

HIS
PLAN
OUR
PURPOSE

IS THERE MORE?

Understanding the Storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation

THE STORIES OF **PURPOSE**

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

28
nineteen[™]

PURPOSE

OF THIS GUIDE

People from every generation seem to be asking the same question about life; “Is there more?”

The short answer is, yes. However, a more in-depth answer is that as we understand God’s plan and its impact on our purpose, we can better grasp what “more” there is as God’s chosen people.

Our goal throughout this year is to understand the storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. At its most basic level, the Bible is simply the story of God fashioning a people for Himself and redemptively interacting with them throughout history. ¹

The Bible has 66 books, written by approximately 40 different people, covering a span of 4,000 years. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. Each book reveals God’s Plan and Our Purpose. From Genesis to Revelation we see that there is more to life than what this world and culture have to offer. Because of Christ, there is faith, renewal, and so much more that will be revealed in the weeks and months to come.

How to use this Guide:

Work your way through this guide each week, prior to the lesson date. You can do a little each day or do it all at one time. It is designed to be used with your Bible, which is God’s blueprint for life.

¹ *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc Carol Stream, Illinois, 2012, p. A23

For each week:

- **READ** the scripture passages noted for each section.
- **PONDER** the points suggested in the outline based on the scripture passages you read.
- **ANSWER** the questions posed under each point.

Pray for your teachers and for those who will attend your class, that His story would come alive, that His plan would become clear, and that all would gain understanding that shapes our purpose.

IS THERE
MORE?

THE WHOLE STORY

Warren Wiersbe writes, “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”



THE STORY OF **GRACE**

> *January*



THE STORY OF **DELIVERANCE**

> *February*



THE STORY OF **PROMISE**

> *March*



THE STORY OF **FAITH**

> *April*



THE STORY OF **RENEWAL**

> *May*

FEATURED



THE STORY OF **PURPOSE**

> *June, July + August*



THE STORY OF **CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS**

> *August + September*



THE STORY OF **POWER**

> *October*



THE STORY OF **CHANGE**

> *November*



THE STORY OF **HEAVEN**

> *December*

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THE STORY OF PURPOSE



This year we have been asking the overall question, “Is there more?” And now that we are midway into the year, the question is just as relevant. The series we are embarking upon this summer is perhaps the timeliest of all. It does not matter what stage of life you are in, or circumstances you are facing; everyone wants to have purpose.

For the next 10 weeks we will be looking at the Story of Purpose as it pertains to life. The dictionary defines purpose as both a noun and a verb. The noun definition is **the reason something exists or is done, made or used**. The verb definition is to **set as an aim, intention, or goal for oneself**.¹ Whether you are looking for the reason something exists or its aim or intention, we all are looking for purpose.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived realized the value of purpose. In Ecclesiastes 3, he begins the chapter with this verse:

ECCLESIASTES 3:1 *To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. (NKJV)*

This one verse sums up the importance and significance of purpose. Everything under heaven, that which we experience on this earth, has purpose. There is nothing that happens on this earth and in our lives that comes as a surprise to God. There is a season, a time and a purpose for all

¹ Dictionary.com

things. After Solomon states this thesis, he proceeds to list 14 opposites. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to weep and a time to laugh, among others. These 14 opposites are known as extremes, yet in between the extremes is something called life. It is in between the extremes that we find purpose for everything under heaven.

There is a purpose for family and work. There is a purpose for words and community. In God's sovereignty, He knew that we would experience the inevitable extremes. But God also knew that we would have choices to make amid them. Over the next 10 weeks, we will seek the wisdom of God by looking at passages from the wisdom books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

Jun 6/7	Purpose of Wisdom - Proverbs 1
Jun 13/14	Purpose of Work - Ecclesiastes 9
Jun 20/21	Purpose of the Home - Proverbs 24, 31
Jun 27/28	Purpose of Words - Proverbs 18
Jul 4/5	Purpose of Freedom - Psalm 119:1-56
Jul 11/12	Purpose of God's Ways - Proverbs 14
Jul 18/19	Purpose of Community - Ecclesiastes 4
Jul 25/26	Purpose of Praise - Psalm 9
Aug 1/2	Purpose of the Valley - Psalm 42
Aug 8/9	Purpose of the Heart - Ecclesiastes 3

PURPOSE

OF WISDOM

DATE

June 6 & 7

WEEK

1 of 10

KEY VERSE

Proverbs 1:7

LESSON OUTLINE

1. How We Perceive Wisdom
2. How We Receive Wisdom
3. How God Gives Wisdom

THINGS TO KNOW

- Wisdom is not just a matter of the head (intuition, intellect, or experience), but also a matter of the heart (authority, love, and affection).
- Wisdom is accessible to all people.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD
IS THE BEGINNING OF
KNOWLEDGE; FOOLS
DESPISE WISDOM AND
INSTRUCTION.

PROVERBS 1:7

SETTING THE STAGE

The book of Proverbs was written largely by King Solomon, considered the wisest man to have ever lived, the fame of his wisdom extended well beyond the territory of Israel. Since the printing press, the Internet, and podcasts did not exist back then, many kings and queens from nations across the world came to Jerusalem to hear his other-worldly wisdom.

Why is it important to possess wisdom? And why does it seem so elusive to find and difficult to acquire, even for the most powerful and connected? While there are many definitions for wisdom, it is generally viewed as the ‘X factor’ allowing one ‘to win’ at life.¹ People want to know the best decision to make and the best course to take in any given situation. If they only possessed wise foresight, knowledge, and discretion, surely it would transform the course of their lives and positively affect their destinations.

The book of Proverbs speaks specifically to the topic of wisdom; namely, what it is, where it comes from, and how to get it. As we will see, wisdom is not deliberately elusive or purposefully problematic like it might appear. To the child of God, true wisdom is available and accessible through Jesus Christ. Wisdom is learned and utilized throughout a lifetime.

¹ Daniel L. Akin, and Jonathan Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2017). iBooks p. 21.

PURPOSE

OF WISDOM

READ: Proverbs 1:1-17.

POINTS TO PONDER

How can a person gain wisdom and grow wise? Before we can know how to gain wisdom, we must first know what wisdom is, so that we can discern between true wisdom and false wisdom.

Generally speaking, most people might perceive ‘wisdom’ as being really smart and having a high IQ; and not just smart in the sense of being ‘book smart.’ Rather, the type of smart that bears upon real-life situations in meaningful ways.

That seems like a fair definition of ‘wisdom.’ It is certainly not less than that; but there is more to it, as well. What does this passage communicate about the nature of true wisdom, and more importantly, how we can gain true wisdom?

1. HOW WE PERCEIVE WISDOM

Biblical commentators and scholars believe that the simplest definition of ‘wisdom’ is “the ability to see things from God’s perspective,”² and “competence in seeing the realities of life.”³

Those two definitions might sound dissimilar at first, but they are virtually synonymous. For instance, if you can see things from God’s perspective, then you will have competence in seeing the realities of life as they truly are.

² Chuck Swindoll, *Solomon*.

³ Timothy Keller, *Pointers to Christ – Directional Signs in History*. “A King’s Wisdom – Solomon.” October 5th, 1997.

Biblical scholars arrived at this definition for wisdom in Proverbs, as relayed by King Solomon, by mainly pivoting back to the original place Solomon first gained wisdom from God, which takes place in 1 Kings 3. This chapter recounts a scene where God approaches Solomon as a young boy, as he becomes king, and promises to grant him whatever he might wish. And Solomon, humbly and admirably, asks that God would give him wisdom of all things so that he could steward well his leadership of God's people.

Whenever Solomon is referring to wisdom, he is not primarily invoking the idea of knowledge. He is primarily invoking the notion of authority instead.

Solomon is saying that wisdom is, at its very root, not an issue of intellectual capacity, but personal authority. He is saying, "Whatever your authority is, whatever your king is, that will be the source of your wisdom." Types of wisdom come from types of authority. And your wisdom will always flow from the source of your authority.

Therefore, before we even get into a conversation of 'what wisdom is' and 'where we can find it,' we must consider the following question first: **who or what is your king?**

Solomon, wisely, is saying that there are many types of wisdom out there, precisely because you can give yourself to many different types of authority. The kind of wisdom you receive will come from the authority you crown king.



Who or what is the main authority in your life?

2. HOW WE RECEIVE WISDOM

REVIEW PROVERBS 1:7.

We receive wisdom by making the LORD our King, which is expressed by a fear of Him. What does the Bible mean by ‘fear’? It does not mean our relationship with God should be characterized by a constant state of ‘spiritual fright.’ The ‘fear of God’ communicates a reverence regarding His great power and holiness and appropriate awe towards His abundant mercy and goodness.

When we begin to see God rightly, then we will begin to see ourselves in light of who God is, and it will begin to produce a godly fear—reverential awe—inside of us. And when God is our King, *the fear of the Lord [will be] the beginning of knowledge.*

This framework fits how we defined wisdom — ‘the ability to see things like God sees them’ and ‘competently seeing the realities of life.’ If we are going to start seeing rightly, we must start with seeing God for who He is, and then, seeing ourselves rightly in light of God. If we do not get that straight first, then it will be impossible to find true wisdom apart from the only source of true wisdom.

Wisdom is received, therefore, by humbling yourself before the Lord. Humility finally makes wisdom accessible because you are starting to see things as they really are. ⁴



How has humility drawn you closer to God? How has it helped you become wiser?

⁴ Jason Fritz, Illuminate Community Church, Solomon – Finding The Source of Wisdom. October 17, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rJoEF5v-bk>.

3. HOW GOD GIVES WISDOM

To understand how God grants wisdom to His people, it is important to note two truths that we must hold in tension with one another. The first is that God desires to make us wise. And the second is that God makes us wise by putting us into situations where we are forced to exercise the muscle of dependency upon His wisdom and counsel.

A. God desires to make us wise.

God desires to make us wise because He desires for all of us to be conformed increasingly into the likeness of His Son, who Himself is the wisdom of God (*Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 1:24*).

REVIEW PROVERBS 1:20-23.

From what we can see, God is not playing hide-and-seek with us, as we might otherwise think or imagine when it comes to wisdom. God desperately desires us to be wise in His Word and wise in His world.

B. God will make us wise through dependence.

Whenever we ask or pray for God to give us something, I think we are all guilty of thinking that the process is similar to how we would ask for anything else in life. Especially in our Western culture—we ask for it, and it is given to us.

To be sure, we do know that we are supposed to pray for wisdom. And the good news is that God will answer this prayer. God promises that when we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us and answer us (*1 John 5:14*). And since it is His will to make us more like Jesus, we can therefore conclude that God will always answer that prayer (*Romans 8:29*).

However, this does not mean God will always answer that prayer in the way we think He should or will. Oftentimes, God's answers to prayer are wrapped differently than we imagine, given on terms we did not think we agreed to, and delivered on a timetable we might not prefer.

And this is certainly the case with wisdom. In the Bible, God gives wisdom not through an easy, instantaneous process, but through the mechanism of trial, suffering, and sacrifice.

READ: James 1:2-4.

