

# blueprint

I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU . . . *Jeremiah 29:11*

**WISDOM**  
what's in your heart?

**SUFFERING**  
growing through tough times

**VALUES**  
having godly ones



# GOD'S

---

## WORD

LET HIM DIRECT YOUR WORK, PLAY, AND DAY.

- **Pray for some/get some free!**

*"Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7).*

- **Equip yourself to win.**

- **The only armor you should wear.**

**GREAT SALE  
THIS WEEK ON  
WISDOM!**

*EVERYTHING YOU NEED...ALL IN ONE PLACE.*

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# Welcome

to Blueprint, a Christian magazine  
for teens.

The Bible is God's blueprint for us. Jesus  
Christ is the foundation we build on. But we,  
as teens, have to do the work of building our  
own unique lives of faith.

Join us as we explore how God makes a  
difference in our lives, and how He wants us  
to make a difference in the world.

“For I know the  
plans I have for  
you,” declares  
the LORD “plans  
to prosper  
you and not  
to harm you,  
plans to give  
you hope and  
a future.”

—Jeremiah 29:11

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# **R** stands for Re-evaluate

**Do movie ratings really matter?**

By Caroline Ferdinandsen

# Oh they're good.

Moviemakers are some of the cleverest psychologists around. "Let's make a movie we know will appeal to young people, but let's pretend it's not designed for them. Let's give it an adult rating of 'R' but market it for teenagers." The not-so-secret code behind an R-rating sends a loud message to its audience: this movie is raw, edgy, adult-themed, or just plain raunchy, but we hope every teenager sneaks into the theater to watch it anyhow. If he or she is not brave enough to do that, then at some point, he or she will be sure to watch it at home or see it online.

You've heard the rules already. R-rated movies should be off-limits for Christians, but how come? And why do some Christian adults go to see them? These are good questions. But an even better question, "Why are you asking?" Some teenagers are notoriously eager to find out exactly where the line should be drawn in the sand. The reason? They are all too happy to get as close to that line as possible, so they can maintain their parents' trust but have a rationale to do as they please. When their conscience rears up and whispers, *Don't go there*, who wouldn't want a good excuse?

That answer is just no good. A better answer to "Why are rated-R movies off limits?" might be found in your motives. If your goal is to find a spiritual loophole so you can indulge your own sin nature or fantasy, your motive becomes suspect. If your goal is to feel more normal since you're the only one in school who hasn't seen a particular film, your motive is found in insecurity or fear. If your goal is to satisfy simple curiosity, your motive sounds pretty naive.

Let's use an analogy. In professional tennis matches, a tiny sensor pierces the silence when a ball penetrates the line between in and out. Likewise, a movie's R-rating sounds the alarm. Enough said, right? But human line judges can overturn the call, using judgment, experience, and a great set of eyes to keep the match fair. In the same way, parents can be

effective line judges with the kind of experience that might at times override the censor under the right circumstances.

Admittedly, there are times when a filmmaker has artfully and honestly chosen the imagery and dialogue best suited for his or her movie's effectiveness. Are teenagers—or adults—the best line judges for that call? The answer is not found in whether you are old or young, but whether you're intimately connected with Jesus Christ.

Ah, now we're onto something. It seems that the Christian's rating system has nothing to do with the movie industry at all. What if we found out that God's standards aren't measured by letters, legal age—or even the lax standards of some adults? God's standards are measured by sharing the mind of Christ and growing in relationship with Him. Not by an easy checkbox. "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you [and

## The Christian's rating system has nothing to do with the movie industry **at all.**

your movie watching?], which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:2, NLT).

Jesus Christ spoke clearly to people who tried to draw lines in the sand rather than consider the spiritual implications of their behavior and decisions. In John 7:24, Jesus scolded the Pharisees when they tried to nail Him to the wall with a legal loophole: "Don't be nitpickers; use your head—and heart!—to discern what is right, to test what is authentically right" (MSG).

# MPAA MISRATINGS

## Here are some non-check box questions to help you judge movies:

■ When your friends say, “Hey, c’mon and see a movie with us,” the first question shouldn’t just be “What’s it rated?” Instead, ask yourself, “What’s in it that is good for me?” Also ask, “Is there stuff that is not good for me?” If the answers to those questions come out OK, then ask, “Why do I want to see it?”

■ Christians and non-Christians get their standards from different sources. Should a Christian and a non-Christian have different standards for appropriate movies? What should those be?

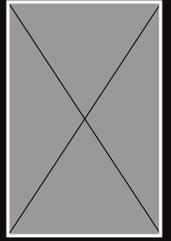
■ “Art” does not always mean appropriate. Simply because a film is dubbed artistic doesn’t mean it’s automatically a good choice. What is the artist’s stated intention and message of this film? Is it one that should be endorsed?

■ What will be the impact of this movie on your brain and memory? Shocking, graphic, or disgusting scenes can stay in your mind for years. If it’s the latest horror flick, those scenes may sit in your head for no good reason. Yet, in movies that portray truth, shocking scenes could spur you on to social justice and the pursuit of righteousness for those who are wronged.

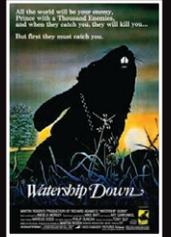
In short, movies and their ratings can’t be trusted at face value. Many moviemakers are notoriously greedy and famously manipulative. A few try to use their extraordinary talent to speak truth, but most will just suck you in and then pocket the cash. But a committed follower of Christ can begin to trust his or her spiritual instincts over secular standards. An R rating in most cases is probably non-negotiable—not because we are supposed to follow the world’s rating system, but because all Christ-followers should long for soul nutrition rather than junk food. What should our response be then? If you’re not sure, then “R” stands for Reconsider, Re-evaluate, or just plain Run.

The MPAA’s (Motion Picture Association of America) standards are absolutely different from God’s standards. The MPAA is all about quantifying how many swear words are used, or defining levels of nakedness. God’s standards are about watching things that are spiritually uplifting. Let’s look at some old movies and their misratings:

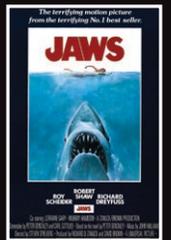
**PG?** – **Gremlins:** the violence and gore of this movie were directly responsible for the creation of a PG-13 rating. This movie gained infamy for terrifying kids, but kept its PG label even after it spawned a more-mature level of rating.



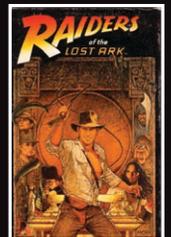
**PG?** – **Watership Down:** It’s an animated movie about rabbits! Any animated movies about rabbits should be safe for kids, right? Unfortunately, this was actually a dark satire, with the rabbits slowly being killed off by a variety of enemies.



**PG?** – **Jaws:** more violent than many R-rated movies, Jaws somehow struck the MPAA as being safe with some parental guidance. Funny, considering the first horrifying death happens before the opening credits even roll.



**PG?** – **Raiders of the Lost Ark:** Exploding heads, melting faces, bloody fight scenes—what’s not to say that kids under 13 shouldn’t see this movie?



**PG?** – **Facing the Giants.** Even though there is no swearing, no violence, and no sex—usually the hallmarks of a G-rating—the MPAA rated this Christian family movie at PG, because it talked about faith issues. This frustrated many Christian groups.



# the what-fors of proverbs

Proverbs 1:1-7

Some books of the Bible give very specific reasons about why they were written. Luke wrote his Gospel so that his friend Theophilus might know with certainty the facts about Jesus (Luke 1:4). John wrote his first epistle so that Christians might know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Solomon began the Book of Proverbs by telling us why he wrote it. When the Lord told Solomon that he could have anything he wanted, just for the asking, he asked for wisdom. The Book of Proverbs contains much of this wisdom.

## ▶ Read Proverbs 1:1-6.

▶ List the eight reasons Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

▶ If by reading the proverbs you gained each of these things, how could you use them?

## ▶ Read Proverbs 1:7.

▶ Fearing God means respecting His power and control over your life. Why is this kind of respect a good starting point for gaining wisdom?

▶ Why is it foolish to treat wisdom and discipline lightly?

### Proverbs 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup>The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: <sup>2</sup>for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; <sup>3</sup>for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; <sup>4</sup>for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—<sup>5</sup>let he wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—<sup>6</sup>for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

<sup>7</sup>The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

»mon

In Proverbs 1:7, “fear” doesn’t mean fright. It means being in awe of who God is and what He is capable of doing. Write down one way God has demonstrated His power in your life sometime in the past week. Praise God for His ability to do anything.

»tues

Learning without any respect for God only results in academic arrogance. When He is ignored, people begin to believe what is false. Praise God today for being the source of all that is true.

»wed

Read Proverbs 13:16. Everyone behaves foolishly sometimes. What

was the last foolish thing you did? What were the consequences? Ask God to help you learn from foolish decisions so that you don’t repeat them.

»thurs

It often takes courage to act wisely and to do the right thing. What’s the most difficult “right” thing you ever did? Ask God for the same courage when you face those kinds of choices in the future.

»fri

Read Proverbs 10:17. Discipline is as essential to the growing Christian as training is to the committed athlete. What are the best 10 to 15 minutes of your day? Consider giving that time to God by focusing on Him. Ask the Lord to help you be consistent.

»sat

Ideally, everyone should continue to learn throughout their life. Do you remember your perception of God when you were 10? Has it changed? If so, how? Thank God for the spiritual growth you have experienced.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

—Proverbs 1:7

# WHO SAID THIS?

**a** “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.”

**B** “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”

**C** “Before God, we are all equally wise—equally foolish.”

**D** “You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.”

**e** “By all means marry. If you get a good wife you will become very happy; if you get a bad one, you will become a philosopher—and that is good for any man.”

# WORD TO THE WISE

## WISDOM ABOUT WISDOM

How would you fill in the following quotes about wisdom? The original words can be found in small print on the right.

1. The wise learn from \_\_\_\_\_; the foolish merely repeat it.  
—Michael Novak
2. The Lord set limits on man’s wisdom, but none on his \_\_\_\_\_.  
—Konrad Adenauer, former chancellor of West Germany
3. Nine-tenths of wisdom is being wise in \_\_\_\_\_.  
—Teddy Roosevelt
4. The wisdom of this world is \_\_\_\_\_ in God’s sight.  
—The apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 3:19

IF SOMEONE WANTED TO QUOTE YOU, WHAT WISE SAYING WOULD YOU GIVE THEM?

Answers: A. Solomon, Proverbs 11:22; B. Benjamin Franklin; C. Albert Einstein; D. Abraham Lincoln; E. Socrates; 1. tragedy; 2. stupidity; 3. time; 4. foolishness

# 2 women, 2 paths

Proverbs 7:6-23; 8:1-20

One of the purposes of Proverbs is to give advice on acting wisely in relationships. Near the beginning of the book, we see two characters—the adulteress, or Temptation, and Wisdom—two women who do their best to capture the attention of people who are looking for answers.

## Who would you follow?

Read the references below, and fill in the information about each character.

### ▶ TEMPTATION

#### Read Proverbs 7:6-23.

- ▶ Qualifications: (What sort of character reference would you give her?)
- ▶ Temptation's promises:
- ▶ Solomon's recommendation: (See Proverbs 7:24-27.)

### ▶ WISDOM

#### Read Proverbs 8:1-20.

- ▶ Qualifications: (What sort of character reference would you give her?)
- ▶ Wisdom's promises:
- ▶ Solomon's recommendation: (See Proverbs 7:1-5.)

#### Proverbs 7:6-23

<sup>6</sup>At the window of my house I looked down through the lattice. <sup>7</sup>I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense. <sup>8</sup>He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house <sup>9</sup>at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. <sup>10</sup>Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. <sup>11</sup>(She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at home; <sup>12</sup>now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.) <sup>13</sup>She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: <sup>14</sup>"Today I fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home. <sup>15</sup>So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! <sup>16</sup>I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. <sup>17</sup>I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. <sup>18</sup>Come, let's drink deeply of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! <sup>19</sup>My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. <sup>20</sup>He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon." <sup>21</sup>With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. <sup>22</sup>All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose <sup>23</sup>till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

#### Proverbs 8:1-20

<sup>1</sup>Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? <sup>2</sup>At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; <sup>3</sup>beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud: <sup>4</sup>"To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. <sup>5</sup>You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it. <sup>6</sup>Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. <sup>7</sup>My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. <sup>8</sup>All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. <sup>9</sup>To the discerning all of them are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge. <sup>10</sup>Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, <sup>11</sup>for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. <sup>12</sup>I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. <sup>13</sup>To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. <sup>14</sup>Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. <sup>15</sup>By me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; <sup>16</sup>by me princes govern, and nobles—all who rule on earth. <sup>17</sup>I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. <sup>18</sup>With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. <sup>19</sup>My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. <sup>20</sup>I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice."

»mon

What ranks first in your life? Ask God to help you pursue things He considers valuable, like wisdom, though it costs you all you have.

»tues

Someone tells a dumb joke and then asks, “Do you get it?” Wisdom’s no joke—Solomon tells us here to sell all we have, if necessary, to “get it.” Pray for the gift of wisdom.

»wed

How much of your money goes toward things that will make you wiser? Draw up a wisdom “budget” today and bring it to God. Think about ways you can get a better return on your daily investments.

