdom to thrive. He would gain the respect of the citizens of his kingdom, and they would appreciate his

authority. If he rendered fair judgments to powerless people, his kingdom would last **forever**.

When leaders give themselves to the Lord, they can count on Him to make them wise to lead with integrity. As a result, people who follow them will enjoy the blessing of stability.

Which leaders need you to pray for them so they'll lead with integrity?

THE RESPONSIBILITY (PROV. 29:15-17)

VERSES 15-17

When we think about the **rod of correction**, we need unmistakable clarity about the difference between discipline and abuse. Parents who have the best interests of their child at heart won't hesitate to discipline when necessary. They want the child to grow in **wisdom**, and discipline helps their child to become a wise adult. On the other hand, abusive parents don't have a worthwhile reason for inflicting pain on a defenseless child. They may fall under the powerful control of dark, destructive urges that give them permission to be abusive. With their awful behavior, they leave physical and emotional scars on a child that can last a lifetime.

PARENTING IN PROVERBS

- Parents give godly instruction to their children (1:8-9; 4:1-4; 6:20-24).
- Parents delight in godly children (17:6; 23:23-25; 29:3,17).
- Parents discipline their children as an expression of love (3:12).

Some parents allow their child to grow up without any discipline at all. Left to themselves, undisciplined children grow up aimlessly. They will spend the days of their **youth** in pursuit of foolishness that eventually will bring **disgrace** to their **mother**.

The focus of discipline in verse 16 shifts from a house to the community. A parent's work of disciplining a child can be frustrated by the spread of wickedness around them. **Wicked** people can take the form of bullies who lurk in the shadows and strike innocent individuals when they get the chance. Or they can take the shape of community leaders, business leaders, or government leaders whose evil has been fortified by their power. Their **rebellion** against godly wisdom puts the spotlight on them, and the glare of their moral decay glows brighter every day.

A reliable promise helps to settle the frustration of parents who raise their children in a wicked environment. It offers the kind of assurance that will encourage parents to keep on working to discipline their children. The day will come when godly parents see the **downfall** of rebellious individuals who have chosen to live under the control of evil influences.

VERSES 15-17

¹⁵ A rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a youth left to himself is a disgrace to his mother.

¹⁶ When the wicked increase, rebellion increases, but the righteous will see their downfall. ¹⁷ Discipline your child, and it will bring you peace of mind and give you delight.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “A Word Fitly Spoken” in the Summer 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/Biblicalllustrator.

Likewise, wicked kingdoms will collapse. Their downfall may occur here and now, or it may happen later. Either way, the Lord will have the last word over rebellion. That’s when **righteous** people will be pleased that they taught their children to live as disciplined individuals in an undisciplined world.

With the promise comes a challenge to parents in verse 17. God’s wisdom at work in a family guides parents to take seriously the mandate to **discipline** children. Discipline involves instruction, and instructing children to fear the Lord—to seek His wisdom and follow it—requires parents to spend quality time with them. It also requires them to invest their resources in what’s best for their children and to live before them as good examples of adults who love the Lord and follow His wisdom.

Giving attention to the discipline of their children results in long-term blessings for parents.

Giving attention to the discipline of their children results in long-term blessings for parents. They will be blessed with **peace of mind**. They will be able to rest in the confidence that their children will handle the challenges ahead of them with wisdom. They will experience the **delight** that goes along with watching their children grow up to be wise adults. The possibility of these blessings makes the investment in children more than worthwhile for their parents.

In your circle of relationships, who sets a good example of parents who discipline their children well?

THE SOURCE (PROV. 29:18-20)

VERSE 18

¹⁸ Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy.

Without discipline, people **run wild**. By the same token, God’s people who have no spiritual insight can become just as unrestrained. When we think about the need for **revelation**, our thoughts turn to the vital necessity of hearing from the Lord. Listening to God focuses our thoughts on Him. It helps us to direct our energy according to His purposes.

In the Old Testament days, God’s people heard from Him most often through the preaching of the prophets. Their proclamations opened the spiritual eyes of His people so they could see what He wanted them to do.