In other words, God will often make us wise through difficulties that force us to think deeply, critically, and holistically in a way that otherwise would have been impossible without the trial. And as such, the rest of Proverbs teems with sayings related to conflict and resolution—with friends, with money, with leadership, with family, with governance, with work, with sleep, with speech, with purity, and with virtually everything in life.



How have trials in your life made you more wise?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The book of Proverbs concerns true wisdom, which is the fear of the Lord, allowing His ultimate authority to inform and transform every aspect of our life. Wisdom is not merely intellectual knowledge; it is a conviction of God's Truth that bears upon all of our thinking, living, and doing.

Only Christianity suggests that wisdom is a beautiful gift of grace through faith. It is not earned by merits or smarts so that no one may boast. It is a gift of God. The Gospel makes true wisdom from the true King accessible to all, precisely because God's mercy in Jesus Christ is available to all. And this true wisdom will make us more like the King from which we behold:

JAMES 3:17-18 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Notice that true wisdom, from the true King, bears meaningfully upon real life. It leads to a life of flourishing that creates flourishing for many others as well. May we perceive of true wisdom correctly, ready ourselves to receive it appropriately, and humbly ask the true King to give it. But let us not be surprised if God answers this prayer by giving us difficulty and trial. In some cases, the path of wisdom might be the only way, as was salvation through the cross. But by His grace, He will give us everything we need for life and godliness along the way (2 Peter 1:3).

PURPOSE OF WORK

DATE

June 13 & 14

WEEK

2 of 10

KEY VERSE

Ecclesiastes 9:10

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Design of Work
2. The Dignity of Work
3. The Delight of Work

THINGS TO KNOW

- Work was instituted before the Fall of Mankind; therefore, work is God's gift to us and our gift to one another.
- Your worth is not connected to your work.
- God has made us both agents (capacity for work) and regents (responsibility in work) in the working order.

WHATEVER YOUR HAND FINDS
TO DO, DO IT WITH ALL YOUR
MIGHT, FOR THERE IS NO WORK
OR THOUGHT OR KNOWLEDGE
OR WISDOM IN SHEOL, TO WHICH
YOU ARE GOING.

ECCLESIASTES 9:10

SETTING THE STAGE



Three books of the Bible are formally considered ‘Wisdom Literature’ by genre: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Psalms and Song of Solomon are often included in this genre as well. Interestingly, the books are composed differently from one another in terms of their structure and style. But each book communicates a clear message about how we ought to think about life. Namely, that life is complex: it does not always function in neat, tidy, or categorical ways that we so often think it should. And therefore, the answers and explanations, or wisdom the Bible provides are not so readily apparent, neat, tidy, or categorical either.

The book of Ecclesiastes weaves two main theological ideas throughout the entire book, the word “futility” and the phrase “under the sun.” The word “futility” is mentioned 38 times, and the phrase “under the sun” is mentioned 29 times, in only 12 chapters. And these two ideas set the framework for a key message of the book, the nature of work.

First, the Hebrew word used for “futility” is the term, ‘Hevel,’ which essentially conveys the notion of nothingness. It refers to the idea of something that has the appearance of substance, but when pressed, it reveals itself to be empty. And second, the phrase ‘under the sun’ communicates a view of life without the larger perspective of God and eternity, expressing a perspective of the material world only. If ‘under the sun’ is simply the earth, then ‘over the sun’ would be all of life under heaven’s perspective.

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PURPOSE

OF WORK

Setting the Stage, continued >

Within this framework, Ecclesiastes speaks of the topic of work frequently. The book recognizes that our work is often subjected to and frustrated by the dual ideas of ‘futility’ and ‘under the sun.’ So, where is the hope for our vocations and aspirations? Well, it might just be uncovered in the very definition of ‘vocation.’

We get the English word ‘vocation’ from the Latin word ‘vocare,’ which means ‘to call.’ In our American culture, the term ‘vocation’ usually refers to the job one holds. But the original sense of the term communicates a different idea entirely. It conveys the notion of ‘calling,’ which means your work did not originate from you or for you, but for someone else; and, it concerns a mission or service beyond yourself.¹

Here lies the biblical wisdom for how we are to understand work, and how our work can be redeemed from a life ‘under the sun’ where everything is inescapably ‘futile.’ While many passages address this topic, Ecclesiastes 9:10 provides three guiding principles for understanding a type of work ‘under heaven.’ They are the design of the work, the dignity of work, and the delight of work.

READ: Ecclesiastes 9.

P O I N T S T O P O N D E R

1. THE DESIGN OF WORK

REVIEW ECCLESIASTES 9:10.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Our Work To God’s Work*. (Penguin Group, 2012), iBooks p. 18.

In the first part of the verse, we read that the author implores us to approach work with the following framework: *Whatever your hand finds to do...* What does this mean exactly?

First, it means that we are designed to work. God created us in His image, and since He is a creative and working God who created everything, this means that we too are creative beings, designed to create and to work as well. Thus, the capacity for and the ability to work is simply part of our DNA. The faculties to create and to work are part of what it means to be human, made in the image of a working and creative God.

In verse 10, the word ‘hand’ simply represents our capacity to work, our individuality, and our agency. And the phrase ‘finds to do’ refers to the idea that there is always something that you can do to contribute to the flourishing and development of this world. So, when the author says, “*Whatever your hand finds to do,*” he is making the clear assumption that it is within our design to, at least, do something.

Secondly, this verse also alludes to the idea that we, by our design, gravitate towards a specific type of work. God not only created us with the capacity to work in general, He also created us to complete certain types of work in particular. God has designed us such that we each have different skill sets, predispositions, and personalities. This means God did not create us all the same. Rather, God gave us differences that we can utilize to specialize in certain work.

For humanity to truly have dominion over all of creation, God endowed different types of people with the unique ability to govern over, serve in, and contribute to virtually every area of life.



How has God guided the work of your hands to contribute to the Kingdom of God?

2. THE DIGNITY OF WORK

In the second part of the verse, the author implores us to approach work with our God-given abilities with the following attitude and ethic: “*do it with your might...*” This means several important things as well, specifically concerning the dignity of work. There are two main truths hidden in this phrase that we need to uncover so that we can work as God would desire us to work.

The first truth in this phrase is that there is value in engaging in our work wholeheartedly, as a response to the reality that work itself is a gift from God and a dignifying responsibility on its own terms. In this way, we do not approach work with a hanging threat of condemnation, but a gentle exhortation of truth.

Seen in this light, work becomes more than a mere duty, although it is that. It also becomes a privilege. The only right response to the reality of work, and serving God in our work, is to expend our might and to give our best, which is an act of worship.

The second truth is that our work should be done for the sake of work itself. The text says, “*do it with your might.*” Notice the author does not say, “do it to establish your significance and importance as an individual;” nor does it say, “do it for the express purpose of securing financial stability;” nor does it say, “do it so that you can win the approval of other people.” A biblical view on work does not view work, any work at all, even the ‘work’ of good deeds, as a means unto something else.

God’s call is for us to “*do it with your might*” and not with or for anything else. When work is done from any other purpose or motive, it becomes defective itself; it destructs us in the process, and it deteriorates the quality of our work as well.



How can your job be done as an act of worship?

3. THE DELIGHT OF WORK

Lastly, there is a third dimension of the verse that reveals why we should delight in our work. The verse ends by saying, “*for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in [death]...*” What does this mean exactly? The author is providing the framework that undergirds and encloses our work — time.

Time is a limited resource, and we all desire more of it, not less of it, especially when it comes to our work. We wish we had more time in a day to finish that project. We wish we did not have to sleep as much so that we could maximize our productivity. And so, time, and our inherent limitation of it as human beings, frames our capacity for accomplishment and completion. It humbles us, and it sobered us up to realize that we may never get to finish it. Time marks the end of our work, and the end of our lives.

In God’s economy, when our work is done with hearts and hands bent on God’s Kingdom and eternity, our work means something, whether it was completed in this life or not. Without God and eternity (or, as the author puts it, all things ‘under the sun’), our work on earth simply has no meaning or lasting impact. But with God and eternity, even our smallest efforts, even the ones left unfinished or frustrated by outside forces, matter and carry into eternity. When we take that truth to heart, it ought to engender within us a type of delight underneath all of our endeavors and work projects.



In what ways can you delight in your work?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

God works, and therefore, work on its own terms is a good thing. It is a glorious extension of His attributes. And when God created us in His own image, He made us both agents of work (giving us the capacity for work) and regents of work (entrusting us with the responsibility to work).

When we do not work, we simply become less than what God designed us to be. If work according to God's design is **humanizing**, then not working at all or not working according to God's design is **dehumanizing**. As Christians, we realize that our work is not our ultimate worth, stability, security, or satisfaction—Christ is. Under this framework 'under heaven' our work, becomes redeemed to being what it was always meant to be all along: work.

When we live according to God's will for work, we will find God's unique design for work, His special dignity in work, and His particular delight for us to enjoy within work. His plan truly becomes our purpose.

WHATEVER YOU
DO, DO YOUR WORK
HEARTILY, AS FOR THE
LORD RATHER THAN
FOR MEN, KNOWING
THAT FROM THE LORD
YOU WILL RECEIVE
THE REWARD OF THE
INHERITANCE. IT IS THE
LORD CHRIST WHOM
YOU SERVE.

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

PURPOSE

OF THE HOME

DATE

June 20 & 21

WEEK

3 of 10

KEY VERSE

Proverbs 24:3-4

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Wise Men
2. Wise Women
3. Wise Parents

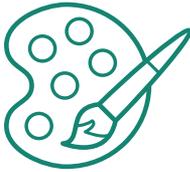
THINGS TO KNOW

- Proverbs 31 speaks to both men and women.
- God designed the home as the centerpiece of civilization.

BY WISDOM A HOUSE IS BUILT,
AND BY UNDERSTANDING
IT IS ESTABLISHED; AND BY
KNOWLEDGE THE ROOMS ARE
FILLED WITH ALL PRECIOUS
AND PLEASANT RICHES.

PROVERBS 24 : 3 - 4

SETTING THE STAGE



Have you ever had the opportunity to build your own home? It can be one of the most exciting, but also stressful, times of your life. The notion of building your own house initially sounds amazing. After all, who would not want a house that is custom-tailored to fit your personal preferences? However, the journey to completion can be daunting. Yes, you get to make all the decisions, but the problem is the number of decisions you will have to make. You want to build the perfect home, but how do you get there?

While not all of us get an opportunity to choose our own brick and mortar, the Bible explains that all of us do get the opportunity to build our own homes. However, this type of building goes far beyond raw materials. Warren Wiersbe explains,

According to Scripture, God established three human institutions in the world: marriage and the home (*Genesis 2:18-25*), human government (*Genesis 9:1-6; Romans 13*), and the local church (*Acts 2*); of the three, the basic institution is the home. As goes the home, so goes the church and the nation.¹

God designed the home to serve as the centerpiece of civilization. The home is the primary instrument that God uses to build and shape every individual's character and faith. And as adults, we are given the humbling responsibility to choose how we want to build our own homes. But unlike physical home-building, our decisions are not focused on the carpet color or type of countertops. Instead, spiritual home-building is focused on the values and principles that we choose to use as our foundation.