»thurs

Read Matthew 13:44-46. Usually, the more something costs, the more valuable it is. Has following Jesus ever cost you anything—perhaps some pride or maybe even a friend? Praise God for the value He places upon His relationship with you.

»fri

Read Proverbs 3:5-6. To play a game, it’s essential to understand the rules. Ask someone to explain something you don’t understand about God or the Bible. Thank

God for the freedom to question and discover truth for yourself.

»sat

What would you be willing to pay in order to understand everything about God? Make a list of everything you own; check off the things you’d be willing to exchange for God’s wisdom. Ask God for the courage to pay the price when it comes to growing in your relationship with Him.

The beginning of wisdom is this:  
Get wisdom.  
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.  
—Proverbs 4:7

# EXPOSED

“These people make a big deal out of saying the right thing, but their hearts aren’t in it. Because they act like they’re worshiping me but don’t mean it. I’m going to step in and shock them awake, astonish them, stand them on their ears. The wise ones who had it all figured out will be exposed as fools. The smart people who thought they knew everything will turn out to know nothing” (Isa. 29:12-14 MSG).

The Old Testament prophets were loud and blunt. Isaiah gets right to the point. Don’t be hypocrites! God knows the difference between counterfeit Christianity and the real thing. You can’t fake it. God knows your inner motives—if you’re only doing the Christian thing for show, well...get ready for a shake-up.

First turns out to be last. Up turns out to be down. In literature, it’s called a paradox, but the Bible is full of this principle—what you see isn’t always what you get. In this passage, it’s clear that

all believers will eventually be exposed for who they really are. It’s important to trust and listen to wise counsel, but not all advice is God-made. Whose wisdom are you following? Read the entire chapter of Isaiah 29 to learn more about the Israelites who forged ahead with their own plans and forgot who was in charge.

Sometimes it’s easy to look “Christian” on the outside but have doubts deep down about the whole faith thing. Look at Isaiah 29:12-14 again. It’s clear that God despises falsehood, so—heed this warning. Use these verses as a simple reminder that genuineness is important to God. If Jesus is in you—you can be a great example to both the “so-called Christians” and the down-right pagans.

What’s most important? Follow God’s commands to be salt and light in a dying world. That’s as real as real can be. If that’s you, God’s taking notice. He always sees truth and rewards it.

momma always said . . .

# CHEATERS NEVER WIN AND WINNEERS NEVER CHEAT.

What planet was Momma  
Talkin' About?

It probably won't wear you out physically, but feeling like the only person on the planet committed to living a clean life—devoid of lying and cheating—can be like jogging up the down escalator, with a bunch of linebackers charging toward you.

Why do so many teenagers cheat, many times showing little or no remorse?

- ▶ They don't think it's wrong
- ▶ They're busy
- ▶ It's easy
- ▶ The pressure to cheat is too intense
- ▶ Everyone else cheats

BY MIKE CHIAPPERINO



Technology has opened a huge door for cheating. The Internet, with its copy-and-paste culture, offers an easy way to plagiarize. Students sneak cellphones into class and textmessage test answers across the room—or use digital photos of “cheat sheets” from their notes.

The lure to cheat is further fueled by America’s winner-take-all mentality...in sports, finance, and entertainment. Our culture loves a winner... and rewards the victor with fame and fortune. The downside? There’s a perception that being number two makes people losers. This must-win message breeds people who are desperate to win at any cost. Sadly, this epidemic of cheating has reached the church.

Some of those lies in a cheating culture are: *Everyone cheats; it’s not so bad; I deserve a break; etc.* What lies do you believe? Ask God for the truth and search it for yourself, too.

Stay alert. Temptation to cheat is all around you but so is God. Never forget God is there. Tell Him about your temptation and what you think and feel. He knows and can handle it.

Nothing is irredeemable. But every step taken is a step taken either toward holiness...or away from it. If you’ve ever cheated, you can be forgiven. What’s the next step you’re going to take?

## MONICA'S STORY

It started innocently enough. On Monday night, Monica’s babysitting job turned disastrous. The twin toddlers got the stomach flu, and the study time she was banking on turned into a nightmare.

On Tuesday night, Monica had agreed to swap shifts with a co-volunteer at the hospital. Monica really enjoyed volunteering—and she desperately needed the community service hours—but throughout the four-hour shift, she could feel her stress level rising. She wasn’t ready for the big French exam in the morning.

When she finished her shift, she raced home and headed for her room to study, but minutes after starting, she was out cold. Before she knew it, she was face-to-face with a killer French exam. Monica could fake it on a couple of short essays, and she had a pretty good handle on conjugating the verbs in this unit, but the vocab section was blowing her away. She just hadn’t had time to memorize those definitions. But, she was relieved to discover the test had a multiple choice section, so at least she could guess.

Monica felt her heart pounding and her academic future passing before her eyes. If she didn’t ace this test, her class ranking would tank, she’d lose her chance to be valedictorian, and all that scholarship money would be gone forever. In her mind’s eye, she could see the look of disappointment on her dad’s face when she came in second—or maybe third! *How could I have fallen asleep?* she asked herself again and again.

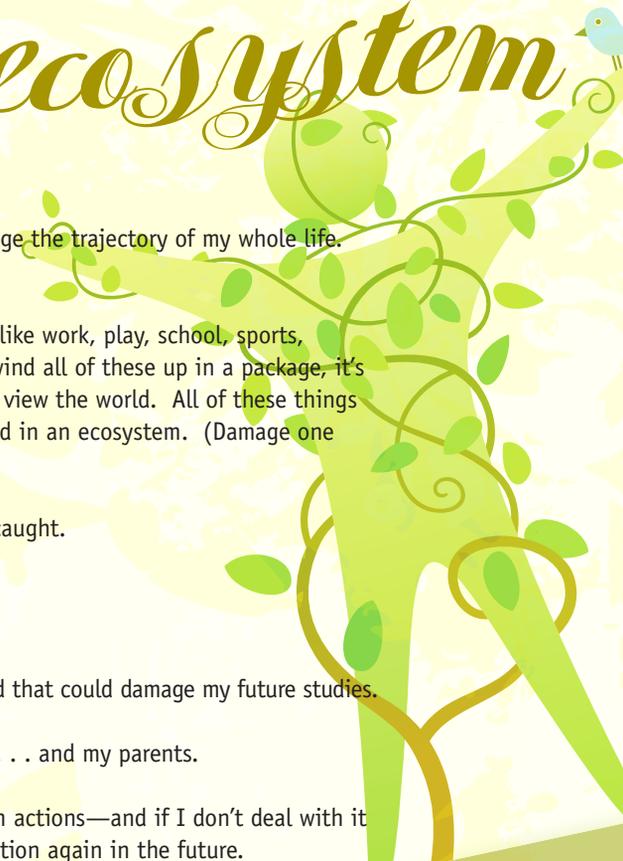
Certain that most of her guesses were wrong, Monica flipped her paper over and waited for the torture to end. Glancing at the clock on the wall, she noticed that class would be over in nine minutes. She also noticed Ben’s eyes scanning Jeremy’s answers. Through their high school years, Ben was one of the two people who had given Monica stiff competition in everything from chemistry to American Lit. In that moment, Monica wondered if cheating was his secret weapon. Maybe that’s what gave him the edge.

Her heart pounding, Monica had only eight minutes to make a decision that could change everything. On both sides of her were hard-working students with their multiple choice answers visible. It would be easy enough to do what she was watching Ben do. By the time she left class, Monica wondered if she’d ever sleep soundly again. She was confident she’d get at least a low A on the test, but she felt like a loser.

Monica had been more concerned about letting her dad down than her heavenly Father. Regret filled her heart, and she knew she wasn’t done with this test after all. The true test of her character was yet to come.



# My personal ecosystem



**Cheating has the power** to change the trajectory of my whole life. It's not a one-time deal with no consequences.

My life is an ecosystem made up of interdependent parts—like work, play, school, sports, friends, family, fun activities, church, and so on. When I wind all of these up in a package, it's the whole me—my hopes, dreams, value system, the way I view the world. All of these things are interdependent in me—just like everything is connected in an ecosystem. (Damage one part in an ecosystem, and the whole thing will suffer.)

When I cheat, I have a whole lot more to fear than being caught.

## *When I cheat:*

- ▶ Guilt begins to brew and fester in me.
- ▶ I may short-circuit my own learning process . . . and that could damage my future studies.
- ▶ I've risked my trust relationship with my teachers . . . and my parents.
- ▶ I've rewired my heart and mind to condone my own actions—and if I don't deal with it soon, it'll become even easier to give in to temptation again in the future.
- ▶ It changes what others think of me if they notice my cheating. It can damage my Christian testimony.

## DIGGING DEEPER

God's way is the best way. Explore these Scriptures to learn how to tap into God's power and combat the urge to cheat.

Matthew 5:13-15

Galatians 5:16-26

Mark 7:14-23

Galatians 6:7

Romans 6:12-13

Philippians 1:27

Romans 12:1-2

Philippians 4:8-9

# Personal Proverbs

A PROVERB is simply a short, easy-to-remember word of advice. The Book of Proverbs is full of these wisdom tidbits. Telling proverbs has been a common way to express advice in many cultures throughout history.

A good way to remember biblical truths is to write your own proverbs. Think about some of the principles from God's Word that relate to each of the topics on this page; then, with a little originality, turn those principles into proverbs. Here's an example:

Getting Advice:  
"Collect opinions before making major decisions."

- Proverb Topics:
- Relationships
  - Parents
  - Sex
  - Friends
  - Temptation
  - Spiritual Growth
  - Getting Advice

# out of the heart

Proverbs 16:16-24, 27-28

*For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.*  
—Matthew 12:34b-35

With these words, Jesus corrected the common misunderstanding that good and evil simply come from somewhere “out there,” from the environment in which we grew up, or the society of which we are now a part. No, good or bad comes from within and eventually manifests itself in what comes out of our mouths.

So, we need to do more than just watch what we say. Our attitudes and thoughts ultimately determine our words, no matter how much control over our mouths we think we have. If we want to change our speech, we need to change our hearts.

Proverbs 16 talks about two qualities that go well together: wisdom and humility.

## ▶ Read Proverbs 16:16-17.

- ▶ Solomon was one of the richest men in the world. Why do you think he put so much value on wisdom?
- ▶ Some people say that strong Christians should be able to handle any evil that comes their way. Do you think this is true? Why is it important to guard our hearts by avoiding evil?

## ▶ Read Proverbs 16:18-19.

- ▶ What is the difference between “good” pride, like taking pride in your work, and the pride that Solomon speaks of?

## ▶ Read Proverbs 16:20-22.

- ▶ What usually happens to people who don’t take instruction seriously?
- ▶ Put these proverbs in your own words.

## ▶ Read Proverbs 16:23-24.

- ▶ How does a person’s heart direct what that person says?
- ▶ How can an encouraging word act like a medicine to someone who is discouraged?

## Proverbs 16:16-24, 27-28

<sup>16</sup>How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!

<sup>17</sup>The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives. <sup>18</sup>Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. <sup>19</sup>Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

<sup>20</sup>Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. <sup>21</sup>The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction. <sup>22</sup>Prudence is a fountain of life to the prudent, but folly brings punishment to fools. <sup>23</sup>The hearts of the wise make their mouths prudent, and their lips promote instruction.

<sup>24</sup>Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. . . .

<sup>27</sup>A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips is like a scorching fire. <sup>28</sup>A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

## ▶ Read Proverbs 16:27-28.

In the same way that a wise man’s heart directs his words (16:23), so the evil man’s words are directed by what is inside of him.

- ▶ What kind of damage can evil words do?

» mon

True righteousness comes from God. Tell a friend today about something God has done for you. Ask the Lord for true humility.

» tues

Read Matthew 12:35-37. Words can either help or hurt. Look for an opportunity today to offer some helping words to someone. Thank God for the ability to build people with your words.

» wed

Taking sides is easy. Being just—or fair—is usually more difficult. Is there someone who is being treated unjustly for whom you need to speak up? Pray for the courage to speak out on that person's behalf (Prov. 31:8-9).

» thurs

Read Psalm 37:31. Take a minute and write down what's in your heart and on your mind. Ask God to guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

» fri

Everyone "slips" every now and then. But are you walking in slippery places spiritually? Think about the people, places, and activities that can lead you into sin. Pray for the strength to avoid them.

» sat

The laws of God are guidelines for an abundant life. List the laws of God that you're familiar with. Thank God for giving you boundaries to live within.

The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip.  
—Psalm 37:30-31

TIME SLICE  
Solomon

Solomon was the last of only three kings to rule over a united Israel.

**The Queen of Sheba** figures big in Solomon's legend. She was a well-known Ethiopian who heard of the wisdom of Solomon and left her land to meet him. See 1 Kings 10:1-13.

Solomon lived at the turn of the millennium—the 1st millennium B.C., that is.

This was the beginning of the Iron Age, when countries with iron weapons found that it was much easier to conquer countries who still only had bronze weapons.

Ancient Japan had just started to cultivate rice. But they wouldn't come up with sushi for another couple of millennia. In China, the Zhou dynasty claimed to have "the mandate of heaven," that the gods decided they should rule China. People believed them, partly because the Zhou slaughtered anyone who didn't.

