

TEACHING VALUES

BIBLE BASIS: Proverbs 15:21–33

BIBLE TRUTH: Godly wisdom is necessary to live well and to succeed.

MEMORY VERSE: He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding (Proverbs 15:32, KJV).

LESSON AIM: By the end of this lesson, we will: **DISCUSS** the advice given in the lesson

that promotes godly wisdom; **REFLECT** on experiences of following both good and bad advice; and **DECIDE** to follow the advice offered in the proverb.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Proverbs 10:1–15:33— Read and incorporate the insights gained from the Background Scriptures into your study of the lesson.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Bibles (several different versions), Quarterly Commentary/Teacher Manual, Adult Quarterly, teaching resources such as charts, worksheets/handouts, paper, pens, and pencils.

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To embrace the values extolled in Proverbs 15.

BIBLE LEARNING

To recognize that without advice and support, the path of life is downward.

BIBLE APPLICATION

To desire an orderly life based on the wisdom of Proverbs.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students will translate these proverbs into life lessons for today.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

PROVERBS 15:21–33, KJV

21 Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly.

PROVERBS 15:21–33, AMP

21 Foolishness is joy to him who is without heart and lacks [intelligent, common] sense, But a man of

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22 Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

23 A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!

24 The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

25 The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow.

26 The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.

27 He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

28 The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.

29 The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.

30 The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.

31 The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.

32 He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding.

33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

understanding walks uprightly [making his course straight].

22 Without consultation and wise advice, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they are established and succeed.

23 A man has joy in giving an appropriate answer, And how good and delightful is a word spoken at the right moment—how good it is!

24 The [chosen] path of life leads upward for the wise, That he may keep away from Sheol (the nether world, the place of the dead) below.

25 The Lord will tear down the house of the proud and arrogant (self-righteous), But He will establish and protect the boundaries [of the land] of the [godly] widow.

26 Evil plans and thoughts of the wicked are exceedingly vile and offensive to the LORD, But pure words are pleasant words to Him.

27 He who profits unlawfully brings suffering to his own house, But he who hates bribes [and does not receive nor pay them] will live.

28 The heart of the righteous thinks carefully about how to answer [in a wise and appropriate and timely way], But the [babbling] mouth of the wicked pours out malevolent things.

29 The Lord is far from the wicked [and distances Himself from them], But He hears the prayer of the [consistently] righteous [that is, those with spiritual integrity and moral courage].

30 The light of the eyes rejoices the hearts of others, And good news puts fat on the bones.

31 The ear that listens to and learns from the life-giving rebuke (reprimand, censure) Will remain among the wise.

32 He who neglects and ignores instruction and discipline despises himself, But he who learns from

rebuke acquires understanding [and grows in wisdom].

33 The [reverent] fear of the LORD [that is, worshiping Him and regarding Him as truly awesome] is the instruction for wisdom [its starting point and its essence]; And before honor comes humility.



avoid hasty decision-making. Obtaining counsel from others promotes sound judgment, support, and success.

BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

A. Abomination (Proverbs 15:26) *towè-bah* (Heb.)—A disgusting thing.

B. Reproof (vv. 31, 32) *towkechah* (Heb.)—Rebuke, correction, punish, chastisement.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Most of the verses in **Proverbs 15** are composed of two-sentence couplets that extend or balance a single illustration. Each proverb sets before us advantages and disadvantages, blessings and curses, or choices made by the wise and the foolish. **Proverbs 15** has three sections that teach us how to speak wisely, live life happily, and embrace the blessings of good advice.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will recall the wisdom of the Proverbs in times of trouble and joy.

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Advice

Solomon explained that it is easier to know what to do when one seeks the advice of others. In this fatherly advice, Solomon encouraged his children to shy away from making decisions alone and to

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will align their daily actions with God's Word.

I. RIGHT ACTIONS (Proverbs 15:21–24)

Merriam-Webster defines “folly” as “lack of good sense,” which leads to terrible results and, in some cases, tragic outcomes. The focus of this week's lesson is folly and the serious urgency it demands.

Don't Face It Alone (verses 21-24)

21 Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly. 22 Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. 23 A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it! 24 The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

Foolish people isolate themselves when they make decisions. This generally comes from overconfidence that leads them to failure. The stumbling occurs when the person comes upon

defeating circumstances that they could have been prepared for or even foreseen if only the person had used wisdom. Nevertheless, the fool delights in folly and does not seem to comprehend the outcome of an immoral deed. A foolish person follows any whim and finds delight in impulsive behavior because he or she “is destitute of wisdom.” To find joy and satisfaction in folly are definitely signs of stupidity, because folly can bring disaster.

In contrast, the wise person has insight, appreciates the potential for danger, and, therefore, walks “uprightly” or in a “straight course.” **Verse 21b** underscores the importance of good judgment and suggests that a valuable lifestyle must be maintained by wise decisions. In fact, **verse 22** explains that a successful plan requires using good advice; this general observation has value on the personal and national level. Imprudent action brings disaster; prudent action gives security. Failure to seek advice is a sign of pride, but seeking advice from many counselors can avert disaster.