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¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Skillfull, God's Guidebook to Wise Living*, David C. Cook, 2009, p. 117-118.

PURPOSE

OF THE HOME

Setting the Stage, continued >

This massive task can leave us feeling like a confused buyer working with a home builder on a construction site. Fortunately, our God never leaves us guessing in the dark. Instead, His Word lights our path and guides our decisions (*Psalm 119:105*).

READ: Proverbs 24:3-4.

God tells us that if we want our homes to be filled with the riches of His grace, we must first make sure we are building it with the right material: **wisdom**. It all starts with becoming wise individuals. For purposes of our discussion, home constitutes a family unit whether it be a single person never married, a single parent, a divorced or widowed individual, a married couple without children, a married couple with children, grandparents raising their grandchildren or a multi-generational family all living together. Regardless of what your ‘home’ looks like, God has a purpose for your home, and it begins with wisdom from above.

READ: Proverbs 31.

NOTE: This lesson specifically references husbands and wives but the truths stated apply to men and women in general regardless of marital status. Likewise, the parents section is applicable to aunts, uncles, grandparents, or anyone in a guardian-type role.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. WISE MEN

If you have ever studied the book of Proverbs, you know that one of the most famous passages in the book is the 31st chapter. The chapter is

primarily focused on the characteristics of God-fearing women that walk in wisdom. And while that is the primary focus of the text, the chapter often gets overlooked for its practical application to husbands. So, before we turn to the chapter to help us define a wise wife, let us first look at how it defines a wise husband.

A. He CHERISHES her.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:10.

A wise husband understands how good he has it. In Genesis 2, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so he provided a “suitable helper” (*Genesis 2:18*). God presented the first bride to the first groom, and Adam was so thrilled that he began singing (*Genesis 2:23*). Unfortunately, many men fail to see their wives as the God-given gift that they are.

This is why a wife’s worth is far above any jewels. Wise husbands not only understand this truth in their minds, but they demonstrate it through their actions. They are wise enough to understand their wives’ sacred value. There is nothing wrong with a man placing value in his work, hobbies, or friends, but wise husbands make sure their wives know that they cherish them above everything else.

B. He TRUSTS her.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:11.

Wise husbands do not put up walls between themselves and their spouses. They do not keep secrets or selfishly set aside personal resources. They do not micromanage their wives or control them. Why? Because wise husbands trust their wives. They understand that God gave them a divine teammate, not an adversary. Wise husbands trust the heart and character of their spouse.

C. He ENCOURAGES her.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:28-29.

Far too often men focus on giving the wrong kinds of gifts. Husbands are quick to open their wallets and purchase flowers, clothes, or jewelry. And while wives appreciate all of these things, the ironic thing is the most valuable gift a man could give actually costs him nothing! Most women

would tell you that the thing they want most from their husbands are his words of affirmation. This is why wise husbands intentionally find ways to encourage their wives. Wise husbands know the value of their words, so they use them to encourage and build up their spouse.



How do you affirm your spouse?

2. WISE WOMEN

A. She **BUILDS** him up.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:12.

A wise wife understands the immense power that God has given her. Proverbs 14:1 explains that a wife can build up her house or tear it down with her own two hands. This is because God has given wives an incredible amount of influence through their words. A wife's words can speak life into her husband and give him the boldness and courage to accomplish more than he ever dreamed.

B. She **PARTNERS** with him.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:13.

The Proverbs 31 woman is depicted as a hard worker! The chapter explains that this kind of woman wakes up early (v. 15), conducts business (v. 16), is a great planner (v. 21), and does excellent work with her hands (v. 22). She is an amazing contributor to the home and serves as the perfect partner to her husband. Wise wives understand this calling and pro-actively look for ways to help. Instead of criticizing their husband's weaknesses, wise wives look for opportunities to come alongside him and fill those gaps.

C. She **TACTFULLY** counsels him.

REVIEW PROVERBS 31:26.

No one knows a man better than his wife. Wives can see their husband's strengths, but they can also best identify their weaknesses. As mentioned above, God created wives to help their husbands, and yes, part of that help includes offering him counsel. The key is the counsel has to be tactful in order to become impactful. A Proverbs 31 wife opens her mouth with wisdom and kindness comes off her tongue. Wise wives that communicate with respect and kindness can become a husbands' greatest advisor, and bring peace to their home.



How do you build up, partner with and tactfully counsel your spouse?

3. WISE PARENTS

Wise parents understand the sacred responsibility they have for the children in their homes. They do not let a child's 18+ years in their home go by frivolously. Instead, they are intentional with that time and steward it well. Wise parents understand this truth noted by Dr. James Dobson, "Children are not casual guests in our home. They have been loaned to us temporarily for the purpose of loving them and instilling a foundation of values on which their future lives will be built."²

A. They lead by EXAMPLE.

READ: Proverbs 20:7.

Wise parents understand the importance of their actions. Children are watching our every move and looking for evidence of the faith that we profess. As many pastors have said for years, godliness is often more "caught" than "taught" by our kids. Children are always watching, so wise parents walk righteously and with integrity in their homes.

² James C. Dobson, *How to Raise Children that Love the Lord*, Chariot Family Publishing, 1991.

B. They lead through WORDS.

READ: Proverbs 1:8.

While a parent's example is instrumental in a child's spiritual development, we cannot overlook the necessity of their words. Throughout the Bible, God commands parents to teach in their homes (*Deuteronomy 6*) and serve as the primary source for their children's discipleship. Wise parents embrace this high calling and instruct their kids. They do not outsource biblical teaching to the church or other ministries. Instead, they are intentional with their kids and talk about the goodness of God in their homes.

C. They lead through DISCIPLINE.

READ: Proverbs 22:15.

The book of Proverbs constantly reminds parents of the importance of discipline in the home. Solomon explains that discipline will help correct and shape the mind of a child so he or she can go on to flourish in this world.

Wise parents understand they demonstrate their love to their kids by correcting them. They know that their primary goal is not to always be their kids' best friends. Their primary goal is to help shape their hearts to love and honor God, live godly lives, and to one day establish their own godly homes. Wise parents keep their eyes on the long-term goal and persevere through the short-term pain that comes with disciplining a child.

God designed the home, and He desires for it to be a place filled with love, joy, and peace for all who live in it. If we commit to building our homes with His wisdom, He will transform our lives as husbands, wives, and parents.



How is God transforming your home?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

God has given each of us an amazing opportunity to build a home. God even gave us the tools and blueprint to do this incredibly challenging building project. It takes time. It takes energy. It takes the willingness to put forth the effort. The question is what kind of home are you going to build?

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus speaks of how different homes are built. He concludes by stating that it all comes down to the foundation that is laid. If the foundation is shaky and constantly moving like sand, the house will not withstand any sort of proverbial wind or rain. However, if the house is built on a solid foundation such as God's Word it can withstand the storms of life.

MATTHEW 7:25 *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.*

It all comes down to the choices you make when you build the house making it into a home. By choosing the wise ways of God, you will be laying a rock-solid foundation. That does not mean that challenges will not arise, or that the changing winds of culture will not tempt your family. The reality is 'life' happens in such a way that we experience challenges and obstacles beyond our control. Yet, if we rely on the wisdom of God we have more than a fighting chance, we have hope and purpose that come from walking in a relationship with Jesus Christ. It will be a home where His plan becomes our family purpose.

PURPOSE

OF WORDS

DATE

June 27-28

WEEK

4 of 10

KEY VERSE

Proverbs 18:21

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Unspoken Words
2. Life-Giving Words
3. Life-Taking Words
4. Empowered Words

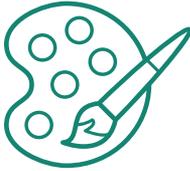
THINGS TO KNOW

- The word "tongue" is used 19 times in Proverbs and 113 times in the Old Testament.
- The word "word" or "words" is used 30 times in Proverbs and 1262 times in the Old Testament.

DEATH AND LIFE ARE
IN THE POWER OF THE
TONGUE, AND THOSE
WHO LOVE IT WILL EAT
ITS FRUIT.

PROVERBS 18:21

SETTING THE STAGE



It is amazing how some things in this world can produce both good and bad results! Used one way, it may bring life and joy, but used another way, the same thing may bring pain and destruction. For example, consider medicine. When used properly, it brings healing and remedy to those in need. But when used improperly, it can bring sickness or even death. The same argument could be made for exercise. Every doctor in the world would endorse exercise as a key ingredient to a healthy life. However, extreme exercise can bring injuries, dehydration, and even heat strokes. If you take a walk outside today, the sunlight will bring your body much needed Vitamin D. But if you walk outside too long, the same sunlight could bring you a sunburn or even skin cancer down the road.

The truth is our tongues could be put into this same category of paradoxes. The same tongue that was used to praise the Lord in Worship can be used to yell at someone in a crowded church parking lot. Our words are used to compliment someone in one moment or belittle them minutes later. Our speech can be used to cast vision and hope, or it can be used to bring discouragement and fear. Indeed, the tongue wields an amazing power (*James 3*). Solomon put it this way,

PROVERBS 18:21 *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

King Solomon understood the immense power that God gave each of us through communication. Words are our greatest tool to build up the Kingdom of God, but they also can be our greatest weapon to tear it down. Because of that, we must understand the purpose of our words. Fortunately, the book of Proverbs gives ample instruction on this topic. As one commentator says, [Continued on page 34 >](#)

PURPOSE

OF WORDS

Setting the Stage, continued > “Accurate, honest, sensitive, prudent speaking is a theme threaded through Proverbs as consistently and strongly as any other.”¹ Examining this topic in the book of Proverbs we will discover the purpose of our words and learn how to steward them well.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. UNSPOKEN WORDS

READ: Proverbs 10:19.

Remember those fun science experiments in school that our teachers would demonstrate in class? Of course, the most memorable ones were the classic experiments that involved a big explosion at the end. One of the most common was the “Mentos Experiment,” where the teacher would combine breath mints with a diet cola. As soon as the mints are dropped into the bottle, the soda begins to shoot into the air like a geyser leaving a huge mess to clean up.

In our lives, some of us can identify with those mints. When we get dropped into a situation or a conflict, our words start flying out like a geyser leaving a big mess to clean up. Most of the time, this is not our intention when we speak up. Many of us are just trying to be helpful and “fix things.” While this can be a blessing in some circumstances, it can also be a curse in others. Why? Because Solomon tells us it is better to “restrain” our lips at times.

When Solomon says, “*restrains his lips*” he is saying to keep your words in “check.” In Ecclesiastes, Solomon put it this way, “*A time to be silent and*

¹ David Hubbard, *The Preacher’s Commentary Vol 15*, Thomas Nelson, 2010, p. 406.

a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7b). Wisdom comes from knowing when it is time to speak and when it is time to be silent.



Read James 1:9 and explain how it parallels with Proverbs 10:19.

2. LIFE-GIVING WORDS

READ: Proverbs 10:11.