# IM Acronyms



New acronyms are needed. 'Cause here's the thing: if you're gonna be trite, be trite in a new way. So, what do you think of this acronym list:

**hijd?** – How's it jamming, dude? (A quick way to start the conversation.)

**ylolf!** – Your laptop's on fire! (Because, if this ever happened, you wouldn't want to waste a lot of time with superfluous letters. Same reason "help" is a one-syllable word.)

**ilicifdicmliwgte** – I laughed, I cried, I fell down, it changed my life, it was good, the end. (This is how we should review all books and movies from now on.)

How about:

**imvso** – In my vastly superior opinion.

**tgit** – thank God it's temporary

**tgiu** – thank God I'm unique

**tgfc** – thank God for chips

But seriously, if you're gonna thank God for something, make it something important.

How about:

**lshcmicoomn** – laughing so hard chocolate milk is coming out of my nose (This should always be immediately followed with a clarifying acronym):

**yiwdcm** – yes I was drinking chocolate milk

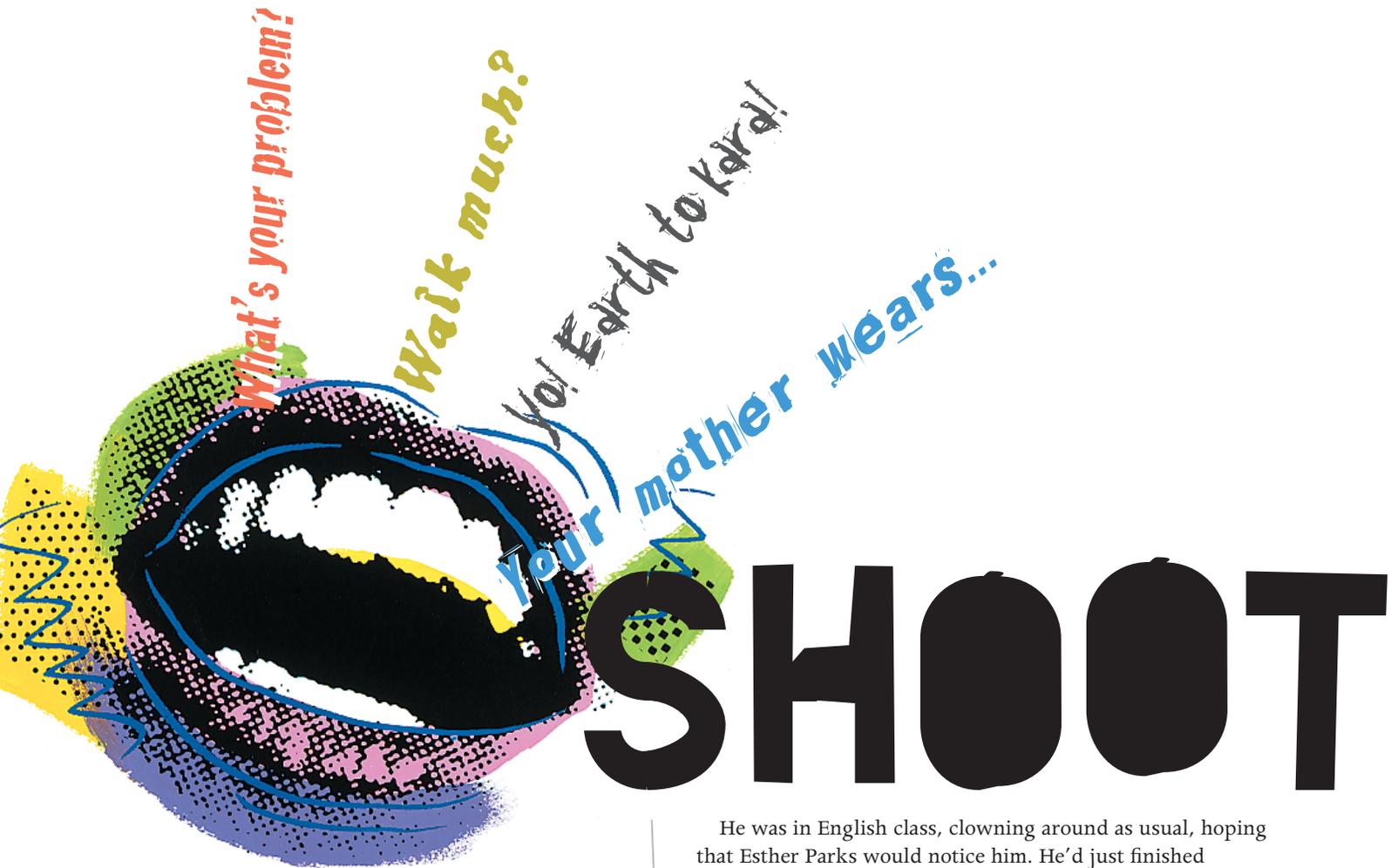
**niwdcm** – no I wasn't drinking chocolate milk (in which case you'd better call the emergency room, and stat, because—ered to you, my brother—you are *really* funny.)

And finally, the two most dangerous ways to start any text (or article):

**sttg**... – so there's this girl/guy...

**siwt**... – so I was thinking...

Speaking of which, I've gotta end this. sttg...



“Listen to the words of Solomon,” Pastor Long began.

*“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Prov. 12:18).*

*Ain’t that the truth!* thought Jake McCormick, remembering the events of the past two weeks. Obviously God had a sense of humor, leading the pastor to preach about the tongue after all that had happened. As the pastor continued, Jake’s mind wandered back to how innocently everything had started.

He was in English class, clowning around as usual, hoping that Esther Parks would notice him. He’d just finished imitating the teacher behind his back when Esther grinned and slipped him a note asking him to walk her to her locker after class. And just like that, they fell into the routine of sitting together at lunch and in the classes they shared. One day, tongue-in-cheek, Jake asked Esther what a girl like her saw in a guy like him.

“You make me laugh,” she replied, a little more seriously than he expected. “I need that right now because I’m going through a lot of bad stuff.”

“Like what?” Jake asked.

“My parents are getting a divorce,” Esther explained. “And they’re fighting over custody of my brother and me. It’s awful, and I just want to forget about it sometimes. You help me do that.”

Jake vowed then and there to do his best to keep her laughing. He also secretly hoped she’d fall in love with him in the process. For about a week, he thought he was making progress. Then one of his buddies ruined everything.

“Hey, McCormick,” his friend joked as he passed the table where Esther and Jake were eating lunch, “either ask her out or move aside and give someone else a chance.”

Embarrassed, Jake shot back without thinking, “Get in line, pal. Everyone wants Esther. Even her folks are fighting over her.”

As his friend continued by laughing, Jake turned back to find Esther angrily gathering up her tray and books. “What’s the matter? Where are you going?”

“As far away from you as possible,” Esther snapped.

“Why? What did I do?”

“What I told you about my parents was private,” she hissed. “I didn’t expect you to turn it into a joke.”

Despite his attempts to explain, Esther would have nothing to do with him. When Jake walked into history class after lunch, he found her surrounded by a crowd of girlfriends who glared at him whenever he glanced their way. One of them was waiting for him at his locker the next morning.

“Esther told me what you said about me,” the heavysset girl coldly informed him. “That I shouldn’t be allowed to have any classes on the second floor because I might crash through the ceiling. You

think you’re so funny, don’t you? At least I can lose weight; you’ll always be a jerk!”

Before Jake could respond, the girl stalked away. Furious at Esther for repeating what he’d said, he called after the girl, “She laughed when I said that, you know. Some friend, huh?” Then he got his things from his locker and went about his business, trying to ignore the angry whispers of Esther’s friends.

Two days of this was all Jake could take, and he finally went to his father for advice. After explaining the situation, he asked, “Should I tell her I’m sorry?”

“Be specific about what you’re apologizing for,” Mr. McCormick replied. “You have a tendency to

# ING OFF



**Be specific about  
what you're  
apologizing for.**

talk before you think. Being funny comes naturally to you, son. But sometimes you go over the line. Getting a laugh becomes so important that you can wind up hurting people’s feelings. You upset Esther with what you said, so she turned her friends against you. Was a laugh worth all that?”

Jake thought about it and decided no. The next morning at school, he met Esther as she got off her bus.

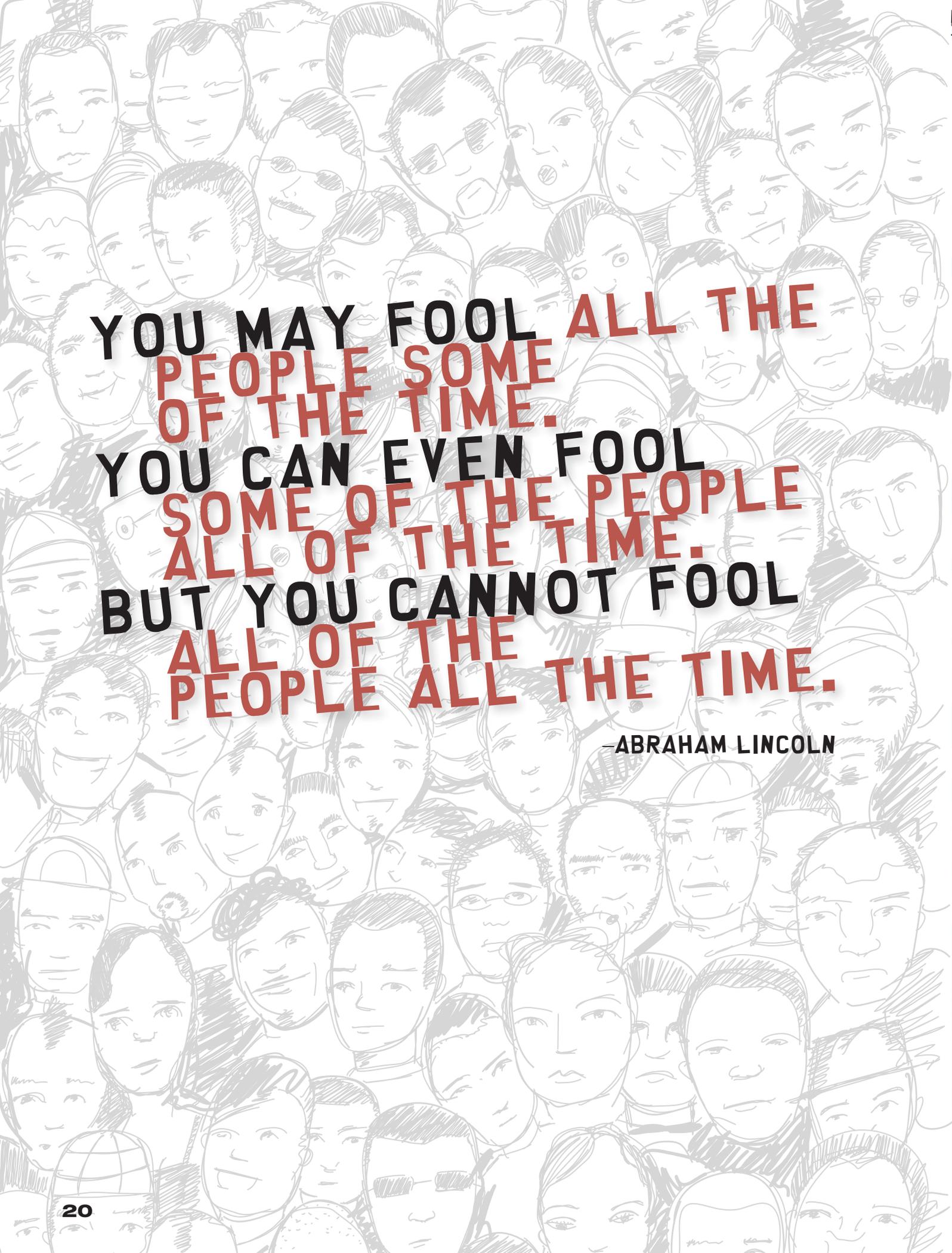
“Esther, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m sorry I said what I did. If you give me another chance, I promise to think before I open my mouth.”

As they stood there, Esther’s overweight friend brushed by them without speaking. Esther sighed. “I’m sorry too. I shouldn’t have told my friends the things you said about them. I was angry, and I wanted to get back at you. Now Julie isn’t talking to me because you told her I laughed about the ceiling joke.” She smiled sadly. “What a mess, huh?”

“Yeah,” Jake agreed. “But not one that can’t be fixed. You tell me who I need to apologize to—I’ll start with Julie.”

Jake forced his wandering thoughts back to the present. He turned to his left after being nudged in the side.

“Good sermon, huh?” Esther whispered. Jake nodded and grinned. “One I wish I would’ve heard last week.”



**YOU MAY FOOL ALL THE  
PEOPLE SOME  
OF THE TIME.  
YOU CAN EVEN FOOL  
SOME OF THE PEOPLE  
ALL OF THE TIME.  
BUT YOU CANNOT FOOL  
ALL OF THE  
PEOPLE ALL THE TIME.**

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

# student counsel

## Selections from Proverbs

**So—What’s the best advice** you were ever given? Advice helps us to avoid mistakes that other people have made.

Solomon was the king of advice givers. God had made him the wisest man in history. But Solomon also made mistakes. A *lot* of mistakes. Which he learned from.

### ▶ Read Proverbs 22:17-21.

- ▶ What do you know about Solomon that would make him qualified to make these statements about his teachings?

### ▶ Read Proverbs 23:4-5.

- ▶ Solomon was not only one of the wisest but also one of the wealthiest men in history. What do you think would lead him to say something like this about money?