Verses 21 and **22** concentrate on the disappointment of foolish and unwise decisions. **Verse 23** provides a contrast and speaks of the joy that comes with the answer spoken in wisdom. “A word spoken in due season” is advice given at the right moment and in the most suitable manner, when the occasion and the interests at stake demand it. The latter part of **verse 23** points out that content and timing are synonymous in importance. The well thought out and appropriate instruction requires knowledge and wisdom. Obviously good advice and good timing do not always coincide. One of the ideals of the sage was to have the right word at the right time, as this verse indicates.

Verse 24 contrasts living with death and going to the grave. Seeking wisdom brings a promise of long life. Foolish decisions and choices can be detrimental to life itself.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 1

What primary benefit of wisdom is listed in Proverbs

15:24?

Those who seek wisdom avoid hell.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Plotting Disaster

In contrast to **Proverbs 11:14**, where the national interest is at the forefront, consultation here is advised for more personal matters. If a person determines the nature of a matter, and goes about its resolution hastily and precipitously, without mature deliberation, without consulting and taking the advice of others in forming a strategy to bring about desired results, it generally comes to nothing. Plans created by one person tend to be less effective than they could be. Wise planning encourages participation and counsel from a variety of people.

II. RIGHT RESPONSE (Proverbs 15:25-27)

Proverbs 15:21-24 gave a view of earthly behaviors. Verses 25-27 introduce God’s concern for rightly responding to life’s decisions.

What God Requires (verses 25-27)

25 The LORD will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow. 26 The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. 27 He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.

The Lord administers His justice through righteousness. He brings down the proud but protects the needy. The proud, self-confident man shall be uprooted along with his family, his household, and his wealth. The second part of **verse 25** refers to the particular vulnerability of widows in Israelite society. Widows had no one but themselves to mount a defense against encroachments and oppression (**Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 7:6**). The widow often typifies weakness and desolation in the Scriptures (see **Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 146:9**). Because of family, society, and circumstances, the widow was humble or weak,

depending only on God for help. These verses explain that God will take the widow under His protection and see to it that her property is secured. Scripture amply confirms that the Lord champions the cause of the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the needy.

Verse 26 refers to wicked plans or designs. These are an abomination to the Lord as are the devices of the wicked. On the one hand, the intentions or “thoughts of the wicked” are thoughts that will harm other people. On the other hand, the Lord is pleased with plans that have righteous intentions. The phrase “but the words of the pure are pleasant words” means literally that words of a soothing, comforting tone are pure in a ceremonial sense, as a pure and acceptable offering. “Pleasant words” are not sweet nothings. They are the opposite of the wicked plans of **verse 26** and thus express the virtuous designs of the just.

Those who are secure in their circumstances will not succumb to the evil devices of avarice. The “greedy” is the one who wants a big cut, who is in a hurry to get rich, and who is not particular about how it happens. In **Proverbs 15:27**, “gifts” could be innocent enough, but they could also be bribes that alter one’s values. Hating bribes is the safest path to follow.

QUESTION 2

What will God do for the widow? (Proverbs 15:25)

He will enlarge the widows’ border, meaning give protection and support when they have nowhere to turn.

Answers will vary.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Right Speaking

Right speaking includes knowing when to speak, speaking with pure motives and good intentions, and speaking profitably, truly, and pertinently. A fool speaks wrongly. Foolish words are ill timed. The person who says whatever comes to his mind speaks with evil intent and dishonors the hearers. Thus, it is the right word spoken at the right time. It may not

be the word that is sought and asked for. It may even be an unwelcome word, a startling word, a word of rebuke. Whether by way of advice and counsel, or of exhortation and instruction, or of comfort, the Lord provides such words to His people.

III. SPEAK WELL, THINK RIGHT (Proverbs 15:28-30)

While speaking well is a strength, speaking right is vital. An articulate person speaks well—he knows how to express himself, pronounces his words precisely, and is verbally captivating—but a wise person speaks right. It is of great importance not only to consider the matter, but also the manner of our utterances.

Right Speaking (verses 28-30)

28 The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. 29 The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. 30 The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart: and a good report maketh the bones fat.

Speech is the one thing that many think they have a right to squander. There is probably no more common recklessness than that of the tongue. In **verse 28**, we find a contrast between deliberate speech and a deluge of thoughtless words. The righteous person “weighs” or “meditates” on how to answer. The thoughtful discourse of the just is the opposite of the rash, actually “evil” speech of the “wicked.” Those who are wise are cautious in how they answer, as opposed to the wicked, who blurt out vicious things.

Wicked words are typical of wicked people. Wickedness puts distance between God and the sinner (**Exodus 33:3; Isaiah 59:2**). Those who turn their ears away from hearing God’s words are inattentive to God’s commands, thus making their prayers abominable to God (**Psalms 10:1; Proverbs 15:8; 28:9**). The distance of God from humans is expressed as His not hearing their prayers (e.g., **Psalms 10:1**). The wicked keep a distance from Him; so He is “far” from them—an idea that signifies He is inaccessible or

deaf to their appeals. Of course, a prayer of repentance by the wicked is the exception, for by it they would become the righteous. But God is near the righteous and hears their prayer. The prayers of the just gives delight to God (**Proverbs 8**).