Proverbs tells us that our words are like a beautiful water fountain. We are told that our mouths can be a “fountain of life” that brings nourishment to the world. Every day, we live in a broken world that is filled with emotionally and spiritually exhausted people. This is one reason why God gave us the gift of words. He wants us to speak life into others that desperately need it. *Proverbs 25:11* says “*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.*” When we open our mouths and speak encouragement and hope into someone’s life, we honor God by accepting His invitation to serve as His ambassador (*2 Corinthians 5:20*). Solomon says these kinds of words are sweeter than an apple and more precious than silver or gold. These comparisons remind us that words are nutritious to the soul and valuable to the spirit.

Many of us fail to speak up because we fear that we will not have the “right” words. Life-giving words are not always focused on offering solutions. Instead, they are focused on pointing them to the solution that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, referred to as the **Word** in John’s Gospel.



How have you used life-giving words this week?

3. LIFE-TAKING WORDS

READ: Proverbs 25:18.

As clearly as we can remember the people who spoke life into our souls, we can likely remember the people that spoke painful and damaging things into our hearts. Words do matter, and their messages are remembered long after the conversation ends. Because of that, we must be careful to not speak life-taking words. Indeed, words have ruined marriages, friendships, and businesses. They have brought more conflicts and wars in human history than we could count. When our words are weaponized, our speech no longer gives life. Instead, our verse above tells us that our words become clubs and swords that hurt everyone around them. We have to understand the power of our words and not throw them out there carelessly. We must capture our thoughts (*2 Corinthians 10:5*) and consider the consequences of our words before we say them. Forgiveness can always be sought after, but words can never be taken back. Sometimes it merely takes a quick quiet breath to rethink what words to say and how to respond to a situation graciously rather than offensively.



How have you experienced life-taking words?

4. EMPOWERED WORDS

READ: Proverbs 4:23.

If we understand the danger of life-taking words and we desire to speak life-giving words instead, the simple question of application is, “How do we do it?” Solomon tells us that we have to watch over our hearts. Solomon was wise enough to understand that our words are not just cavalier thoughts. They are an overflow of what is going on in our hearts. Jesus reinforced this point when He explained, “*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart*” (Matthew 12:34b).

The two wisest men to walk on this earth, Jesus Christ and King Solomon, are in unanimous agreement on the secret to changing our speech. They both say that the only way we can transform our words is if we first let our hearts be transformed. Our speech will never change through reading books, expanding our vocabulary, or through sheer will power. Our speech will only be transformed when we begin to let God’s Word transform our lives.

Words matter to others, but most importantly they matter to God. When we understand the purpose of our words, we will begin to use them for God’s glory and to build up His Kingdom around us.



How can you intentionally use your words for the good of His Kingdom?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Consider how the story began in the beginning. *Genesis 1:1* says, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” In the creation story, we are told very specifically that God spoke the world into existence, the ultimate power of words. *Genesis 1:3* says, “*Then God said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light.*” From the beginning, God’s story impacted our story literally through the spoken word. Those true life-giving words laid a foundation of life to come, in relationship to Adam and Eve.

God then allowed Adam to speak authoritatively as he named the animals. Adam and Eve spoke to God when He asked what happened to cause them to hide in shame of their nakedness. God spoke to Adam and Eve in describing the consequences of their actions. Consider the times Moses would go up the mountain to talk to God and God would speak to Moses; then Moses would come down the mountain to speak to the people the truth of God. Words have always been part of our story. Our relationship with God and others is always impacted by words, both the Word of God and physically spoken words one to another.

Just as God spoke our life into existence, He wants us to speak life into others. Words are a beautiful gift from God that can be instrumental in bringing Him glory and expanding His Kingdom. Words come with responsibility and opportunity. The purpose of words is to encourage, empower and edify others for the glory of God.

PSALM 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

LIKE APPLES
OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF
SILVER IS A
WORD SPOKEN
IN RIGHT
CIRCUMSTANCES.

PROVERBS 25:11

PURPOSE

OF FREEDOM

DATE

July 4-5

WEEK

5 of 10

KEY VERSE

Psalm 119:45

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Freedom Found in Mercy
2. Freedom to Walk
3. Freedom to Speak
4. Freedom of Expression

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Hebrew word 'Rachab' is translated as "liberty" or "freedom."
- The root meaning of the word 'Rachab' means "broad" or "wide."
- The concept is to be "unrestrained."

I WILL WALK IN FREEDOM,
FOR I HAVE DEVOTED
MYSELF TO YOUR
COMMANDMENTS.

P S A L M 1 1 9 : 4 5

SETTING THE STAGE



Psalm 119 is unique in its length and specific authorship as we do not know who wrote this particular psalm. Yet, it takes the reader on a journey of adoration and reverence for the Word of God that is very personal. This psalm is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. Ironically, it is a psalm about the Bible as it emphasizes the Word of God in terms of the law, precepts, statutes, commandments, and ways. This psalm contains the longest acrostic in the Bible consisting of 22 stanzas, corresponding to the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza is comprised of eight verses, each beginning with the same letter.¹ C. S. Lewis compared this psalm to a piece of embroidery, done stitch by stitch in the quiet hours for the love of the subject and the delight in leisurely, disciplined craftsmanship.²

We have looked at the Story of Purpose in a variety of ways, and this week we appropriately consider the Purpose of Freedom. Psalm 119 is all about freedom, though we will focus on just a handful of verses for this lesson. When God established the Ten Commandments, He did so to give order and freedom to His people, not confusion and restriction. Nor did God provide commandments so that His people could be “good enough” to earn freedom. Remember that the commandments of God were given “after” the people were set free from slavery and bondage. It was in the context of freedom that God gave His commandments to establish a people, culture and community that would be based on His principles that were for their good and not harm.

Continued on page 42 >

¹ *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, p. 1029.

² www.soniclight.com/Psalms

PURPOSE

OF FREEDOM

Setting the Stage, continued >

So it is for us. As we celebrate our freedom as a country, we celebrate the freedom we have in God through Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel, he eloquently phrased it like this *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14)*. The Word of God took on human form so that we may behold Him. We are to take notice of the Word of God as it reflects both grace and truth. Jesus even took it a step further when in His own words said, *"So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³²and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'" (John 8:31-32)*. Psalm 119 is all about the Word of God, truth and freedom as it ultimately points us deeper into Scripture and closer to Jesus Christ.

Freedom has always been a blessing to people. Physical freedom. Emotional freedom. Political freedom. Mental freedom. Spiritual freedom. In each instance, freedom should never be taken for granted but be embraced as a blessing. There is a specific purpose for freedom. Those who have been set free, have been set free to live. This week, we will celebrate freedom by looking at the purpose and the blessing of freedom, in perhaps the unlikeliest of places; Psalm 119.

READ: Psalm 119:1-56.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. FREEDOM FOUND IN MERCY

REVIEW PSALM 119:41-43.

Freedom comes when we realize we are in need. There are so many circumstances of life that are beyond our control that restrict us

emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. We become stagnant in our fear and trembling. We are a people collectively in need of freedom. Yet, perhaps more significant each of us needs to realize that as an individual “I need freedom.” We need to look at this freedom on a personal level.

There is not a person in the world who is without fault or guilt today. Each of us has failed. If we were to dwell on that fact it would be depressing, demeaning and defeating. The psalmist realized that without God there was guilt, judgment, defeat, and bondage. But in verse 41, there is a glimmer of hope found in reality beyond circumstances. He is crying out to God with urgency and confidence. “*May Your lovingkindnesses/ mercies also come to me, O LORD.*” Do not miss the plural of “mercies.” We all need much and varied mercy. On any given day we find ourselves stressed out, overwhelmed and on the verge of throwing up our hands in defeat. But be of good courage, there is mercy in the Lord. Not just singular mercy, but plural; mercies.

Now look at the end of verse 41 as the psalmist describes what that mercy looks like “*Your salvation according to Your word;*” The word “salvation” quite literally means to be delivered out of your circumstances. There is freedom in the mercies of God that will save us from that which we deserve. Paul is very clear when he writes in Romans 6:23, “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

The mercies of God not only overshadow the wages of sin but blot them out completely because of the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

 **How have you personally experienced the mercies of the Lord?**

2. FREEDOM TO WALK

REVIEW PSALM 119:44-45.

There is optimism in the words of the psalmist, *“I will keep on obeying. I will walk in freedom.”* Both are phrases marked by movement and confidence. There will be people in your life that will not understand why you respect, revere and obey the Word of God. To many people today the Bible is a collection of old stories that may or may not be true. It is considered to be literature but nothing more. But there is a reason that the Bible continues to be the best-selling book of all time. There is a reason that the full Bible is translated into 698 languages; the New Testament is translated into 1,548 languages.³ There is a reason that the Bible has documented history, geography, and culture in the context of God’s Word. We are to do exactly as the psalmist vowed to do, *keep on obeying the instructions of God*, regardless of whether or not friends and family understand.

We have freedom to walk the path before us with confidence as we devote ourselves to His Word. The devotion means it is a choice we make to be committed to His Word, seeking answers to life in His Word. *“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105)*. It is the illumination of His Word guiding us each step of the way.



How are “obedience to God’s Word” and “freedom” connected?

³ www.wycliffe.org/uk statistics from October 2019.

3. FREEDOM TO SPEAK

REVIEW PSALM 119:46.

We enjoy the freedom of speech in this country, though it has been debated in a variety of settings over the years. However, with that freedom comes responsibility. And as Christ-followers, we have a responsibility to speak of the testimonies of God. It is our opportunity to tell other people our story of what God has done in our life. In this verse, the psalmist gives the example of speaking before kings and not being ashamed. It reminds us that we have nothing to be ashamed of when we base our life on the Word of God.

We are to be bold in our freedom of speech without shame or embarrassment. Whether it be in front of a king or a cashier. Whether it be in front of a Jew or Muslim. The Gospel is far-reaching as noted by Paul in Romans 1:16. It is for both the Jew and the Greek; that encompassed everyone in the first century! The psalmist references the extreme of their time of speaking to the kings. For us, it would be talking to a family member, neighbor or co-worker using discernment in our freedom.



In what ways can you be more bold for the sake of Christ?

4. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

REVIEW PSALM 119:47-48.

Two times the psalmist uses the phrase, *'which I love'* as He is talking about the commandments of God. There is a very personal connection between the psalmist and the Word of God. It is an emotional connection that goes beyond the intellectual understanding and appreciation of God's Word. Rather, it has penetrated his very soul as exemplified by the phrase *'which I love'* to describe God's Word.

The psalmist is saying there is freedom of expression in underscoring appreciation with delight. Notice what this freedom of expression causes the psalmist to do. In verse 48, he says, “*And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments.*” This is not worshipping the commandments themselves, rather it is an expression of his delight of and love for the commandments of God. God’s Word is His revelation of Himself to us. We are to delight and love His Word in such a way that we celebrate His truth as it is revealed in Scripture.