### ▶ Read Proverbs 23:17-21.

- ▶ Here’s some advice for potential partyers. What two reasons does Solomon give for not hanging out with people who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat? How do you see these things happening?

### ▶ Read Proverbs 24:3-6.

- ▶ Solomon uses the metaphor of a house to describe wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. What are some of the “rare and beautiful treasures” that wisdom, understanding, and knowledge can give us?

#### Proverbs 22:17-21

<sup>17</sup>Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, <sup>18</sup>for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. <sup>19</sup>So that your trust may be in the LORD, I teach you today, even you. <sup>20</sup>Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, <sup>21</sup>teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth, so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?

#### Proverbs 23:4-5, 17-21

<sup>4</sup>Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness. <sup>5</sup>Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. . . .

<sup>17</sup>Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. <sup>18</sup>There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. <sup>19</sup>Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path. <sup>20</sup>Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, <sup>21</sup>for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

#### Proverbs 24:3-6

<sup>3</sup>By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; <sup>4</sup>through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. <sup>5</sup>The wise prevail through great power, and those who have knowledge muster their strength.

<sup>6</sup>Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.

»mon

Read Proverbs 12:5. Have you ever wondered why so many people write for advice from a columnist they've never met? Who do you turn to when you need help? Thank God for people whose advice you can trust.

»tues

It's normal when beginning a new game to read the instructions first. Think about something you'll be doing in the near future that will be new for you. See if you can't find some instruction on it in the Bible. Ask the Lord to instruct you as the time for this new thing approaches.

»wed

People have grown used to seeing immediate results. On the other hand, good growth takes time. Look at some pictures to see how you've changed over the years. Ask God for patience as you continue to grow spiritually.

»thurs

Do you ever think of turning to the Bible when someone asks you for counsel? Say a friend needed some advice on how to get along with his father. Where in the Bible would you direct him? Ask God to help you find the answers when you need them.

»fri

Read Proverbs 11:14. List five people you think are wise in the biblical sense. Pray for each of them by name.

»sat

Choose a wise person from yesterday's list and write an encouraging note. Tell this person one way his or her wisdom has helped you. Thank God for placing this person in your life.

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.  
—Proverbs 19:20

# TIMELESS GUIDANCE

**T**ake a guess as to how old these quotes are—you might be surprised to see who wrote them (loosely translated, of course).

One thing's for sure: good advice is timeless.

- A. *The smartest people in the world are those who know how dumb they are.*  
SOCRATES, AROUND 404 B.C.
- B. *He who blows off learning when he is young repeats the mistakes of the past, and has no hope for the future.*  
EURIPIDES, AROUND 452 B.C.
- C. *Image is not everything.*  
AESOP, AROUND 550 B.C.
- D. *No wisdom = no happiness.*  
SOPHOCLES, AROUND 466 B.C.
- E. *Education is the best social security.*  
ARISTOTLE, AROUND 344 B.C.
- F. *Wisdom depends more on attitude than age.*  
PLAUTUS, AROUND 200 B.C.
- G. *Nothing is too difficult to understand for those who don't give up.*  
TERENCE, AROUND 185 B.C.

# your friend, your self

Selections from Proverbs

Perhaps you've heard the saying "You are what you eat." When it comes to friendships, you are who you hang out with. Friends have a powerful influence on each other, usually more than they realize. It's the same for a good example as well as for a bad one. Choosing the people we hang out with has a major influence on how we turn out. As they say about the movies, discretion is advised.

## ▶ Read today's Lesson Scripture.

- ▶ List the characteristics of people you should avoid as friends.
- ▶ What kinds of things will happen to you if these types of people are included in your circle of friends?
- ▶ Name three of the most popular ways of being enticed to do something that is wrong.

## ▶ Read Proverbs 13:20; 18:24; 27:9.

- List the characteristics of people who would make good friends.
- ▶ What kinds of things will happen to you if these types of people are included in your circle of friends?
  - ▶ What kinds of things encourage loyalty between friends?

## ▶ Read Proverbs 18:24.

- ▶ Why is it hard to maintain several deep friendships?

## ▶ Read Proverbs 19:4, 6-7.

- ▶ How can money perpetuate an illusion of a strong friendship?

### Proverbs 1:10-15

<sup>10</sup>My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them. <sup>11</sup>If they say, "Come along with us; let's lie in wait for innocent blood, let's ambush some harmless soul; <sup>12</sup>let's swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; <sup>13</sup>we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; <sup>14</sup>cast lots with us; we will all share the loot!" <sup>15</sup>My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths;

### Proverbs 13:20

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

### Proverbs 18:24

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

### Proverbs 19:4, 6-7

<sup>4</sup>Wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor person deserts them. <sup>6</sup>Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of one who gives gifts. <sup>7</sup>The poor are shunned by all their relatives—how much more do their friends avoid them! Though the poor pursue them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

### Proverbs 22:24-25

<sup>24</sup>Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, <sup>25</sup>or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.

### Proverbs 27:9

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice.

»mon

"You are who you hang out with." Think about your friends. How do they think and act? Ask God to help you honestly look at and listen to them today.

»tues

Who is your best friend? What does your choice of a best friend say about the kind of person you are? Ask God to bless your friend this week.

»wed

Who has the stronger influence in your friendships—you or those you hang out with? Write down one way you can influence your friends for Christ this week. Pray for the courage to be a godly influence on your friends.

»thurs

When was the last time you got into trouble with friends? Were you aware of what was happening or were you just going along with the crowd? Think about whether or not these are friends you need to avoid. Pray for guidance to make the right decision.

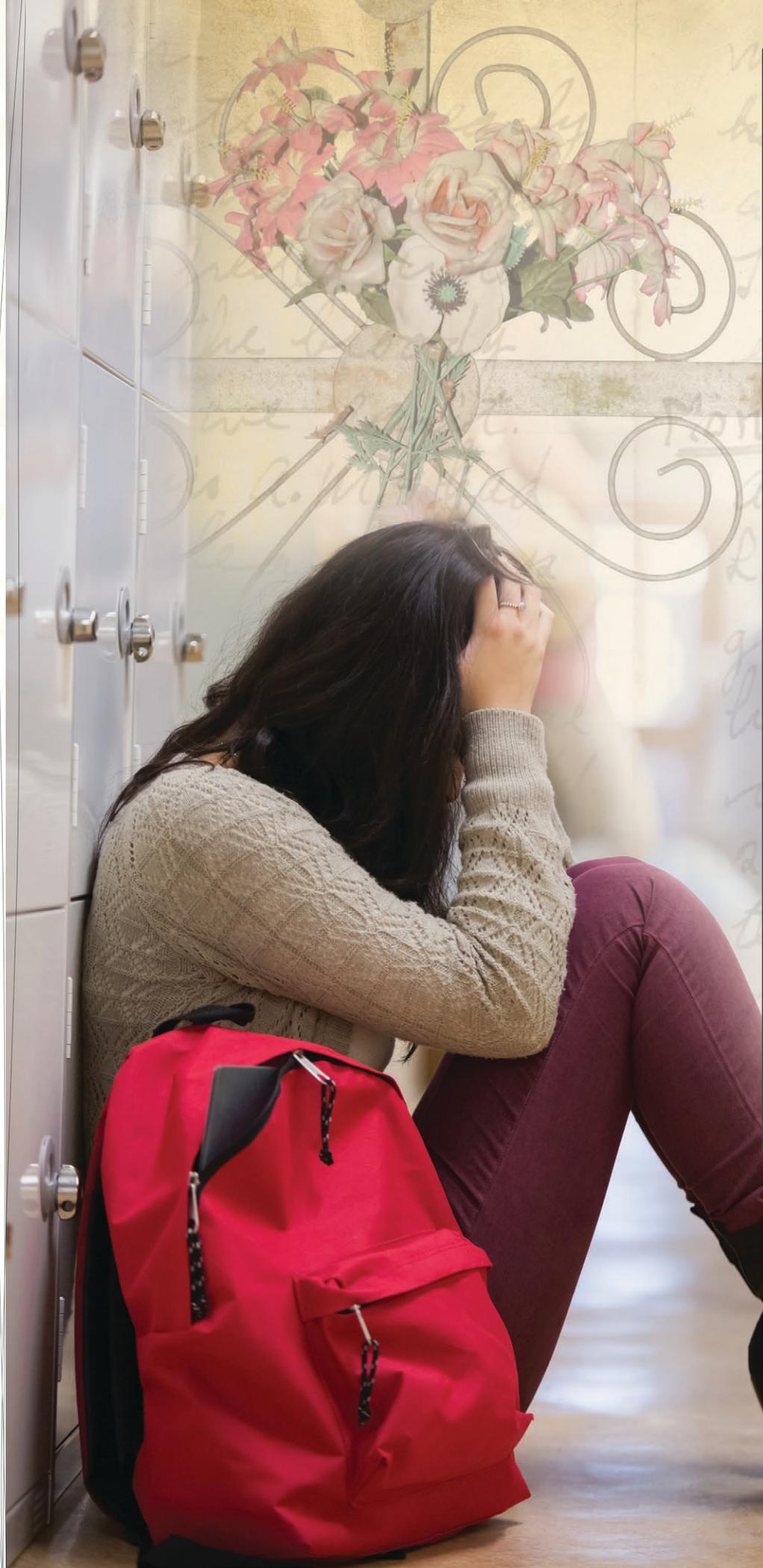
»fri

Loyalty is a big issue in friendship. Sometimes people will appeal to loyalty when asking you to compromise yourself. Ask God to help you develop a loyalty for your friends that would never dishonor Him.

»sat

You've heard it said, "Birds of a feather flock together." What kind of birds best describes your friends? Eagles full of dignity and strength? Vultures who feed on others' misfortunes? Pray that you and your friends are what God would have you to be.

Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.  
—Proverbs 13:20



# THE DAY MY LIFE STOPPED

by Lisa Sandeen (age 15)

On November 30th, I woke up expecting it to be like every other day. I got up slowly from my bed and went upstairs to get ready for school. After 30 minutes or so of trying to get my hair and clothes just right, I was finally ready. When we pulled up to the front of the school, I put on my backpack and walked up to the main doors. As soon as those double doors opened, a very awkward feeling came over me, but I thought nothing of it. As I walked past the library to sophomore hall, a cloud of sadness hovered over my classmates. I noticed that everyone was crying and holding onto each other as if they never wanted to let go. I stopped and asked a friend what had happened. He just said, "Look," and pointed to a locker across the hall. On it were signs that said, "We will forever miss you," and, "We will never forget you." Right then and there my heart fell into my stomach, and my entire body went into shock.

We had no idea what had happened for sure. All we knew was that one of our former classmates had chosen to take her life. Right then one of my close friends gave me a bracelet to remember her by. By the time first period came along, we were all in disbelief that she was really gone. We all wanted to know why and if there was something we could have done. But only one person knows why she did what she did and what was racing through her mind. We will never know because that person is no longer with us.

To tell you the truth, I felt guilty for not sharing my faith with her, with all the opportunities I had. But now there was nothing any of us could do. During study hall not a single sophomore was able to talk without shaking or move without trembling. Everyone was hugging one another no matter what "clique" they were in. We all just threw our grudges and our hatred away and leaned on each other for emotional and mental support. It took a person to die for us to realize not to take life for granted. It really opened our eyes to see that God has blessed us with life. No matter how hard we try to make the pain and depression go away. I know I speak for everyone when I say we will never forget the loved friend we lost.

Because of this tragedy, I couldn't help but realize that not even the happiest of people are truly happy. They are just very good at covering up their pain with what they think will make them complete. Most of the time, the void in their lives is a friend or a loving parent. You never know who might be going through a rough time and just needs a smile or a hug. So, before you get up from your seat, tell someone you appreciate them or even just smile. 'Cause you never know if that could be the last time you'll ever see the person again.

**Lisa writes from her heart about the pain and loss she felt upon learning of her friend's suicide. If you or someone you know has contemplated suicide, it is imperative to get help from a trusted adult who can direct you to a professional counselor.**



# REAL COMMUNITY

When I was 18, I was so ready to go to college. I couldn't wait to live in the dorm, stay up late, have deep conversations, and watch girl movies. Also, I was positive I'd find a deep sense of community with my new best friends.

Well, I definitely stayed up late, watched some great movies, and had some deep conversations, but something else happened that disappointed me. I did not become best friends with everybody on my floor. Though I was living in community with other Christian girls, I didn't feel super close to them. I wondered if something was wrong with me, or with them. It turns out we were all pretty normal. I just had a few things to learn about the culture of Christian community.

First, being in community doesn't necessarily give you warm fuzzies. Consider what the Bible says about how we should act in community: Honor others above yourself (Rom. 12:10). Be completely humble and gentle; be patient (Eph. 4:2). Doing these things doesn't necessarily feel good at first. The benefits come later when you are able to live really well with each other.

Second, real community doesn't mean you'll be best friends with everyone. First Corinthians 12 talks about how there are different kinds of people in the Body of Christ. Since this is true, there are going to be some people you connect with more than others. That's OK. Community needs a variety of people and relationships to function properly.

Finally, community doesn't "just happen." It takes work. You have to earn people's trust—and learn to trust others. You have to be honest and open up to each other. Serve one another humbly in love (Gal. 5:13). These things take effort, but the resulting community is definitely worth it!