God’s people grow more disciplined as they give their full attention to His **instruction**. They demonstrate that they take it seriously by obeying what He has taught in His Word. Spiritual insight from the Lord and instruction in His Word nourish a **happy** heart for believers. We’re inspired by what God is doing in our lives and look forward to serving Him as our highest priority.

VERSE 19

The relationship of a master to his servant helped people in Solomon's day grasp the challenge of trying to change another person's direction. In those days, masters used **words** to command their servants. The words only made a difference if the servant listened with obedience. A servant may have been able to understand what the master said. But hearing words didn't guarantee that the servant's behavior would change. In fact, a servant could hear the words but never **respond**. When the master saw that the servant was ignoring his words, he had to do something about it. He would need to compel his servant to have a change of heart. Otherwise, the servant would have never taken the master's command seriously.

This proverb about the servant brings up the problem of stubbornness. Followers of Christ can hear what He's saying to us, but we may not be willing to conform our lives in keeping with it. However, wise Christians are disciplined to take God's direction seriously. Being disciplined involves nurturing a humble and willing heart. Such a change of heart enables us to listen to Him carefully and obey Him consistently.

Hope is squandered by an unwillingness to be quiet long enough to listen to God.

VERSE 20

God's Word furnishes us with what we need to be wise in Him and apply His wisdom in our lives. The proverb in this verse points to an obstacle that prevents us from receiving His Word. We can't listen to God when we're unable to be quiet. A person who **speaks too soon** is someone who is too hasty when it comes to talking. When we speak before we listen, we're in too big of a hurry. We're in a rush to fill up the air with our speech. In a conversation, for example, we're only interested in waiting for our turn to talk and get impatient when our turn doesn't come soon enough. When we think about hearing from God, we're foolish if we don't learn the discipline of being quiet and listening to Him. In fact, this proverb warns us that we're worse than fools. Foolish people listen, but to the wrong voices. Yet they have the potential for listening to God and turning to Him. A person who can't be quiet doesn't have that possibility. **Hope** is squandered by an unwillingness to be quiet long enough to listen to God.

Which of these proverbs about hearing from God do you need to take to heart?

VERSE 19

19 A servant cannot be disciplined by words; though he understands, he doesn't respond.

VERSE 20

20 Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: Lead the group to select the quote they most agree with: “Discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most” (Abraham Lincoln). “Discipline yourself and others won’t need to” (John Wooden). “Small disciplines repeated with consistency every day lead to great achievements gained slowly over time” (John Maxwell).

ASK: If you were asked to define discipline, what would you say?

EXPLAIN: Our English word *discipline* comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, the word for *pupil*, and it’s also the source of the word *disciple*. The Greek word for *disciple* is *mathetes*, meaning a *learner* or *apprentice*.

QUERY: Is discipline essential for the spiritual growth and development of God’s people? Explain. (PSG, p. 91)

TRANSITION: Today’s study of Proverbs 29 reveals how God uses discipline from society, family, and others to shape His people. Point out *discipline* as a key word in Proverbs using **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Words in Proverbs).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

MINI-LECTURE: Proverbs 29 includes sayings of Solomon collected during the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Using Understand the Context (p. 104), explain how Hezekiah used Solomon’s sayings to build spiritual reform in Judah. For more information about Hezekiah, consult the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary.

STATE: Whether during the time of Hezekiah or today, God’s people frequently need spiritual disciplining. Read aloud Hebrews 12:11, and relate that as we study Proverbs 29, we need to remember that through our relationship with Jesus Christ we have the Holy Spirit and God’s Word to light our paths and discipline us when we go astray.

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 29:1-3, as the group listens for the contrast between the disciplined and the undisciplined.

DRAW: On a board or chart paper draw a “t” chart with two columns. Label one column *Discipline* and the other *Undisciplined*. Lead the group to add words or phrases from the verses appropriate for each column.

ASK: How does knowing the results of a disciplined lifestyle help a person continue in that lifestyle? (PSG, p. 93)

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Solomon reveals that God’s wisdom is available to all.