And then it is almost as if the psalmist takes a deep breath, puts his hands down to his lap and bows his head as he meditates on the statutes of God. The reality is that you cannot just throw in the towel and call it a day, there needs to be a time that you reflect, meditate and pray. Psalm 1:1-2 says it like this, “*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.*”

Again, we see the combination of delight and meditation. Meditating on the Scripture means you study, ponder, pray and reflect on the Word of God. We are fortunate to live in a country where we have the freedom to read and study the Word of God; freedom to delight and meditate on His Truth.



List three ways you can delight in the Word of God this week.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The commandments, laws, and precepts of God are not restrictive, through obedience they allow us to experience freedom. In these verses, the writer talks about keeping the laws and yet being free. Contrary to what we often expect, obeying God's laws does not inhibit or restrain us. Instead, it frees us to be who God designed us to be. By living God's way, we have the freedom to fulfill God's plan for our lives.⁴ There is nothing greater than walking in freedom and moving forward with confidence.

The mercies of God allow us to be free. Freedom to walk. Freedom of speech. Freedom of expression. The greatest freedom of all is the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. The ultimate freedom at the ultimate cost; the crucifixion of Jesus who was innocent yet bore our sins. We celebrate our country's freedom this week, but more importantly, let us celebrate our freedom in Christ.

JOHN 8:36 *So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

⁴ *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL 1988, p. 879.

PURPOSE

OF GOD'S WAYS

DATE

July 11-12

WEEK

6 of 10

KEY VERSE

Proverbs 14:12

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Seemingly Good Way of Self-Effort
2. The Seemingly Good Way of Works
3. The Seemingly Good Way of Religion

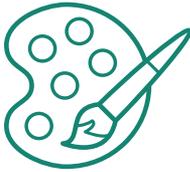
THINGS TO KNOW

- The Hebrew word 'Mashal' is translated "proverb" or "allegory."¹
- The basic meaning of the Hebrew word 'Mashal' is "a comparison."²

THERE IS A WAY THAT
SEEMS RIGHT TO A
MAN, BUT ITS END IS
THE WAY TO DEATH.

PROVERBS 14:12

SETTING THE STAGE



The purpose of Proverbs is to provide wisdom for living through special instruction on life: folly, sin, goodness, wealth, poverty, the tongue, pride, humility, justice, family (parents, children, discipline), vengeance, strife, gluttony, love, laziness, friends, life, and death. It is touted as the most practical book of the Bible in terms of wisdom for daily living.

The underlying theme of Proverbs is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7a). To ‘fear the Lord’ is to stand in awe of His holy character and power. The book of Proverbs explains that true wisdom leads to the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 2:1-5). The absence of a fear of God, however, leads to an unbridled and foolish life.

Throughout the book of Proverbs and all of Scripture, it is evident that obedience to God is a foundational part of wisdom. From the time of Adam and Eve, we see that disobedience to God never ends well and often results in severe consequences. Thus, Solomon shares that true wisdom produces true obedience. Proverbs 14:12 falls into a larger section of the Proverbs (10:1 - 15:33) written by Solomon in which he contrasts the godly and the wicked.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary OT*, David C. Cook, 2007, p. 1055.

² Ibid.

PURPOSE

OF GOD'S WAYS

READ: Proverbs 14:12.

There is a way that seems so right in our relationships, but as many of us know without God in a relationship it will likely fail. There is a way that seems so right in our careers, but as many of us know, without God we will always be searching for another road. The road of money can become a highway of idolatry without God. Even when we think about the very Gospel of Jesus Christ, there are seemingly good things we do, but many times leave us hurt, frustrated, and lost because we operate in our own strength, doing what we think is best. We could sum up Proverbs 14:12 with one big idea:

Any seemingly good way without God is a bad way.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE SEEMINGLY GOOD WAY OF SELF-EFFORT

The writer of this proverb is speaking truth and reality. The reality is there are ideas and concepts in this world that 'seem right.' There are books with titles that 'seem right.' Some speakers have podcasts where the content 'seems right.' And the truth of the matter is that people believe the book titles, podcasts, speakers and authors at face value.

Many people believe that to come to God they must be perfect. In other words, have a clean life, perfect family, everything put together. Now, as Christ-followers we know that is not true. It is actually impossible to be perfect. It goes something like this, "I want to go to church, but I need to clean up my life first," or "I like the thought of Christianity, but you do not know what I have done; can God really accept someone like me?" What is being expressed in these statements and many like them is that we need to do something to make ourselves ready for God to accept us.

This plays out in life as self-effort, a form a self-improvement or behavior modification with a Christian twist.

If you find yourself on the way of self-effort — *a way that seems good to man* — pull the car over, get out and stop trying harder. Self-effort might be a seemingly good way, but it is not God’s way. Jesus has done everything we need to be made right before God. When we put our faith in Christ the Spirit comes into our lives and starts to form us and shape us from the inside out.



Why do you think self-effort is so popular in our culture?

2. THE SEEMINGLY GOOD WAY OF WORKS ---

There are a lot of people who do really good things for others. If someone truly helps another person, it seems like that should earn them points with God. If someone gives a lot of money to a non-profit charity, it seems like that should earn them points with God. It seems right. Admittedly, those volunteer work hours and financial support do help a lot of good people in good ways that change lives on this earth. However, when someone rests on the works that they accomplish as what will make them ‘right’ with God, then they have taken a different path than following God’s ways.

It is the change of the heart that changes the behavior. Here is how Paul explained it to the church in Ephesus.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (ESV)*

There is no amount of money or good works that will get someone into heaven. It is simply and profoundly through faith in Jesus Christ. It is truly a ‘gift of God.’

Good works are just that, ‘good.’ They are not life-changing for eternity. If there was something that we could do to work for our salvation then it could not be free. The one who works is owed a paycheck, but grace is a free gift. The seemingly good way of works is a road that leads to disappointment, disobedience, and frustration in life.

Remember the words of Jesus, “*I am the way, truth, and life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). There is only one way to the Father, and it has nothing to do with our works. It is owed to no one, but by God’s grace is available to anyone.



Briefly share when and how you received the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

3. THE SEEMINGLY GOOD WAY OF RELIGION _____

Jesus dealt with this issue on several occasions, but one in particular to a group of Pharisees, who were the most religious people in the first century. They knew the words of the prophets, the law of Moses and the Psalms and Proverbs. But it was just something that impacted them on the surface as they focused on the seemingly good way of religion.

In Matthew 23, Jesus says this to a group of Pharisees.

MATTHEW 23:25-27 “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. (ESV)*

Jesus knew the truth of Proverbs 14:12, that the things that seem to be the right way lead to death. The Pharisees were fooling themselves in

thinking that just because they were religious on the outside, they were in a relationship with God. Yet, the Pharisees rejected Jesus face to face; even though Jesus was the living fulfillment of the Scripture they had memorized.

A relationship with God through Jesus Christ is not based on external rules and regulations, it happens from the inside out, it begins in the heart.



Do you tend to focus more on external rule following or matters of the heart? Explain.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

There are those who like to take shortcuts in life; but as Proverbs 14:12 reminds us, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” (ESV)*

In His grace, God has given us a road map that is the GPS to eternity. Think of the letters GPS and let it remind you that the Bible shows us God’s Path to Salvation. None of us want to settle on what *‘seems right to a man,’* a mere mortal. Each of us wants to know the God of creation in a personal way. God has made it clear in His Word that He wants to know each one of us in a personal way.

It comes down to whether or not you want to try and take a short cut that will most certainly lead to death in terms of separation from God for eternity. Or you have a choice to follow the GPS found

in Scripture. Salvation is a free gift that comes from having faith in Jesus Christ. And as a new creation we have a new purpose, to trust and obey His Word in such a way that His light shines through us for the good of others.

Another proverb brings attention to the fact that if you want to know the purpose of God's ways, it begins in the heart.

PROVERBS 3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. (ESV)*

I AM THE WAY,
TRUTH AND
LIFE. NO ONE
COMES TO THE
FATHER EXCEPT
THROUGH ME.

JOHN 14:6

PURPOSE

OF COMMUNITY

DATE

July 18-19

WEEK

7 of 10

KEY VERSE

Ecclesiastes 4:9

LESSON OUTLINE

1. God in Community
2. Purpose in Community
3. Three in Community

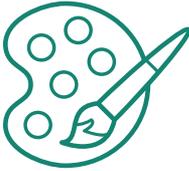
THINGS TO KNOW

- Community is not just what we do; it is who we are.
- God exists in community with Himself as the Trinity.
- Ecclesiastes helps the reader develop a God-centered worldview and recognize the dangers of a self-centered worldview.¹

TWO ARE BETTER THAN
ONE BECAUSE THEY HAVE
A GOOD RETURN FOR
THEIR LABOR.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9

SETTING THE STAGE



Ecclesiastes is a unique book in that there is not an easily defined setting, chronological timeline or countryside context. Yet, it is a book that transcends settings, timelines, and countrysides. Ecclesiastes is pure philosophy written as a confessional autobiography.² In this book, we get to see the questions that Solomon was pondering, the lessons that he was learning and the perspective of looking back over a life that was not always based on God's principles. In reading it, we can learn from his mistakes. Solomon was a king but was also considered a teacher and a preacher because of the wisdom and understanding bestowed on him by God. When reading Ecclesiastes, picture a speaker gathering a group of people together to listen to words of wisdom.

The name of the book is based on the Greek translation of a Hebrew word, 'Qohelet.' The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (i.e. Old Testament) gave this book the name 'Ekklesiastes' transliterated into English as Ecclesiastes.³ The root of that Greek word is 'Ekklesia' which means "assembly." In essence, the writings of this book are based on community, an assembly of people.

If you want to dig a bit deeper into the title itself, the Hebrew word 'Qohelet' is translated in the NASB as "preacher" and the NIV as "teacher," both being good translations. *Continued on page 58 >*

¹ John E. Johnson, "The Special Relevance of Ecclesiastes for Contemporary Culture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:674 (April-June 2012): p.159-71.

² Dr. Ed Young, *Been There. Done That. Now What?* Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville TN; 1994, p. 1

³ www.soniclight.com/ecclesiastes

PURPOSE

OF COMMUNITY

Setting the Stage, continued >

And where do preachers and teachers do their preaching and teaching? Traditionally in a church community; an assembly of people. Solomon, in his wisdom, realized that these words which are recorded in this book are best embraced in the context of community.

READ: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

POINTS TO PONDER

Our culture begins the exploration of self-discovery by starting with ourselves, which seems natural. But the Bible begins the exploration of self-discovery by starting not with our self, but with God. And in seeing a clearer picture of God, we will begin to see who God made us to be. As we will see today, we are deeply relational, communal people. Community is not just what we do; it is simply who we are.

1. GOD IN COMMUNITY

The purpose for community is not God's competition for us to compete in, it is His accommodation for us to experience more of Him and the life we were meant to live. This does not mean that your 'ideal' community ought to be large or small or deep or wide or every day or every-other-day or even once a week.