**BE COMPLETELY HUMBLE AND GENTLE.  
BE PATIENT, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.  
(EPH. 4:2)**

# FRIEND TIPS



## **BE FRIENDLY**

Say hello. Smile. Show interest in what others are doing. Basically, treat them as you'd like to be treated.

## **OPEN UP SLOWLY**

Initially, stick with talking about everyday stuff—the weather, the latest sports, current music. Deeper conversations will come naturally as a closer friendship develops.

## **LISTEN**

Make eye contact when someone is talking to you. Ask questions and wait patiently for a response.

## **SAY A GOOD WORD**

People appreciate a sincere compliment. Find something good to say about your new friend—and say it.

## **LAUGH**

A good sense of humor goes a long way in building a solid friendship.

## **RESPECT A PERSON'S SPACE**

All people need time for themselves or for other friends. Don't wear out your welcome.

## **KEEP CONFIDENCES**

As friendship develops, it's tempting to tell others something your new friend said in confidence. That's gossip. Don't do it.

## **REMEMBER IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS**

When you remember someone's birthday or send an encouraging text on the day of a big test, it means a great deal. Sometimes lockers are just screaming for decoration. Be tactful and thoughtful and let your friend know you care.

## **DON'T GET DISCOURAGED**

Don't wish for friendship; attempt to make new friends instead. Everyone needs a friend, and it's easier to do the more you practice. You have something unique to offer another human being. That in itself is pretty amazing.

# Friends Forever QUIZ

A good friend can make the difference in how we respond to life.

**But bad friends can also make a difference.**

In many ways, we're shaped by who we hang out with. That's why the Bible has so much to say about friends—how to choose them, keep them, and be the right kind of friend to them.

In the columns below, write the names of one to three of your best friends. Then read the following characteristics, and check off the ones that apply to these friends. Put your name in the fourth column. Check off the ones that are true of you.

Each characteristic listed comes from the book of Proverbs.

Don't use this checklist as a way of pointing out your friends' faults. Use it as a tool to help you evaluate your friendships, improve them, and start new ones. Use it also to evaluate yourself as a friend, and to learn how to become a better one.

## Proverb Characteristic

	friend 1	friend 2	friend 3	me
Doesn't pressure you to do the wrong thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't go along when others do wrong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't give in easily to peer pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't hang around with the wrong crowd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spends time with wise people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't try to be good friends with everyone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would still be your friend if your world fell apart	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Isn't your friend just because you're generous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doesn't have a hot temper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cares enough to confront you when you're wrong	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Filling the void

Selections from Ecclesiastes

As a young man, Solomon set high goals for himself, and in each of them he placed God first. But as he grew older, he lowered his goals until success and his own happiness became the controlling motivation of his life. God was no longer so important. Finally, as an old man, Solomon speaks in the Book of Ecclesiastes. In his quest to get the most out of life, he had forgotten that God was the only lasting source of satisfaction.

## ▶ Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-3.

- ▶ Perhaps we could think of “The Teacher” as a type of debater. In a debate, it is necessary to establish a problem to resolve. What problem has been introduced?

## ▶ Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-4, 10-11.

- ▶ If Solomon had lived in our time, what would he have pursued in his search for pleasure?
- ▶ What would explain Solomon’s emptiness after an incredibly successful life?

## ▶ Read Ecclesiastes 11:8—12:1, 6-7.

- ▶ What advice was Solomon giving to people your age?
- ▶ Why did Solomon balance his advice to go wherever your heart leads with the reminder that God will one day judge all you do?
- ▶ Why do you think Solomon urged young people to grow as much as possible in their relationship with God before they meet the difficulties of adulthood?

### Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup>The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: <sup>2</sup>“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

<sup>3</sup>What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

### 2:1-4, 10-11

<sup>1</sup>I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. <sup>2</sup>“Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” <sup>3</sup>I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

<sup>4</sup>I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. . . .

<sup>10</sup>I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. <sup>11</sup>Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

### 11:8-10

<sup>8</sup>However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. <sup>9</sup>You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. <sup>10</sup>So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.

### 12:1, 6-7

<sup>1</sup>Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them”—

<sup>6</sup>Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

»mon

Courtroom dramas make for popular television shows. People enjoy hearing a judge make a decision after all the evidence is in. This week's passage examines the evidence concerning life and expresses that the only important thing is knowing and obeying God. Do you believe that? Talk with God about your relationship with Him.

»tues

Advertisers continually tell you what will make you happy—new jeans, a certain brand of soda, some shade of lipstick. The next time you watch television, notice how many conflicting opinions there are about what will make you happy. Ask God for the joy that only He can give.

»wed

Fear in this verse can be defined as healthy respect. Take a minute and write a note to someone you respect. Be specific about what you admire in him or her. Show God how much you respect Him by your worship.

»thurs

Someone once said that God gave 10 "commandments," not 10 "suggestions." Ask God to protect you from a spirit of legalism as you seek to obey Him today.

»fri

God created you to know Him and to obey Him. You can't do one without the other. Thank God for His willingness and desire to have a relationship with you.

»sat

The pleasures of this world come and go. What's "in" this year is "out" the next. Only God never changes. Pray for a strong foundation for your faith, one that won't shift during the storms of life.

**F**ear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of all mankind.

—Ecclesiastes 12:13b

Pascal's Wager



*"Let us weigh the gain and the loss of wagering that God [exists]. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all. If you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."*

**IT ASKS: WHAT DO YOU RISK ON THE IDEA THAT GOD EXISTS? IF THERE IS NO GOD AND YOU LIVE AS IF THERE WERE, WHAT HAVE YOU LOST? LIKEWISE, IF THERE TRULY IS A GOD AND YOU LIVE AS IF THERE WERE NONE, WHAT DO YOU STAND TO LOSE? WHICH OF THE TWO IS THE GREATER RISK?**

This is the famous wager of Blaise Pascal (pronounced blehz pas-KAL), a 17th-century French scientist and mathematician. Pascal more or less invented the barometer. He's also credited with doing the foundation work for calculus. Pascal brooded over the reality of God. After years of thinking, he came to the following conclusion:

**"There are only three kinds of persons; those who serve God, having found Him; others who are occupied in seeking Him, not having found Him; while the remainder live without seeking Him and without finding Him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those between are unhappy and unreasonable."**

Blaise Pascal died of a very painful illness when he was only 39 years old. Even to this difficult end, Pascal continued to trust God. Listen to these final words from Pascal, which are strangely reflective of King Solomon's in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

**"It is good to be tired and wearied by the vain search after true good, that we may stretch out our arms to the Redeemer. Jesus Christ is the end of all and the center to which all tends. Whoever knows Him knows the reason of everything."**

# FACTS

{ you may not know about }

# Blaise Pascal

**BLAISE PASCAL WAS A PHILOSOPHER, MATHEMATICIAN, THEOLOGIAN, AND PHYSICIST.**

**HE WAS BORN IN CLERMONT-FERRAND, FRANCE, ON JUNE 19, 1623. HE DIED ON AUGUST 19, 1662, IN PARIS, FRANCE AT AGE 39 OF A MALIGNANT STOMACH TUMOR.**

**PASCAL IS FAMOUS FOR LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE MODERN THEORY OF PROBABILITIES. PASCAL INFLUENCED THE THINKING OF SIR ISAAC NEWTON AND LED HIM TO UNCOVER HIS "GENERAL BINOMIAL THEOREM FOR FRACTIONAL AND NEGATIVE POWERS."**

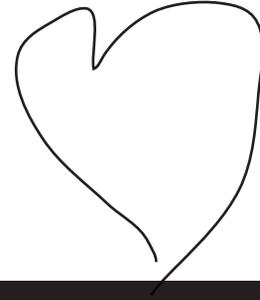
In 1970, the Pascal (PA) unit was named after Pascal. The Pascal is a unit of pressure that is measured using the meter-kilogram-second system to calculate pressure. Pascal invented the earliest form of the calculator, the Pascaline, and in 1972, computer language invented by scientist Nicklaus Wirth was named in Pascal's honor.

Can you imagine being brought up with a parent who forbid you to do math? That was how it was for Pascal. His father, Etienne Pascal, knew Blaise was a child prodigy, but he didn't want him to work too hard. Making math a forbidden topic actually made the young Pascal want to do it more, and so at age 12, Pascal explored geometry on his own and made up his own math terms to explain it. Finally his father was convinced that he should do math and allowed Pascal at the age of 16 to accompany him to meetings at the mathematics academy in Paris. Pascal became a devoutly religious man but later experienced a Christian conversion when he was thrown from his horse and plunged off a bridge. For the rest of his life, Pascal carried with him a piece of parchment sewn into his coat that contained assurances of his faith, like this one: "This is life eternal that they might know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

**We are often told that science and Christianity don't mix. Blaise Pascal would have begged to differ. God used Pascal in many ways. His life was short, but full of God's grace and mercy. The calculator is a handy tool and we have Pascal to thank for that, but the way Pascal boldly paved the way for Christianity and science to work together has proven to be even more beneficial.**

**1000%**  
**GUARANTEED?**

**M**any things in life don't come with a warranty. There is no guarantee that one day you'll get the perfect job or pick the perfect mate. Even if you have every earthly advantage, there is no guarantee that you will find *meaning* in what you do.



### ***Fame can't guarantee happiness.***

Royal birth did not guarantee happiness for Solomon. Neither did all his wisdom. Even with over 1,000 women at his beck and call, Solomon did not find the intimacy he was looking for.

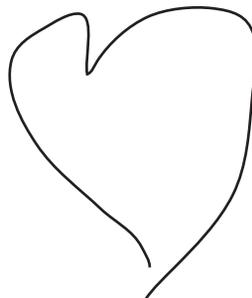
Creativity did not guarantee fulfillment for Solomon. He was a designer and builder of cities, but called his life empty when all his projects were over. Laughter and entertainment did not give him the contentment he so desperately sought.

Popularity, fame, and the adoration of his subjects could not give the king peace of mind or happiness.

### ***Smarts can't guarantee peace.***

Genius did not guarantee happiness for a great scientist of France, the most famous Frenchwoman since Joan of Arc. Madame Marie Curie discovered radium, which would extend the life of millions of people. Even so, those millions would eventually have to die. She herself lived in constant fear of death. She had no faith in God to rest upon.

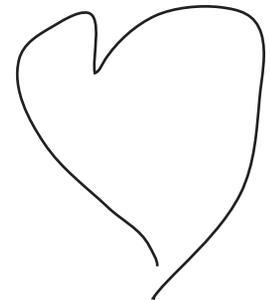
In her old age, her daughter Eve and two doctors were her constant companions. In her sickness, she could not bear to be alone. They comforted her and always told her she was improving. She died, numbed with opiates. Her brilliance of mind in physics and chemistry was no guarantee against fear in old age.



### ***Christ is the only guarantee.***

After King Solomon reviewed his tragic life, he gave one last bit of advice. "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (Eccl. 12:13). In other words, there really isn't anything else worth living for. Perhaps he remembered his own father's words: "In keeping (God's commands) there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11b).

A growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the only real guarantee in life. It does not promise a painless existence or unending earthly happiness. All it guarantees is a meaningful life. What more could anyone ask for?





**NO CHRIST, NO PURPOSE**

know Christ, know purpose



# the big question

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

Are the events of your life part of a meaningful pattern, or do they just happen?

If this question disturbs you a little, you're in good company. For thousands of years, it has been the "big question" for thinkers in every society. And the writer of Ecclesiastes was no exception. He asks—and answers—this question in Ecclesiastes 3:1-14.

▶ **Verses 1-8** talk about everyday events, big and small, of human life. Look closely at the pairs of events listed in verses 2-8.

- Which ones have happened to you or someone you know?
- Which ones have made you question whether God was really in control?
- Twenty years from now, do you think it will be easier for you to accept these things as under God's control? Why or why not?

▶ **Put verse 9's question into your own words.**

▶ **In verse 10**, the writer tells us that God has placed a "burden" on human beings; then he describes the burden in verse 11.

- How is verse 11 encouraging? How is it discouraging?
- If everyone is in this condition, what advantage do Christians have over non-Christians?

▶ **The author's first response to verse 11 is found in verses 12 and 13.**

- At first glance, some people think these verses don't sound very Christian. Why do you think they come to that conclusion?
- According to verse 13, enjoyment or satisfaction is a gift of God. If we believed this, what effect—if any—would it have on the way we have fun?
- How does the message of verses 12 and 13 make sense in light of verse 11?

▶ **According to verse 14**, what motive does God have for His actions toward people?

▶ **Pick one of God's actions from verses 1-13**; then use your imagination to tell how such an experience might lead a person to "revere" or "fear" God.

▶ **How has this Scripture passage challenged your ideas about God?**

- ▶ How has your attitude toward your own experiences changed? Summarize your thoughts in a few short sentences or phrases.

## Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

<sup>1</sup>There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

<sup>2</sup>a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
<sup>3</sup>a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,

<sup>4</sup>a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

<sup>5</sup>a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

<sup>6</sup>a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

<sup>7</sup>a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

<sup>8</sup>a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

<sup>9</sup>What do the workers gain from their toil? <sup>10</sup>I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. <sup>11</sup>He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. <sup>12</sup>I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. <sup>13</sup>That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. <sup>14</sup>I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

»mon

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that the rhythm of life is part of God's design. With this understanding, we can see both our laughter and tears as part of life. Do you see all of life as a gift of God? Thank God for His timing in your life.