READ: Read aloud Proverbs 29:12-14, while the group highlights words or phrases that show that God’s wisdom is available to all.

STATE: The words of Solomon reveal that there’s no excuse for foolish, undisciplined living.

WRITE: Record additional information gained about being disciplined or undisciplined on the chart.

REFLECT: *How does knowing that God's wisdom is available to all people bring encouragement?* (PSG, p. 95)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read Proverbs 29:15-17, as the group listens for specific information regarding discipline and the role of parenting.

STUDY: Lead the group to write their own definition of *discipline*. Then highlight the definition of *discipline* on page 91 of the PSG. Compare the two definitions. Ask: *What is the value of loving discipline in parenting? In God's relationship with believers?*

RECORD: Continue adding words or phrases to the chart.

ASK: *How are societal norms a gauge of the type of parenting taking place within that society? To what level do you agree that the lack of parental discipline of the child is a reflection of the lack of discipline in the parent's personal life? Explain.* (PSG, p. 96)

DISCUSS: Call on a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Ask: *How do these verses clarify Solomon's instructions in Proverbs 29:15-17?*

TRANSITION: *Whether as parents, leaders, or followers, God's revelation provides direction for living a disciplined life.*

EXPLAIN: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Themes of Proverbs*) to those who need one. Highlight the last paragraph beginning "Faith in God's promises ..." Note discipline's role in gaining wisdom.

READ: Read aloud Proverbs 29:18-20, as the group considers the connection between God's revelation through the law and discipline. Add words or phrases to the chart.

ASK: *How does a commitment to God's Word help a person avoid acting in haste?* (PSG, p. 98)

TRANSITION: *If true discipleship is reflected in consistent obedience, we must examine our own lives to determine how we're providing discipline for those in our care and how we're growing ourselves through the discipline of God's Word.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: Briefly review the chart developed during the session, summarizing the contrast between discipline and lack of discipline. Ask: *How might God be disciplining you now to draw you closer to Him?*

CHALLENGE: *Consider what role discipline plays in your development as a follower of Jesus Christ. Determine at least two actions that you're willing to take to more consistently apply God's Word. Ask one person close to you to help you be accountable for the action steps.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for clear instructions on how to live a disciplined life. Pray that He will provide discipline for our children and those following our leadership. Pray that He will help us to obey His Word and honor Him in all that we do.



PRACTICE

- Examine your own heart to determine how willingly you accept God's discipline to support your growth in discipleship.
- Contact any recent guests to the group. Thank them for coming and include a personal invitation to attend Bible study next week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an alternative opening, lead the group to list types of diets. Explain that to be consistent with a diet, a person must select his or her food carefully, monitor the amount of food eaten, and persevere despite not feeling like it. Ask: *How would you describe the similarities and differences between a physical diet and a spiritual diet?*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- Expand the study of Proverbs 29:15-17, if appropriate for your group, by examining the following verses that provide instruction for parents regarding discipling children: Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11-12; 6:23; 13:4; 22:15; Ephesians 6:1-4; and Colossians 3:20-21.
- For further discussion of Proverbs 29:18-20, discuss how boundaries provide structure for children and our own spiritual growth. Ask: *Why do people—both young and old—tend to push against the boundaries established for their own protection and safety?* Then select the case study most appropriate for your group to discuss. (1) Mark and Grace are the parents of two teenagers. Both of their children constantly disregard the rules or boundaries set by their parents. Ask: *How would you offer support for them during this difficult time?* (2) Sylvia recently lost her husband. She has always been active in church and enjoyed studying God's Word daily. Now her Bible is gathering dust, and she rarely attends church. Ask: *How would you offer support for her during this difficult time?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Remind the group of the quote by John Maxwell under Focus Attention on page 110, and challenge them to let discipline shape their lives in His wisdom. Then lead the group to answer the second question set in the PSG on page 99: *As a group, discuss ways people can disguise and cloak God's wisdom. What can the group do to help God's wisdom be revealed and accessible to all people?*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, play the song "Speak, O Lord," by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. The song could be used as a time of prayer and commitment.