There is no hard and fast biblical formula or equation, except that we must gather as a church 'frequently' and live in such a way that we are sharing life with each other. The book of Hebrews exhorts us of the importance:

HEBREWS 10:24-25 *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (ESV)*

The word for “church” that we see in the New Testament’s original Greek language is the term ‘Ekklesia,’ which means “an assembly.” In other words, what makes the church truly the church, is not the programming, music, or activities. It is the gathering of the body of Christ, which has covenanted itself to one another — meeting together frequently.

There are many reasons why meeting together as a church and maintaining a level of biblical community can be good for your soul. But perhaps the greatest of all reasons is that God models this, and we are made in His image. Community is not an explanation of what God does as much as it is a revelation of **who God is**.

The Bible explains to us that God exists in community, and He has done so for eternity, even before time, space, and matter began, in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, if God exists in community Himself, and if we are designed in His image, this means that God wired the need for community deep into the hard drive and operating systems of our souls.

When we neglect community, we become less of what God designed us to be, we become less... human. To be human — to be made in the image of a triune God — means fundamentally to be communal.



How have you experienced community in your life?

2. PURPOSE IN COMMUNITY

Since everything started with the existence of a triune God who existed eternally and fully in community from eternity past, and if this communal God created humankind in His image and all of life, this means the purpose of community is woven inextricably throughout the very purpose of life. To really live, and to really experience the life God designed us to have, we should prioritize weaving our lives into the lives of others, reflecting the perfect, good, and communal nature of God Himself.

To be sure, the Bible does not command your community to be large or small. It simply exhorts you towards community because there are certain advantages to having it.

REVIEW ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12.

We can clearly see that there are advantages to living in community. The three key ideas are 1) If you fall, your community can pull you up; 2) If you are cold, your community can warm you up; and 3) If you are weak, your community can strengthen you. Let's dig a little deeper.

A. When you fall, community can pull you up.

King Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs, "*for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity*" (Proverbs 24:16, ESV).

Significantly, Solomon pairs that truth in Proverbs 24 with this principle in Ecclesiastes 4. How can a righteous person get up and rise again after falling? By living in a community where they can be reached in the pit and lifted back up on their feet.

Living in community will provide a context where the strong and compassionate hands of others around you can pull you up when you are either too weak to get up yourself or your circumstances are too steep for you to get out on your own.

B. When you are spiritually cold, community can warm you up.

Look at verse 11, "*Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?*" This biblical principle exhorts us to stay close to one another.

When we face the coldness of life through pain, grief, hardship, or lack—one of the greatest temptations is to isolate because we do not want to be a burden to other people. Throughout the Bible, we are warned to not grow callous or cold at heart for the things of the Lord.

The author creates a key analogy for us: "What happens when a heart becomes hardened?" It usually happens when there is no blood running through it. Without the presence and flow of blood, the heart will become cold, hard, and lifeless. But with the presence and flow of blood, the heart

will be warm, soft, and life-giving. Biblical community is a give-and-take of administering and ministering the life-giving Word of God to each other's heart. When our hearts feel cold spiritually, it is usually a byproduct of either the people of God or the Word of God missing in our life or both.

C. When you are weak, community can strengthen you.

Notice that the author does not say, "If you are weak." Rather, he implies quite clearly, "It is certain you are weak. You **might** prevail against temptation or weakness or struggle; but in community, you **will** prevail."

Our natural pride shrouds us from our own weakness and deludes us with overconfidence in our own abilities. Simply put, this is the nature and outworking of sin in our own lives: underestimating our weaknesses and overestimating our strengths.

The purpose of community can breathe life into our lives in so many different ways. As the passage infers, it can pull us up out of our pits and failings; it can warm us up with the reviving Word of God when we are cold to the things of God, and it strengthens us against lures of the world and temptations toward sin.



How have you benefited from community?

3. THREE IN COMMUNITY

There is one last phrase in the text that should strike you as rather peculiar. If you notice, throughout the passage, there are always two parties at work: you and another person. Yet, at the very end of verse 12, the passage notes, "*A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart*" (NASB) "*a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*" (ESV)

Did he mean to say, "A twofold cord is not quickly broken" instead? Perhaps it is because the author recognizes that in biblical community, there are never only two parties involved, but three—**because God is also present.**

If it is your spouse and you, your cord is not quickly broken with God in the middle. If it is your accountability partner and you, your cord is not quickly broken with God in the middle. If it is your church community, Bible study class, small group and you—your cord is not quickly broken with God in the middle.

In a biblical community, there are always three parties at work. The Apostle Paul gives us a picture of how this works in 1 Corinthians 12 when he analogizes the body of Christ to a human body and explains how it should operate based on how God designed the body to operate. Paul writes that God has given individuals in His church certain giftings and abilities so that they can work with one another, minister to one another, and be nourished by one another.

So, what does this mean for us, practically? It means that if we cut ourselves off from the community of the church, we are fundamentally cutting ourselves off from the main means through which God is trying to minister **to us** through others. And it also means the reverse. If we cut ourselves off from the community of the church, we are also cutting ourselves off from the main means through which God is trying to minister **through us** to others.

In other words, whenever we think we are reducing our threefold cord down to two strands, we actually reduce our threefold cord down to one strand. Because when we remove one strand from the equation (such as God or community), we actually lose both strands in the process. God ministers to us through community.



In what ways are you stronger because of the three strands described?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

This has been a year when we have had to deal with social distancing and even isolation. It has proven that we need one another in ways we have perhaps taken for granted. God has designed us for community. From the time of Adam and Eve until now, God has wanted us to be part of community.

Community is not our idea, it is God's idea. Not simply as His explanation for how we ought to live, but rather, as His revelation of who He is. If we fail to model our lives after this inherently relational Creator, we will fail to live up to our own design, having been made in His image, as inherently relational people.

Christian community is simply sharing a common life in Christ. It moves us beyond the self-interested isolation of private lives and beyond the superficial social contacts that pass for “Christian fellowship.” The biblical ideal of community challenges us instead to commit ourselves to life together as the people of God.⁴

Let us pray for the humility to get connected to the body of Christ—not just for our own sake, but for the sake of others as well. Why? So that we can be a blessing to them, and so that they can be a blessing to us. It is truly His plan and our purpose to live in community.

⁴ www.bible.org/article/community-god's-design-growth; by Howard Macy.

PURPOSE

OF PRAISE

DATE

July 25-26

WEEK

8 of 10

KEY VERSE

Psalms 9:2

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Perspective of Praise
2. Protection in Praise
3. Provision with Praise

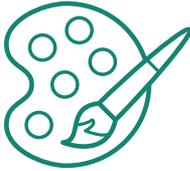
THINGS TO KNOW

- The Hebrew word 'Yadah' means "to shoot, throw, or cast down." It is an intentional movement towards something. This word is translated as "thanks" or "thanksgiving."
- The Hebrew word 'Zamar' means "to sing or play a musical instrument with the idea of plucking an instrument with fingers." This word is translated as "sing praise."
- With both words above, there is a giver and receiver. The one who gives thanks and sings praise does so with the intent of it being received.

I WILL BE GLAD AND EXULT IN
YOU; I WILL SING PRAISE TO
YOUR NAME, O MOST HIGH.

P S A L M 9 : 2

SETTING THE STAGE



The Psalms are a collection of songs and poems. They deal with real-life situations that are to be embraced. Sometimes that means we are to embrace that which causes us fear and dismay. Other times that means we are to embrace that which causes us to smile and jump for joy assuming we can jump! Throughout the Psalms, we see the fullness of life and death; confidence and fear; praise and sorrow.

The Psalms were written by different authors, though David is believed to have written approximately half of them, including the one we are looking at today. David experienced the fullness of life and wrote it as a crying out to God, a prayer and even a song. The Psalms allow us to reflect on the circumstances of the past, present, and future and learn from how David and other authors dealt with various aspects of life and death. The Psalms guide us to worship God regardless of the circumstances we might be facing. Dr. Thomas Constable reminds us that the Psalms reveal that worship grows out of something God has done for man. ¹

We learn from the Psalms that worship is a matter of the heart, not circumstances. We also learn that praise is the foundation of worship and God is worthy of both praise and worship simply because He is God. David did not let circumstances dictate whether or when he would praise and worship God.

In Psalm 9 we see a psalm of praise and thanksgiving that seems illogical based on circumstances. But praise and worship throughout Scripture are never based on logic, rather they are an outward expression of our thanksgiving, gratitude and recognition of who God is in all His fullness.

¹ www.soniclight.com/psalms

PURPOSE

OF PRAISE

READ: Psalm 9:1-11.

P O I N T S T O P O N D E R

We have all experienced various times of trouble. Whether it was a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, an illness, a divorce, or the coronavirus that impacted the world; there have been times of trouble in our lives. No one has been or will be exempt from difficulties, directly or indirectly.

Yet, we have each experienced times of celebration as well such as the birth of a child or grandchild, a marriage, a special vacation, a job promotion, or school graduation. It is in the times of celebration that we know exactly how to respond, whereas in times of trouble it is a bit more challenging.

Paul McCartney wrote the song, “Let It Be” based on a dream he had of his mother Mary, who had died of cancer when he was 14 years old. Paul had this dream during a very difficult time in 1968 when the group was becoming more dysfunctional and considering breaking up. In the dream, he remembered the words his mother would tell him on how to deal with difficult situations in life. The opening verse of the song states the premise clearly:

When I find myself in times of trouble, mother Mary comes to me,
speaking words of wisdom, let it be. And in my hour of darkness she
is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be.

Though not a spiritual song there is a truth that we find in these words that are similar to what David writes in Psalm 9. David shows us how to respond to times of trouble not based on words from an earthly parent but based on faith in the wisdom, sovereignty, and protection of our Heavenly Father, praising God in times of trouble.

1. PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE

REVIEW PSALM 9:1-2.

The first two verses of Psalm 9 resound with praise and thanksgiving. In the overall context of this particular Psalm, it does not make logical sense. As you keep reading you see David refer to *enemies* (v.3), the *wicked* (v.5), the *oppressed* (v.9), *times of trouble* (v.9) those who *hate him* (v.13), and *nations sinking down in the pit which they have made* (v.15). Honestly, it does not seem there would be a lot to be thankful for or sing praises about in a logical sense.

And that is the key. David was not logical in his praise. David was completely illogical “in times of trouble.” He had a perspective of praise regardless of the circumstances. It was a choice he made with intentionality. David did not put his faith in people, things, fame or fortune. He put his faith in God. His perspective of praise was focused exclusively on the LORD.

Logically David could have complained. Based on the words and phrases used in this psalm the circumstances were greater and deeper than mere ‘times of trouble.’

But David had a different perspective. He had a perspective of praise which was an intentional choice. David did not wait for the feeling of praise to happen. He chose to praise God. In David’s heart and mind, he said with boldness and confidence, “I will.”

- I will praise you.
- I will tell of all your wonders.
- I will be glad and rejoice in you.
- I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.



What is your perspective in times of trouble? Why?

2. PROTECTION IN PRAISE

REVIEW PSALM 9:3-6.

David had made his choice to have the perspective of praise. Perhaps that perspective was enhanced by God's protection. Notice in verse 3 he takes an abrupt change in tone from praise to a harsh reality. He begins to talk about enemies turning back. They were heading in one direction that would have been disruptive to David in some form or fashion and they retreated, which is amazing.