»tues

Are you involved in sports, music, drama, job training, etc.? We grow in our faith when we develop our gifts and abilities. Thank God for this time of "planting" (see vs. 2) as you participate in these activities this week.

»wed

Sometimes we find ourselves in a painful time of "pulling up." The last touchdown has been scored, the final curtain closes, a relationship comes to an end. Thank God for endings, even when they are painful, because they always lead to the openings of new chapters in your life.

»thurs

All of us need time alone. Even with best friends, we inevitably think: "I need to be by myself for a while." Such moments can be time for growth if we allow God into them. Spend some silent time alone today and meditate on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

»fri

It is impossible to go through life without mourning. Jesus, too, knows what it is to weep. Read Isaiah 53:3 and pray that you will be as receptive to God's love in times of sorrow as you have been in times of joy.

»sat

How have you seen God's timing in the activities of your life this week? Write down three specific ways you've seen Him work, and thank Him; then tell someone about it.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.  
—Ecclesiastes 3:1

# A Sound for every Season

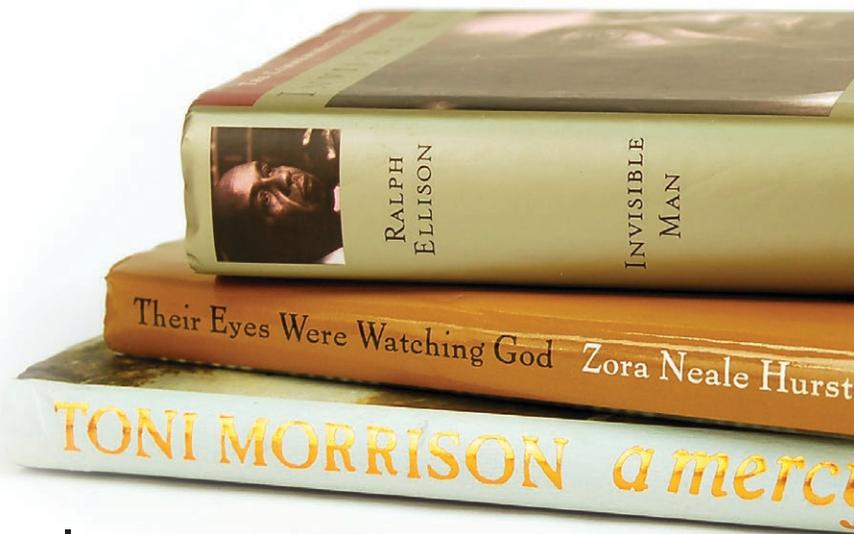
Wind ~ A cappella singing ~ Trains and planes ~ Raindrops ~ Mountain silence  
Birds singing during the day ~ Bugs and frogs at night ~ Thunder ~ Laughter  
Surf and sand colliding ~ A horse's neigh ~ Cheering crowds ~ Marching bands  
Spoken prayers ~ A baby's giggle

# Stuff your English teacher

# WON'T TELL YOU.

Every English teacher will tell you that Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison are a few of the greatest writers in the history of English literature. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is considered one of the greatest American novels written, while Zora Neale Hurston made a considerable impact in anthropology and in movements such as the Harlem Renaissance. Toni Morrison won the Nobel

Prize for Literature in 1993. But what your teacher may not tell you is how the lives and work of these writers sometimes closely align with Scripture. It's almost as if they knew the Bible better than some do today. Want proof? Try this activity. See if you can match the Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and Zora Neale Hurston quotes with these Bible verses.



**1** “Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all.” —Toni Morrison

**2** “It seems like fighting is a game where everybody is the loser.” —Zora Neale Hurston

**3** “Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.” —Zora Neale Hurston

**4** “I have been in sorrow's kitchen and licked all the pots...” —Zora Neale Hurston

**5** “America is woven of many strands.” —Ralph Ellison

## Scripture

- a For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. —Romans 12:4-5
- b Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. —1 Corinthians 13:4
- c But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” —Genesis 3:9
- d Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. —Job 2:13
- e “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” —Mark 3:25

Answer key, 1-B, 2-E, 3-C, 4-D, 5-A.

# SOLOMON'S SEASONS

Based on Ecclesiastes 3

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every  
activity under the heavens:

- a time to be born  
and a time to die,
- a time to plant  
and a time to uproot,
- a time to kill  
and a time to heal,
- a time to tear down  
and a time to build,
- a time to weep  
and a time to laugh,
- a time to mourn  
and a time to dance,
- a time to scatter stones  
and a time to gather them,
- a time to embrace  
and a time to refrain from  
embracing,
- a time to search  
and a time to give up,
- a time to keep  
and a time to throw away,
- a time to tear  
and a time to mend,
- a time to be silent  
and a time to speak,
- a time to love  
and a time to hate,
- a time for war  
and a time for peace.

He has made  
everything beautiful  
in its time . . .  
Everything God does  
will endure forever.



# why?

selections from Job

**Why do people have to suffer?** God sometimes allows tragedy to discipline wrongdoers. Other times, individuals may cause suffering by unwise actions. But why does disaster sometimes strike believers who have been loyal to God?

God gave Satan the green light to put Job to the test, and Satan devised some horrible hardships.

In the end, Job proved that God is sovereign.

The Bible doesn't provide a magic cure for suffering. But what happened to Job does help to answer some misunderstandings about suffering.

Read today's text; then write or discuss your answers to the following questions:

▶ How do we know that hard times don't always mean that God is displeased with us?

▶ How do you respond to this statement? Tragedies and disasters are just a matter of fate or bad luck.

▶ How much power does Satan have to cause trouble for us?

▶ How should Christians prepare for hard times and suffering?

## Job 1:1, 6, 11-12, 20-22

<sup>1</sup>In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

<sup>6</sup>One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. . . .

<sup>11</sup>"But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

<sup>12</sup>The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

<sup>20</sup>At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup>and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

<sup>22</sup>In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

## Job 2:7-10

<sup>7</sup>So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. <sup>8</sup>Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

<sup>9</sup>His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"

<sup>10</sup>He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

»mon

Read through the Book of Job this week and next. Read chapters 1 and 2 today and look at your faith honestly. Do you think it is sufficient to get you through the difficult times? Ask God for a faith that withstands testing.

»tues

Read chapter 3. It is not a sign that we lack faith when we feel depressed over life's difficulties. We, like Job, are still people of God even when we feel as if we have been tossed on the garbage heap. Tell God how you feel today.

»wed

Read 4-7: Job's first "comforter" speaks, and Job replies. With friends like these, who needs enemies? Do you know someone who is going through hard times? Thank God for friends who can truly understand, and ask Him to make you a true friend.

»thurs

Read 8-10: "Comforter" 2 and Job's reply. Sometimes our friends let us down. They may not mean to, but it still hurts. Are you angry with a friend because of a misunderstanding or mistake? Resolve to settle it as soon as possible. Ask God to help you.

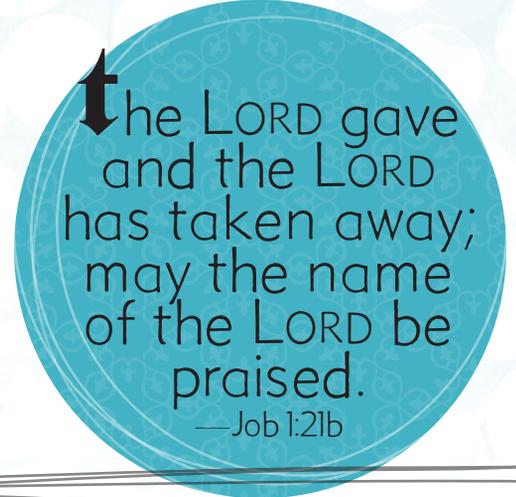
»fri

Read 11-14: Job's third "comforter" offers his advice, and Job replies to him. Illness can be a time not

only of physical pain, but also of discouragement and frustration. We usually need extra patience with people who are sick. Our physical condition can never separate us from God's love. Pray for patience in testing times.

»sat

Chapters 15-31 contain more so-called comfort from Job's three friends. Read Job's words in 16:1-6 and record some of the things you have learned from your reading this week. Pray for a faith that is not dependent on circumstances.



TIME SLICE  
Job

Job never cursed God even when his own wife told him to.

Some Creationists point to Job's mention of the "behemoth" and the "leviathan" as references to dinosaurs, and evidence that man and dinosaur coexisted.  
Job 40-41

You might think that Genesis is the oldest book in the Bible. And you would be wrong. . . . Job is potentially the oldest book in the Bible, written probably around 1500 B.C.

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were Job's best friends. But they also thought it was Job's fault that his children were killed, for not being righteous enough. So maybe not bffs.

The first recognized alphabet had been recently created by the Phoenicians. The Hebrew alphabet borrowed and modified letters from the Phoenician alphabet, but apparently decided they didn't need to take any of the vowels.

# GOD'S WAGER

EXCERPT  
FROM THE  
ACTION  
BIBLE

BASED  
ON JOB

IN A DISTANT LAND, JOB, A MAN WHO LOVES GOD, HAS EVERYTHING HE NEEDS. HE HAS 7,000 SHEEP, 3,000 CAMELS, 1,000 OXEN, 500 DONKEYS AND SERVANTS TO TAKE CARE OF ALL HIS NEEDS. HE ALSO HAS A WONDERFUL FAMILY—A WIFE, SEVEN SONS, AND THREE DAUGHTERS ...

THE LORD HAS BLESSED ME TO OVERFLOWING!

UP IN HEAVEN, GOD IS PROUD OF HIS RIGHTEOUS SERVANT. BUT SATAN HATES TO SEE A HAPPY ENDING.

JOB ONLY WORSHIPS YOU BECAUSE YOU MAKE SURE NOTHING BAD EVER HAPPENS TO HIM.

IF YOU DIDN'T GIVE HIM SUCH RICHES AND BLESSINGS—

—HE WOULD TURN FROM YOU IN AN INSTANT AND CURSE YOUR NAME.

YOU THINK SO? VERY WELL, YOU MAY TEST HIM. TAKE AWAY HIS BLESSINGS, BUT DO NOT HURT HIM.

SATAN WASTES NO TIME IN STRIKING JOB WITH CATASTROPHE. ONE DAY A MESSENGER COMES TO JOB ...

THE SABEANS ATTACKED! THEY STOLE THE OXEN AND DONKEYS AND KILLED THE PEOPLE WORKING IN YOUR FIELDS. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO ESCAPED.

THAT SAME MOMENT, ANOTHER MESSENGER ARRIVES ...

LIGHTNING STRUCK THE SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS. THEY'RE ALL DEAD. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO ESCAPED.

THEN A THIRD MESSENGER COMES ...

CHALDEANS RAIDED THE CAMELS AND KILLED THE CAMEL DRIVERS. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO ESCAPED.

YET ANOTHER MESSENGER ARRIVES WITH BAD NEWS ...

YOUR OLDEST SON'S HOUSE COLLAPSED, KILLING ALL OF YOUR CHILDREN. I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO ESCAPED.

JOB IS SADDENED BY THE LOSS OF HIS PROPERTY AND LIVESTOCK. BUT HE IS DEVASTATED AT THE DEATH OF HIS CHILDREN!

HE SHAVES OFF ALL HIS HAIR IN GRIEF, AND RIPS HIS CLOTHES TO TATTERS. BUT HE DOES NOT BLAME GOD FOR THIS MISFORTUNE.

I CAME INTO THIS WORLD WITH NOTHING, AND I WILL LEAVE IT WITH NOTHING. GOD GAVE, AND GOD TOOK AWAY. PRAISE BE TO GOD!

SEE, SATAN? HE IS A BETTER MAN THAN YOU THOUGHT.

WELL, SURE. SINCE I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING TO HIM OR HIS HEALTH. BUT NO ONE PRAISES GOD WHEN THEY'RE SICK.

SO YOU THINK. RUIN HIS HEALTH, IF YOU THINK THAT WILL HAVE ANY EFFECT ON THIS RIGHTEOUS MAN. BUT DO NOT KILL HIM.

SATAN IMMEDIATELY RETURNS TO EARTH AND STRIKES JOB WITH TERRIBLE OPEN SORES FROM HEAD TO FOOT. HE CURSES JOB WITH INSOMNIA AND—WHEN JOB DOES SLEEP—SATAN TERRIFIES HIM WITH NIGHTMARES. JOB CAN'T KEEP HIS FOOD DOWN AND LOSES SO MUCH WEIGHT; HE CAN HARDLY MOVE.

STILL, JOB DOES NOT COMPLAIN. BUT HIS WIFE ...

EVERYTHING WE OWNED AND EVERYONE WE LOVED IS GONE. SURELY THIS DISEASE WILL KILL YOU. YOU SHOULD JUST CURSE GOD AND DIE!

JOB LOOKS AT HIS WIFE OUT OF PAINFUL, BLEARED EYELIDS.

DON'T BE A FOOL. WE CANNOT ACCEPT THE GOOD THINGS FROM GOD WITHOUT ALSO ACCEPTING THE BAD.

WHEN JOB'S FRIENDS HEAR ABOUT HIS TROUBLES, THEY COME TO SIT WITH HIM IN THE GARBAGE DUMP AT THE EDGE OF TOWN. THE DISEASE HAS AFFECTED JOB SO STRONGLY, HIS FRIENDS ALMOST DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HIM. FOR SEVEN DAYS, NO ONE SPEAKS. THEY JUST SIT TOGETHER WITH THEIR FRIEND. FINALLY, AFTER A WEEK, JOB BREAKS OUT WITH A CRY OF GRIEF.