Good news is uplifting to hear. A “cheerful look,” (NIV) may indicate the gleam in the eyes of someone who tells good news, as the parallel second clause suggests. The idea of “health to the bones” (NIV) comes from a Hebrew expression found in the KJV “maketh the bones fat,” and it is a symbol of health and prosperity. These are the results of right speaking.

Right Thinking (verses 31–33)

31 The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. 32 He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. 33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

The hinge on which right speaking and right actions swing is right thinking. **Verse 31** shows how someone who listens to “constructive criticism” will feel comfortable among wise people. The development of wisdom requires a willingness to hear and integrate perspectives that may run counter to previously held convictions. This is the implication of the word “reproof,” which means “censure.” This is also in opposition to the “scorner” of **Proverbs 15:12** and to anyone who will not listen to reproof. A listener who hears a rebuke receives it gratefully and obeys it.

To abide “among the wise” implies that either a person who listens to reproof will thereby be made wise and be esteemed as one of that number.

Verse 32 emphasizes the reward of teachability (compare with **Proverbs 5:12**). Note the connection between discipline and understanding, and the neglect of discipline and death. If embracing instruction leads to the preservation of life, he that “refuseth” willfully rejects and despises instruction—throws it all in the way of danger. This willful rejection of wise counsel is tantamount to considering one’s “own

soul” as vile and worthless, as the word “despise” signifies. Discipline is often at odds with youthful inclinations, but accepting discipline is both necessary and important to spiritual development. Being a good disciple demands being a good listener, which in turn implies a willingness to receive rebuke.

The verse takes up the theme of “fear of the LORD” from **Proverbs 1:7** and **9:10** is the subject of **verse 33**. Humble submission, in faith to the Lord, is not only the beginning of wisdom but also its continuance. The last part of **Proverbs 15:33**, “before honour is humility” has its contrast in **Proverbs 18:12**, where pride leads to destruction. Here humility brings honor. It is the over-estimation of self that makes us contemptuous toward others. A person who fears God must be humble. Just as the fear of God leads to wisdom, it may be said that humility leads to the honor and glory of being wise and reckoned thusly among the wise (**verse 31**). God shall honor those who have the humility to accept Him and His guidance.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

QUESTION 3

What does it mean to “abide among the wise”?

This means becoming a wise person and living a wise lifestyle. It can also mean being respected by those who are considered wise. In the final sense, it is being recognized by God for wise actions and thought.

Answers will vary.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Avoid Moral Suicide

According to the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament commonly designated by LXX), a willful person commits moral suicide because he does not follow the path of life. He is like a sick man who “thrusts away” the wholesome medicine that offers his only hope of cure. In contrast, the person who hears reproof acquires understanding.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will be able to consider how poor choices result from a lack of advice.

Flawed Patterns of Thinking

Some families have been raised to keep quiet about their plans, pregnancies, dreams, and goals for fear of being jinxed, ridiculed, or talked about. Such behavior shuns seeking wisdom and good advice. These unwise decisions have led to disparities in education, entrepreneurship, and homeownership. How can we change these patterns and encourage our youth, our churches, and our communities to seek support and guidance from others?

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will identify personal sources for advice and wisdom

Seeking Advice

Are you one to seek advice from others? If so, with whom do you consult? Sometimes family and friends may not be the best people to consider when you need advice. This is especially true if they are not supportive or experienced in the area about which you have questions. Do you have an important decision to make? If you are on the cusp of a new venture or a major decision, prayerfully identify at least two to three supportive and experienced people you can talk to about your plans. Don't forget to take a list of questions you have and to ask God for boldness in seeking advice.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to be wise in our decision-making and to seek wise counsel. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

Television shows featuring experts that give advice enjoy considerable popularity. They tell us how to solve family problems, handle health issues, finances, dating, and even how to remodel your house. Are all these programs reliable or are they simply geared to

building an audience? How can we decide who to ask for advice and whether we should take it?

Sometimes those who have experience in our area of concern appear to be the best people to consult. Some look for credentials when deciding who to ask, others think an older person is the best choice. Noted pastor and teacher Warren Wiersbe warned, "Not everybody who grows old, grows up. There is a vast difference between age and maturity." Drawing from the book of James, Wiersbe adds that there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom: "knowledge enables us to take things apart, but wisdom enables us to put things together and relate God's truth to daily life."

The most reliable source of human advice is likely to be someone whose experience has yielded both knowledge and maturity: a Christian who has "grown up" as evidenced by the spiritual fruit on display in his or her life. Are you one of those who have the maturity to advise others, and do you associate with others who are?

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature: How to break the mold of spiritual immaturity and grow up in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1978), 5 and 103-105.

HOW TO SAY IT

Sheol.	Shē-ōl.
Achan.	Ay-kan.
Achor.	Ay-kor.
Jericho.	Je-ri-kō.
Gehazi.	Ge-Ha-dzi.
Abomination.	ab-o-mi-na-sion.
Septuagint.	SEP-too-uh-jint'.
Naaman.	Nay-a-man.