In verses 4-6, David uses the phrase "You have" six times. It is almost as if David cannot stop praising God for His protection. David did not even want to appear to take any credit for himself or pass it off as coincidental good luck. David was praising God in these words, noting that God was in control. God had his back. God was just. God was responsible for the consequences.

READ: Psalm 91:1-4.

There is a great relief for us when we realize that God is in control. God wants to be a God of protection. When we walk with God we are in the shelter of the Most High, in the shadow of the Almighty. It is a reminder that God is bigger than us and protects us. He is our refuge and fortress. He delivers us from the snare of the trapper. He covers us with His pinions. Under His wings, we may seek refuge.

When we realize the truth of these passages we can say as David did with assurance, "You have" my best interest in mind. You have my back in times of trouble. When there is darkness, You are the light. When there are fears, You are my comfort. When there are doubts, You are faithful. When you have the proper perspective of praise, you realize the protection God provides in your life in good times and in times of trouble.



List how God has protected you and write out a prayer of praise.

3. PROVISION WITH PRAISE

REVIEW PSALM 9:7-11.

This year we have been reminded in very real ways of how precious life is and how quickly life can change. Psalm 9 is a wonderful reminder of the reality that the LORD abides forever. He never ceases. He never changes. The Hebrew word for 'abide' is, 'Yashab' which literally means to dwell and sit down.² That is a vivid picture of what God does in our lives. He dwells and sits down with us. God is not standing up ready to move on to something else. God is intimately interested in you as an individual, sitting down with you, dwelling forever.

For those who are in a relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ, there is provision in these words. God has provided righteousness for every person who believes in Jesus Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30 *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

When God judges the world in righteousness, He will be looking at us through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who provided salvation for those who believe. God provided a way for us to be with Him for all eternity, judged in righteousness.

Some translations use the word 'refuge' which is an accurate translation as 'stronghold.' But I like the picture in my mind when I read the word 'stronghold.' Can you imagine anything stronger than the grip of the hand of God? The One who created the earth, molding and shaping man from dust. The One responsible for Mount Everest and the Pacific Ocean. The One who flattened out the prairies of the Midwest and carved the coastlines. There is no stronger grip than the Hand of God on your life, especially in times of trouble.

² biblestudytools.com/lexicon.

REVIEW PSALM 9:10-11.

Often in times of trouble, we feel abandoned, neglected or rejected. We feel alone and isolated. Notice this provision that David realizes for those who know God and put their trust in Him. The idea is to have a personal relationship with God, not just an acquaintance that you wave to as you pass by on the street.

There is motion in the word “seek,” moving towards God. We are told to, “*Seek first the Kingdom of God*” (Matthew 6:33). We are to move forward in our relationship with and trust of God each day. The more we get to know God, the more we trust God and can rest in His provision.

What a wonderful opportunity for our testimony to be a testimony of praise, not based on circumstances but based on the LORD God Almighty.



How can you share your testimony of praise this week?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of praise is not intended to make us feel happy inside. The purpose of praise is not based on circumstances being good, comfortable, fun and easy. The purpose of praise is; wait for it, Praise! The word “praise” means to shine the light on an object. The purpose of praise is to shine the light on God.

I have on more than one occasion said to my wife on a cloudy day, “I wish the sun would start shining.” And she always corrects me with her reply, “The sun is always shining.” She, of course, is correct, again. The sun is always shining even on a cloudy day. In that moment I was focused on the grayness of the day, the clouds blocking my perspective of the sun. However, when I stop to think about it, even on the cloudiest and rainiest of days, the sun is shining. It comes down to a matter of perspective. In the same way regardless of circumstances, even in times of trouble, God is shining brightly.

God is protecting and providing for us in big and small ways. God protects and provides for us in times of trouble as well as in times of comfort. God is always shining down on us as He dwells with us, sits with us, dines with us, communes with us. There is fellowship with God on the cloudy days and even during torrential rains; the Light of the World, Jesus the Son of God is still shining.

It is during the times of trouble that God can shape us to where we truly recognize the Purpose of Praise. So, let’s praise the Lord!

PURPOSE

OF THE VALLEY

DATE

August 1-2

WEEK

9 of 10

KEY VERSE

Psalms 42:1

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Growth Occurs in the Valley
2. Battles are Fought and Victories are Won in the Valley
3. The Shepherd is in the Valley

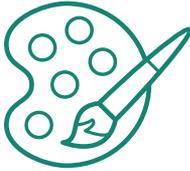
THINGS TO KNOW

- A mountain cannot exist without a valley.
- The Hebrew word for valley is used 53 times in the Old Testament; and only one time in the book of Psalms.¹
- Most biblical scholars agree that Psalms 42 and 43 are a unit.

AS THE DEER PANTS
FOR THE WATER BROOKS,
SO MY SOUL PANTS FOR
YOU, O GOD.

P S A L M 4 2 : 1

SETTING THE STAGE



Before we dive into this psalm, we first need to acknowledge its author, because the author of this psalm provides us with a unique perspective. The Bible tells us in the superscript of the psalm that the author is the Sons of Korah. Who is Korah? Who are Korah's sons? In the book of Numbers chapter 16, Korah incites the most famous rebellion against God and His leader, Moses. Korah and his co-conspirators faced terrible consequences for their rebellion. Korah's Sons are descendants of Korah, but they do not share his attitude toward God and his leadership. The Sons of Korah are given a unique role of service in the Temple. They are gatekeepers.

What do gatekeepers have to do with valleys in life and why do they have the credibility to speak on this subject? The Sons of Korah were given the prime opportunity to people watch. I do not know about you, but one of my favorite things to do is to watch people. At the airport, at a coffee shop it is entertaining to see all the different people come in and out. If you put your headphones in and not listen to anything, it is beyond belief what people will say around you when they do not think you are listening!

As gatekeepers at the Temple, the Sons of Korah had the opportunity to watch people who are broken by life's circumstances come into the Temple to find restoration and perspective.

They would regularly see people walk into the Temple estranged and come out of the Temple restored. They would see people come into the Temple with tears and sorrow only to leave with confidence and assurance in God. The Sons of Korah had a front-row seat to the purpose that can be found in the valleys. It was so important to them that they felt it necessary to write a psalm about it.

¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

PURPOSE

OF THE VALLEY

READ: Psalm 42.

This year our world encountered something that impacted every person regardless of background, language spoken, bank account or belief system. COVID-19 hit the world in such a way that individuals, families, businesses, cities, states and countries were suddenly in a deep dark valley.

There are times when the bottom of our lives falls out. We are left grief-stricken with the loss of a loved one. We are paralyzed by fear when we are served with divorce papers. We feel as if we are drowning when we are called into the boss' office to be laid off. We call these moments of desperation, depression, anxiety and grief: valleys.

All of us are familiar with valleys. We have all been in a valley at one point or another in our lives. The difficult question that comes with valleys is not what is happening to me, but why is this happening to me? While there is a lot of mystery that occurs in the valleys of life, the Bible is clear that Christians can find purpose and hope in the deepest darkest valleys.

When we typically think of valleys, we naturally think of all the hurt, despondency, and pain that is associated with valleys. But if we look at Scripture even beyond the Psalms, we can find deeper purpose in the valleys of life.

P O I N T S T O P O N D E R

1. GROWTH OCCURS IN THE VALLEY

READ: Deuteronomy 8:6-10.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find the nation of Israel on the precipice of the Promised Land. They have spent 40 years wandering through the

desert, but they are about to come home. God describes the land they are about to enter into as “*good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills*” (v.7). He deems the land of valleys a good land. In this text, God is talking about literal valleys. But we learn some potent truths when we look at physical valleys and compare them to metaphorical valleys in our lives.

God shows us that growth occurs in the valleys. The land of valleys they were about to enter was a land of tremendous growth. Their valleys were filled with brooks, springs, and rivers which led to fertile soil and an abundance of resources. Looking back, we see that it is in the valleys of life that exponential growth has occurred in our lives. While the mountain tops in life are great experiences, we learn less about who we truly are and who God is while on the mountain top. Growth occurs in the valley.

In Psalm 42 the Sons of Korah repeat the phrase, “*Why are you in despair, O my soul?*” They encourage us to take inventory of our own hearts to determine the reason why we are suffering from depression and despair. There certainly can be times of great sadness, grief, and sorrow in life. We desire to know what the reasons are for our inner suffering. But the Sons of Korah do not stop there. They see that knowledge does not change the valley, but hope changes your perspective of the valley. They challenge us to “*Hope in God*” (v.5). Korah’s sons give great advice to us because they do not encourage us to hope in a change of circumstances. They do not encourage us to hope in a changing of emotional seasons. They challenge us to hope in God! Biblical hope is always rooted in assurance in God. During life’s valleys, we can be confident that God is doing something in our lives. He is growing us.



What valleys in your life have produced growth?

2. BATTLES ARE FOUGHT AND VICTORIES ARE WON IN THE VALLEY

When we look throughout the landscape of the Bible, we notice that important battles and victories occur in the valleys. Valleys provide the necessary space and ideal terrain for battles to occur. Perhaps, the most famous battle that took place in Scripture occurs in the Valley of Elah, it is where David fought Goliath (1 Samuel 17). For many days the Israelites camped on one side of the valley and the Philistines on the other, as the giant Goliath hurled insults at the people of Israel and the Lord. The Israelites viewed the valley of Elah as a place of hopelessness as they expected to experience great defeat. But that was not the case for David. David found purpose in the valley.

The valleys in life are filled with battles. We battle against insecurity, doubt, anger, and regret. Psalm 42 gives us a great key to experiencing victory in the battles that take place during our valley. The Sons of Korah write about inner turmoil and the battle that rages within us at times. They paint vivid pictures of depression and sorrow. They write, “*My tears have been my food day and night.*” (v. 3) There is intense weeping. “*All Your breakers and Your waves have gone over me.*” (v. 7b) There is a sense of being emotionally consumed by your circumstances. They parallel your emotional state to feeling as if you are drowning.

The Psalmist writes, “*My soul is cast down within me: therefore I remember you*” (v.6) As Believers in Christ, we have access to timeless universal truths about God and His character that guide us in the midst of valleys. Even though Psalms 42 and 43 display times of despair and displacement, they also showcase deep theological truths that can help us walk through the valleys of life victoriously.

- He is the only One who can quench the thirst of my soul. (*Psalm 42:1*)
- He is worthy to be worshipped. (*Psalm 42:4*)
- He is my salvation. (*Psalm 42:5*)
- He is my God. (*Psalm 42:6*)
- He commands His love to me. (*Psalm 42:8*)
- He sings songs to me in the darkest of nights. (*Psalm 42:8*)
- He is the God of my life. (*Psalm 42:8*)

- He is my Rock. (*Psalm 42:9*)
- He is my Vindicator. (*Psalm 43:1*)
- He is my Defender. (*Psalm 43:1*)
- He is my Strength and Refuge. (*Psalm 43:2*)
- He sends light toward me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He sends truth toward me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He leads me. (*Psalm 43:3*)
- He is my exceeding joy. (*Psalm 43:4*)

No matter what battle may rage in our soul or the valleys that we walk through in life, if we keep these truths in front of us, we will be victorious.