I HAVE DONE NOTHING WRONG! WHY IS GOD LETTING ALL THESE TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN TO ME?

ELIPHAZ IS SHOCKED AT JOB'S HARSH QUESTION.

NOW, DON'T GET UPSET, JOB, BUT FROM EVERYTHING I'VE SEEN, GOD DOESN'T PUNISH INNOCENT PEOPLE. YOU MUST HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG.

BUT I HAVEN'T SINNED! AND EVEN IF I HAVE, GOD KNOWS MY HEART AND WOULD FORGIVE ME.

BUT BILDAD IS NOT CONVINCED.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE BLAMING GOD FOR BEING UNFAIR, JOB! I'M SORRY, BUT IF YOUR KIDS WERE KILLED, IT'S BECAUSE THEY MUST HAVE DESERVED IT. YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO CONFESS YOUR SINS—YOU SHOULD TAKE IT.

I WOULD CONFESS MY SINS, IF GOD WOULD COME AND TELL ME WHAT I HAD DONE WRONG.

JOB'S INSISTENCE THAT HE IS INNOCENT OFFENDS HIS THIRD FRIEND, ZOPHAR.

YOU WINDBAG! YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT GOD! YOU STUBBORNLY INSIST THAT YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG, WHEN THE ONLY THING THAT CAN SAVE YOU IS TO APOLOGIZE TO GOD FOR YOUR SINS.

**SOME FRIENDS YOU ARE!**

YOU DO NOT COMFORT ME AT THE WORST TIME OF MY LIFE. YOU THINK YOU SPEAK FOR GOD? I ONLY WISH HE WOULD COME SPEAK FOR HIMSELF. EVEN IF HE KILLED ME, I WOULD TRUST IN HIM.

EVEN AS JOB SPEAKS, GOD  
SUDDENLY COMES TO HIM IN A STORM.

STAND UP  
ON YOUR FEET  
LIKE A MAN. I  
WILL QUESTION  
YOU, JOB, AND  
YOU WILL  
ANSWER  
ME!

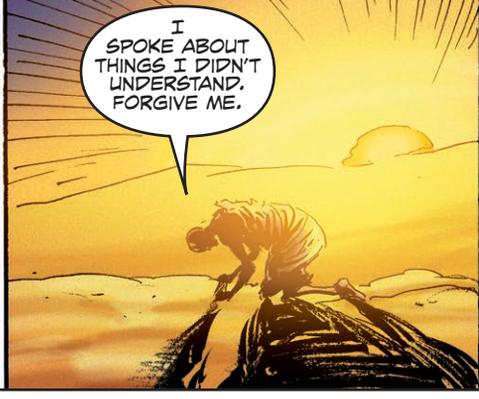
YOU THINK YOU KNOW SO MUCH,  
JOB? WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID  
THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH? HAVE  
YOU EVER COMMANDED THE MORNING TO  
COME? DO YOU SHOW THE SUN WHERE TO  
RISE? CAN YOU UNTIE THE ROPES THAT  
HOLD THE STARS TOGETHER? CAN YOU  
RULE OVER THE MAGNIFICENT  
CREATURES I HAVE CREATED?



I AM IN CHARGE OF THE  
UNIVERSE. I AM IN CHARGE  
OF EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS! YOU  
CANNOT UNDERSTAND MY WAYS, YOU  
CANNOT KNOW THE GREATER GOOD I  
DESIRE FOR YOU. YOUR PLACE IS  
SIMPLY TO TRUST IN ME.

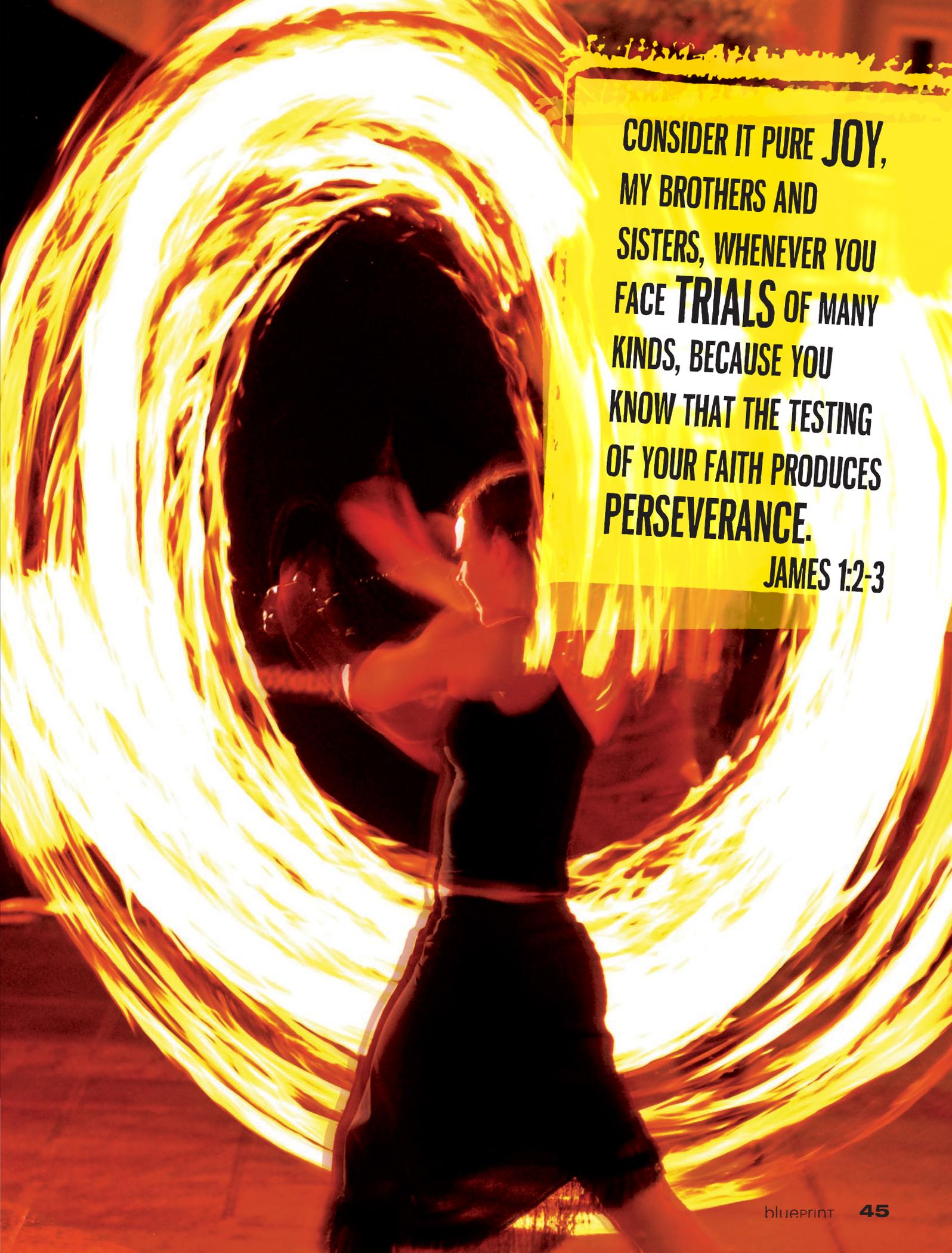


IN REPLY TO GOD'S SPEECH,  
JOB FALLS TO HIS KNEES ...



I  
SPOKE ABOUT  
THINGS I DIDN'T  
UNDERSTAND.  
FORGIVE ME.

AFTER THIS, GOD HEALS JOB. HE GIVES HIM  
TWICE AS MANY ANIMALS AS HE HAD LOST,  
AND HE GIVES HIM TEN MORE CHILDREN. JOB  
LIVES FOR A LONG TIME AFTER ALL THIS.



**CONSIDER IT PURE JOY,  
MY BROTHERS AND  
SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU  
FACE TRIALS OF MANY  
KINDS, BECAUSE YOU  
KNOW THAT THE TESTING  
OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES  
PERSEVERANCE.**

**JAMES 1:2-3**

# FACE IT

The healthiest way to deal with suffering is to confront it.



**W**hen \*Dion was still in elementary school, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Eight years later the doctors announced the bad news: Dion’s mom had one—two years tops—to live.

Dion’s dad couldn’t handle the stress, so he bailed, divorcing Dion’s mom. Dion and her mother packed their belongings and left California for the Midwest to be with friends who would stick by them, no matter how horrible things would get.

And things got pretty bad. But the move gave Dion a chance to become involved with a decent youth group. When her mom had only days to live, Dion had Christian friends who listened to her, cried with her, and prayed with her.

Jesus knows that life can be rotten at times. “In this world you will have trouble” (see John 16:33), He told His disciples the night before He died. Not exactly the most comforting parting words a person could say, but realistic ones.

The word “trouble” conjures up images of bad stuff that happens to other people, like Dion, and we hope never happens to us. As long as we can avoid suffering and pain, we think everything will be all right.

But even if we could escape trouble, should we? The answer is no, especially if we want to have a deeper relationship with the Lord.

James wrote in the Bible to welcome trials as a friend (see James 1:2). Well, maybe you won’t welcome trials as you would your best friends, but you don’t have to run away from them.

Here are some suggestions to help you put out the welcome mat the next time trials come knocking.

• **Choose to use your difficulty** as a stepping-stone to growth as a Christian. All Dion’s dad wanted to do was to find the quickest way out of suffering. While that’s a natural response, her dad never discovered God’s supernatural strength. Dion did, and God helped her through the tough times.

• **Accept and express your feelings.** Be honest with yourself and with God. You don’t have to

pretend you have everything together. If you keep a journal, write about your feelings.

• **Pray.** What should you pray for? You might even ask God that as you talk with Him. James says to ask God for wisdom, which He loves to give. Don’t get caught up in trying to figure out why suffering came your way. Depend on God to be with you (see Isa. 43:1-2).

• **Read and meditate on God’s Word,** especially the psalms. If you don’t feel like praying, use the psalms as your prayers to God. For example, repeat David’s prayer in Psalm 61:1-3: “Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.”

• **Accept support.** No one gets points for suffering in silence. When Dion’s mom died, her friends got out of school to attend the funeral. Some people have trouble talking about their problems or feelings because they consider it a sign of weakness. Yet strong individuals like the apostle Paul accepted the support of others. However, use wisdom in choosing the person with whom to share your problem.

If you’re having an extra difficult time handling a problem, don’t be ashamed or embarrassed to ask for professional support. God uses different people to show His care and support during trials.

Sometimes when things are going well, we coast along, not really growing in our faith and not really rebelling. Suffering, however, can snap us out of a status-quo relationship with the Lord. When we choose to face suffering with God’s help, we’ll become stronger and wiser children of God.

Dion, now a stronger and wiser child of God, eventually moved in with her father. It wasn’t easy adjusting, but Dion had already learned one important truth: God would always be with her.

Jesus was a realist about the world, but He also had the final word on the matter of trouble and suffering in this world: “Take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b). (\*Name has been changed.)

# Faith For the long haul

Job 40:1-8; 42:1-6, 10, 12

**Hopefully,** none of us will ever experience the kind of suffering Job did. He lost his wealth, his family, his health, and even his will to live. Covered with painful sores, he sat on an ash heap regretting the day he had been born.

Job's friends didn't help much either. They had an easy answer to his problems: Just repent of whatever sin it was that had caused his suffering, and God would end it.

Job held his ground against their long-winded arguments. He insisted he had done no wrong. Why, then, did he suffer? Job found himself wavering between his trust in God, which he stubbornly clung to, and his steadfast belief that his suffering was undeserved.

In desperation, Job cried out for a chance to talk things over with God.

## ▶ Job's request was soon granted. Read Job 40:1-8.

- ▶ Why do you think God responded to Job's questions by quizzing him about Creation and His sovereignty in chapters 38 and 39?

## ▶ Job got the message. Read Job 42:1-6.

- ▶ How did Job respond to God's display of power?

## ▶ What was Job's reaction to "seeing" God? Why?

- ▶ Before God confronted him with His power, might, and wisdom, Job had been tempted to switch from his absolute faith in God. Was God really fair? Did He know what He was doing?

- ▶ By the time God was finished, Job was convinced that God did care for him—even if God never let Job know why he had to go through such difficulties.

## ▶ Read Job 42:10, 12 to find out how Job's story turned out.

- ▶ Do you think this was adequate repayment for what Job had suffered?

## ▶ What is one lesson you could learn from today's study?

### Job 40:1-8

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Job:

<sup>2a</sup>"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

<sup>3</sup>Then Job answered the LORD:

<sup>4</sup>"I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.

<sup>5</sup>I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more." <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:

<sup>7</sup>"Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

<sup>8</sup>Would you discredit my justice? Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?"

### Job 42:1-6; 10, 12

<sup>1</sup>Then Job replied to the LORD:

<sup>2a</sup>"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

<sup>3</sup>You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.

<sup>4</sup>"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' <sup>5</sup>My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

<sup>10</sup>After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.

<sup>12</sup>The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys.

»mon

Sometimes we want to challenge God as Job did: "How can such terrible things happen?" Pray from the place of your deepest need with the confidence you will be heard.

»tues

Read parts of Elihu's speech in Job 32-37. How is his speech different from Job's other three friends'? How is it the same?