How have you experienced victory in the valley?

3. THE SHEPHERD IS IN THE VALLEY

Without a doubt, the most famous scripture passage about valleys occurs in the Twenty-Third Psalm. David writes, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*” This verse is commonly read at funerals. Often, the pastor reads this to the congregation to provide courage and comfort as they walk through deep dark valleys of grief and sorrow. What is it about this Scripture that provides courage and comfort? David knows that he does not have to fear in the valley of the shadow of death because the Shepherd is there.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). He walks with us through our valleys because He experienced the darkest valley of history. The Good Shepherd laid His life down for the sheep. In His voluntary act of laying His life down for the sheep, He experienced total loneliness. His disciples left Him, and as He took on our sin He was abandoned and forsaken by

the Father. Jesus experienced unsurpassed pain and heartache on the cross. He cried tears of agony. He unjustly received the wrath of God. He was publicly shamed, mocked and ridiculed. He died a death He did not deserve. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. He experienced total abandonment so that we would never have to experience it. He received the wrath of God so that we would never endure it. He was publicly mocked so that we would be eternally accepted as children of God. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who walked through the valley of the shadow of death, all the way to the cross so that we could find purpose in our valleys.



How has the Good Shepherd walked with you this past month?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Jerry Sittser is a Christian author and professor. He has written some incredible books, but none more powerful than his testimony of walking through the valley. In *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*, Sittser recalls a traumatic car accident that he was involved in that took the life of his wife, mother and daughter. He was broken and grief-stricken. Sittser wrote this book to document his grief process and to recount how God gave him

purpose in the valley. He writes, “The experience of loss does not have to be the defining moment in our lives. Instead, the defining moment can be our response to the loss. It is not what happens to us that matters so much as what happens in us.”² The valleys we find ourselves in can be paralyzing, but God can use them to give us purpose in life.

If you find yourself walking through the valley in life you can be confident that God wants to use that valley to produce growth in your life. While we may find the valley to be a tempting place to abandon faith in God we must be vigilant to hold our faith in God. Jerry Bridges writes, “Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.”³

The valley that you are in may look like a battlefield now, but God wants you to walk through it victoriously. In the darkest valleys we can rest assured that we do not have to fear because the Good Shepherd is walking with us every step of our way, giving purpose to our pain.

It is in the valley that we become like the deer panting for water. Psalm 42:1 “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.*” We can be confident that God will satisfy our thirst in the midst of the valley, as His plan continues to shape our purpose.

² Sittser, Gerald Lawson. *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*. Vereeniging: Christian Art, 2011.

³ Bridges, Jerry. *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2008) p. 214.

PURPOSE

OF THE HEART

DATE

August 8-9

WEEK

10 of 10

KEY VERSE

Ecclesiastes 3:11a

LESSON OUTLINE

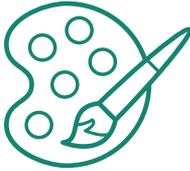
1. The Purpose of the Heart in the Past
2. The Purpose of the Heart in the Future
3. The Purpose of the Heart in the Present

THINGS TO KNOW

- People tend to follow their hearts spiritually, emotionally and physically.
- Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

HE HAS MADE EVERYTHING
APPROPRIATE IN ITS TIME.
HE HAS ALSO SET ETERNITY
IN THEIR HEART.
ECCLESIASTES 3:11A

SETTING THE STAGE



Throughout the summer we have looked at the Story of Purpose as it pertained to various aspects of life. In Ecclesiastes 3 Solomon writes about the extremes of life reminding the reader that there is a purpose to everything under heaven. We have looked at the purpose of different things over the last few months.

Whether we are looking at the purpose of work, home, community, freedom, or valleys, it all comes down to the heart of the matter.

The heart is the most vital of all physical organs as it pumps blood to the entire body. Without the heart doing what it is designed to do, the other organs in the body have no chance of accomplishing their purpose. The purpose of the heart is to give life to the body. If the heart does not fulfill its purpose; if the blood ceases to be pumped throughout the body the result is death.

The heart is just as important in the spiritual side of life. We are to love the Lord with all of our heart. The heart is the core of our being both physically and spiritually. Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*” Solomon realized the importance and significance of the heart both physically and spiritually. The heart represents life. The physical heart represents that which is temporary. The spiritual heart represents that which is eternal. In the passage today we will see that when all is said and done, it all comes down to the heart of the matter and the matter of the heart.

PURPOSE

OF THE HEART

Today as we look at the book of Ecclesiastes we will see what God's Word has to say about the purpose of our hearts. God as Divine Author chooses to show us our purpose, not in specific narrow corridors; instead, He paints broad strokes to cover the purpose of every human heart that has ever beat. When we think of our heart, we typically think of the muscle in our chest that pumps blood to our body. Perhaps when we hear the word "heart" we think about our emotions, predominantly love. When the Bible mentions the heart it typically is referring to the entirety of a person; the seat of the mind, will and emotions. It encompasses the totality of a person's life.¹ What we are going to discover in the book of Ecclesiastes today, is God's purpose for our whole life is placed in our hearts.

God uses the human author, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, to unpack the purpose of the heart most uniquely, through the lens of time. When Billy Graham was 64 years old, somebody asked him, "What is the greatest surprise in your life?" Dr. Graham responded so poignantly, "The brevity of life." Time has a way of passing quickly, but as it passes it profoundly reveals purpose.

READ: Ecclesiastes 3.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE PAST

ECCLESIASTES 3:11A *He has made everything beautiful in its time.*

There is something beautiful about looking back and reflecting on what God in His providence has led you **through** as well as what He has led

¹ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. Zondervan, 2006.

you **to**. One of the reasons we are nostalgic is because when we look at the past, we have a better understanding of how the Lord has taken the tattered threads of our lives, and masterfully woven them into a beautiful tapestry of His grace. We can agree with Solomon and look back at the past and say, “*He has made everything beautiful in its time*” (Ecclesiastes 3:11a). For the Christian, reflecting back on our journey is not an exercise to pat ourselves on the back and applaud our own resolve, strength, and creativity. When we reflect on our journey, we should pause in awe of how good God has been to us.

Our hearts emotionally have the unique ability to recall the past and find a deep purpose. When we were going through difficulties, heartache, and pain we often perceived them as stumbling blocks to where we wanted to be. We viewed the difficulty as an obstacle that impeded our progress. Reflecting on the past confirms that God was not using our difficulties as stumbling blocks but as stepping stones to where He wanted us to be. What we thought of as obstacles that were impeding our progress turned out to be opportunities for personal growth to take place.



List 3 past experiences where God turned a stumbling block into a stepping stone?

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE FUTURE _____

ECCLESIASTES 3:11B *Also, He has put eternity into man’s heart.*

The purpose of our heart is eternal. Everything that we do as Believers should be done considering eternity. Life on earth is brief, yet eternity can be determined by the decisions we choose to make in this life. When

we recognize this incredible truth, it re-purposes how we spend our time. Eternity is too long and too permanent to be wrapped up in surface-level pleasantries. The weight of eternity moves us to ask probing questions and to exhort others to live for Christ. The weight of eternity in our hearts drives us to love others deeply. Eternity re-purposes our finances. Investing in eternity prevents us from being wasteful with the resources God has given us. Instead, eternity urges us to invest in advancing the Kingdom of God, to wring every drop of our finances to spread the Good News of Christ, and to point others to God’s glory with our lives.

Christians are to live with an eternal focus. Everything we do should filter through the lens of “how will eternity be impacted” by our lives. The Apostle Paul writes to the Church at Corinth encouraging them to endure the temporal for the sake of the eternal. He writes to them saying,

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18 *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (ESV)*

Living for eternity does not promise a life of comfort. In fact, Paul calls it affliction. But it does promise great value!



How can focusing on eternity re-purpose your present?

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART IN THE PRESENT ---

REVIEW ECCLESIASTES 3:11-13.

Solomon tells us that our hearts should rejoice in God's work in the past. He tells us that we should live with a sense of purpose for the future and then he moves to what we should do in the present. Solomon tells us that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil — this is God's gift to man. In the Creation narrative, as God looked at His creation repeatedly, He stepped back and declared it "good." God looked at all His toil and work and enjoyed it. Since we are made in the image of God, we have the unique ability to enjoy our lives. To take pleasure in the present. This is one of the distinguishing factors of humanity: the ability to enjoy the richness of life.

When the well-known British preacher, William Sangster was diagnosed with progressive muscular atrophy and could not get well, he made four resolutions for the rest of his life:

- I will never complain.
- I will keep the home bright.
- I will count my blessings.
- I will try to turn my disease to gain.²

Sangster's goal was not to be positive for the sake of being positive but to focus on all the good gifts that God allowed him to receive, despite his disease. These are all practices that each of us can put into place daily. We recognize that everything we possess in life is "God's gift to man." Often, we do not enjoy the life we have, because we believe that we deserve to have a better life. The Book of James tells us that "*every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*" (James 1:17, ESV).

We get to enjoy the taste of hot coffee in the morning. We get to enjoy a cotton candy colored sky as the sun rolls down in the evening. We get to enjoy the company of our family. We get to enjoy our health. God has given us the gift of our jobs as a means of provision in life and we should

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied: Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life: OT Commentary, Ecclesiastes*. David C Cook, 2010, p. 56.

enjoy that. We live in a segment of history where we have access to more information at our fingertips than at any other time, we should enjoy that. Every hug we receive, each smile that is given, every meal that is served is a gift from the kind and generous heart of our Heavenly Father.



Which of God's gifts do you enjoy the most?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The Book of Ecclesiastes shows us that without God at the center of our lives, life is meaningless. It is vanity. Throughout the book, Solomon compares life to trying to catch the wind. But God transforms a vain life into a life of purpose. With Christ at the center of our lives, the past is not merely a series of events that happened to us. The past is an archive of God's grace toward us. We see that with Him nothing is wasted. The broken pieces are transformed into a beautiful purpose.

When we commit our plans to the Lord and keep ourselves fixed on eternity the future is not daunting, it is exhilarating! To know that everything we do in this life can reap dividends in eternity brings joy. It is refreshing to know that God's love toward His children allows us to enjoy life. Our heart's purpose is to be in awe of God. To fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man (*Ecclesiastes 12:13*).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written in 1648 to teach new converts to the Christian faith core truths about Christianity. The Catechism is a tool that asks questions and gives biblical answers to the questions. The beginning of the Catechism asks the question, "What is the chief end of man?" It succinctly answers "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever and ever." Eternity has been placed in our hearts, giving us purpose each day and for all the tomorrows.

THE CONCLUSION,
WHEN ALL ALL
HAS BEEN HEARD,
IS: FEAR GOD
AND KEEP HIS
COMMANDMENTS...

ECCLESIASTES 12:13



_____ *COMING UP NEXT:*
THE STORY OF **CHRIST:**
IN HIS OWN WORDS