»wed

Finally God replies! Read chapters 38-41. None of us is big enough to see life from God's point of view. But nothing is bigger than God. Pray for perspective when dealing with difficulties.

»thurs

When Job stopped demanding that God answer his question, he began the process of trusting God. Ask God to help you be still and listen even when you are desperate for answers.

»fri

Read chapter 42. When Job repented of his challenge to God, good things began to happen to him. When we acknowledge who we are in relation to God, we begin to live life fully. Meditate on where repentance may be needed in your life.

»sat

Read Job 42:2 again. This was Job's declaration of trust in God. How much do you trust God? Write your own declaration in a poem or on a poster for your mirror at home.

**I** know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

—Job 42:2

# SUGGESTION BOX

*Job was not the only person in the Bible to question the Almighty. It's OK to ask "Why?" sometimes.*

## A PROPHET'S QUESTION:

"How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?" (Hab. 1:2-3a).

Read the Book of Habakkuk for God's reply.

## SUGGESTIONS

*Write your own question below:*

*We are limited...God is not. Write about the limitless power of God and how God's power can bring His best in your life.*

**Are you ready for His answer?**

# Trials and Tribulations

James 1 and Psalm 32

Circle the ending to this sentence that best describes the way you feel.

When bad times come my way, I . . .

- . . . face my troubles and wish for a better day
- . . . hide from my problems
- . . . hate it

In today's study, James (who wrote this New Testament book on wisdom) describes a different attitude toward trials.

## ▶ Read James 1:2.

- ▶ Describe James' unusual attitude toward trials.

## ▶ Now read verses 3-4 and 12.

- ▶ Explain the reasoning behind James' offbeat attitude.

## ▶ Read James 1:5-8.

- ▶ At first, it sounds as if James changed the subject, but he didn't. What's the connection he's making between wisdom and facing trials?

## ▶ Read Psalm 32:6-10 and look at James 1:5 again.

- ▶ List all the things God promises and does for His people who are experiencing trials.

Now, based on what you just studied, write a new ending to this sentence.

When bad times come my way, I'll . . .

### James 1:1-8, 12

<sup>1</sup>James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

Greetings.

<sup>2</sup>Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup>If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. <sup>6</sup>But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup>Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

### Psalm 32:6-10

<sup>6</sup>Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

<sup>7</sup>You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

<sup>8</sup>I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

<sup>9</sup>Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

<sup>10</sup>Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

»mon

Write down your first reaction to trouble. When you're finished, read James 1:12. The word "blessed" means happy. In other words, happy is the person who hangs tough in trials. Ask God to increase your staying power when trouble comes your way.

»tues

Read James 1:2-4, 12. What's your honest response to verse 2? Actually, James wasn't crazy when he wrote this letter. List his reasons why God's people can consider trials as a source of joy.

»wed

Bad times often make us realize how much we need God. Thank God for His love and faithfulness in the good times and bad.

»thurs

Read Psalm 32:7. Write a poem, draw a picture, or make up a song to praise God for being your hiding place and protecting you from trouble. Ask God to help you trust Him in times of trouble.

»fri

Read James 1:12 again. A person who makes it through a trial with faith intact knows God on a deeper level than before. Thank God for trials that help you grow closer to Him.

»sat

Read Psalm 32:10. On Monday, you wrote down your first reaction to hard times. Now write a new reaction to hard times, based on what you discovered about suffering, faith, and God's constant love.

**B**lessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.  
—James 1:12

## 4 Gains from Pain

### BACK TO BASICS:

Sometimes it takes sickness or bad times to remind you of what's really important in life. We fill our lives with so much entertainment and world-based goals that we can forget that God is the foundation for everything we do. Pain can serve as a reminder that God is the only essential.

### WAKE-UP CALL:

Sometimes suffering can be a wake-up call that makes you sit up and take notice of your relationship with God. Maybe you've let things slide spiritually and need a gentle nudge to encourage you to hang in there. Keep praying, and trust God.

### EMPATHY:

When someone says, "I know just what you're going through," your first reaction is probably, "Oh, sure." Everyone's situation is unique, but if Kelsey's dad died of cancer last year, and you just found out your mom has cancer, chances are you'd listen to Kelsey. She has been through it. She understands. Suffering can make you more sensitive to other people's pain. Check out 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

### TRUE COLORS:

More often than not, suffering and trouble bring out a person's true colors. Some people faint at the sight of trouble; others become bitter. God, however, wants to make sure His children have what it takes to make a difference in this world. Because of that, He may not rescue you from suffering, but He'll always help you to come through it in one piece and stronger in your faith.

NO PAIN,  
NO  
GAIN



God is Love,  
Live in Love,  
Love Among Us,  
No Fear in Love,

1 John 4:13-18  
(paraphrased)

# Advice.

It comes pouring in from all sorts of sources: friends, counselors, parents, TV. But how do we know which advice to take—and which to ignore?

Below we've given you four different aspects of advice: who's giving it to you, what their credibility is, what their motives are, and the advice itself. Go through and evaluate these different aspects for the people in your life who give you advice.

When you've filled in the fields for a person, reflect: Does his Credibility + Motive + Advice add up to trustworthy guidance? Or would it be better to seek someone else's counsel?

choose options  
from here or  
create your own



## ADVICE EVALUATOR

PERSON:

CREDIBILITY:

MOTIVE:

ADVICE:

Sibling

School Friend

Parent

Church Youth Leader

Friend's Parent

TV Personality

Coach

Best Friend

(fill in your own)

### SAMPLE CREDIBILITY:

- ▶ This person is a gossip.
- ▶ This person has made outstanding achievements in sports.
- ▶ I've caught this person telling lies before.
- ▶ This person listens to me carefully before telling me what he/she thinks I should do.
- ▶ This person mistreats other people.
- ▶ This person lives a life that matches his/her advice.
- ▶ I don't know this person very well.
- ▶ This person doesn't know anything about the subject he/she is advising me on.
- ▶ This person's advice has been right in the past.
- ▶ This person isn't popular.
- ▶ This person has authority because he/she is good looking.

### SAMPLE MOTIVES:

- ▶ This person is trying to help keep me safe.
- ▶ This person told me to do it because it makes him/her look good to someone important.
- ▶ This person is pushing me because he/she failed in this area when he/she was my age.
- ▶ This person is only giving me advice because I asked him/her for it as a friend.
- ▶ This person wants me to do it because he/she likes to boss and control me.
- ▶ This person cares for me. He/she has always been good to me.
- ▶ This person is trying to let me know what's really good.
- ▶ This person is only trying to look like he/she is a good, kind person.
- ▶ This person is giving me advice because I asked him/her for it, and it's his/her job to give it to me.
- ▶ This person wants to help keep me from making bad mistakes and suffering because of them.

### SAMPLE ADVICE:

- ▶ If you expect to get a date, don't dress modestly.
- ▶ I can't make that decision for you. You do what you think is right. Pray about it, and then go ahead and make your decision.
- ▶ Why not be nice to him/her even though you might lose some of your friends?
- ▶ Don't let him/her push you around. You're not a doormat—you're a person.
- ▶ Think of other people first before you act.
- ▶ If you want to get that report done on time, why not begin right now? That's what I've discovered helps me.
- ▶ I think you can handle the college prep courses.
- ▶ Don't go out with him/her. He/she doesn't have any respect for anyone.
- ▶ If he/she bugs you, just tell him/her to beat it.

# Would You RATHER?

## Would you rather eat....

something hard  
and disgusting  
like pigs' feet



something slimy  
and disgusting  
like raw eggs

## Would you rather....

trip and fall in  
front of your  
whole class



puke in front of  
someone you  
have a crush on

## WOULD YOU RATHER....

be buried up  
to your neck in  
sand



be duct-taped  
to a wall

## Would you rather....

babysit your  
neighbor's  
three kids  
(all under the  
age of 5)



mow your  
neighbor's  
5-acre property

# Motives



## What motivates you to do something?

For example, with Christmas and parties coming up, you want to look great, so you're motivated to get some new clothes. Or you don't want to fail chemistry, so you're motivated to put lots of extra effort into your final class project.

Read the following situations and the possible motivations for why these people did what they did. You might not make the exact same decisions as these people, but if you had, what would have motivated you?

Rank the motivations on a scale of one to four, with four being your main motivation and one the least motivating factor.

**Rob is applying to three Ivy League colleges in his junior year. What would motivate him to do that?**

- He wants a high-paying job when he graduates.
- He wants his parents to be proud of him.
- He wants the reputation of attending an Ivy League school.
- He wants to impress his friends.

**Kiana is going on a mission trip to Kenya with her youth group. What would motivate her to do that?**

- She wants determine if she wants to be a missionary full-time.
- She feels this is a good way to serve the Lord.
- Everyone else is going, and she doesn't want to be left out again.
- She hopes the trip will help her get to know a certain guy in the youth group.

**Sean is running for vice president of the student council. What would motivate him to do that?**

- His favorite teacher asked him, and he couldn't refuse.
- He doesn't want his mom to think he's wasting his high school years.
- He wants people to notice him, or at least recognize his name.
- He really wants to make the school a better place for the students.

**Stephen has been working out so that he can make the football team. What would motivate him to do that?**

- He wants to make it to the NFL.
- He thinks taking care of his body is one of the best things he can do for himself.
- He doesn't want anyone pushing him around anymore.
- He wants to be popular.

**We have to ask God to purify our motives for the things we do. God has given us His Spirit to help us have godly and wise motives that please His heart.**

## Lesson 11 Bible Study

## Fair play

James 2:1-9; Psalm 82:2-4

**No one likes it when** someone doesn't play fair in football or basketball. Penalty! Foul! Don't let the person get away with it!

In today's Bible study, James calls a foul on people who don't play fair in their relationships. He has some practical things to say about how we are to treat each other and play fair in the process. Most of all, he warns of favoritism.

## ▶ Read James 2:1-4.

- ▶ Who is the victim of prejudice in the church James describes?
- ▶ What do you think caused this instance of discrimination?

## ▶ Read verses 5-7.

- ▶ What is ironic about insulting the poor and catering to the rich?

## ▶ Read verses 8 and 9.

- ▶ What is the "royal law," and why does James call it that?

## ▶ Read Psalm 82:2-4.

- ▶ List the people who need defending. Next to each person you listed, write down people who belong to these groups today.
- ▶ Why do these people need someone to defend their cause?
- ▶ Based on what you just studied, come up with some guidelines that Christians should follow in their relationships with others.

**James 2:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup>Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup>If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup>have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

<sup>5</sup>Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup>Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

<sup>8</sup>If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. <sup>9</sup>But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

**Psalm 82:2-4**

<sup>2</sup>"How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?"

<sup>3</sup>Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

<sup>4</sup>Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

» mon

Read Psalm 82:3. Write a defense for the cause of people who are treated unfairly, especially the weak, poor, and oppressed. Ask God to help you carry out your defense.

» tues

Draw a picture of some sort of barrier (a wall, for example), and write on it the barriers you put up between you and others. Ask God to help you remove the barriers and see people from His viewpoint. When you're finished praying, tear up your barrier and throw it away.

» wed

Take an honest look at your own prejudices. Ask the Lord to help you recognize prejudice in yourself, and then give you the courage to resist it.

» thurs

Read Proverbs 31:8-9. Think of some ways you can speak up for people who may not be able to give you anything in return.

» fri

Sometimes one kind thing done for the cause of Christ can do more to advance God's purposes than a dozen headline-grabbing events. Always be aware of the possibilities for doing good. Ask the Lord to use you today to meet someone's needs.

» sat

God's love for us doesn't depend on our status or appearance. Thank God for not playing favorites, and ask Him to help you do the same thing.

Defend the the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.  
— Psalm 82:3

TIME SLICE  
James

James lived in Jerusalem, which was considered a backwater district in the Roman empire.



Nero was Emperor of Rome at the time of James' death. Nero is known for fiddling while Rome burned. Actually, he was a bad musician, fiddles hadn't been invented yet, and Nero wasn't actually in Rome during the fire.

James was stoned to death in A.D. 62 on the official charge of "breaking the law."

Hegesippus, an early Christian historian, reported that James was a vegetarian.

Masoretes had just decided to add vowels to the Hebrew alphabet. It only took them 1,500 years.

Lesson 12 Bible Study

# deadly mix

Proverbs 3; James 3:13—4:4

Have you ever tried to recharge a run-down car battery? The two poles of the battery are clearly marked positive (+) and negative (-). Hook up the positive to the negative and you've created a deadly mix-up. In today's Bible study, James explains that there are two different kinds of hookups to wisdom: one is positive and from heaven; the other is negative and from the Devil.

▶ Read Proverbs 3:13, 17-18.

▶ On a separate piece of paper, write or draw your description of wisdom.

▶ Now read James 3:13-18.

▶ In the chart, list the characteristics of both kinds of wisdom. (Some items have been filled in for you.)

Heavenly Wisdom	Earthly Wisdom
<p><i>pure</i> <i>peace-loving</i></p>	<p><i>unspiritual</i> <i>envious</i></p>

▶ Read James 4:1-4.

- ▶ What are the root causes of "explosions" (fights and quarrels) among people?
- ▶ Give one or two examples of praying with the wrong motives. Be specific!

▶ We can't mix wisdom from heaven with earthly wisdom. It's risky trying to be a "friend of the world" and a friend of God at the same time. We must "hook up" to either one or the other.

- ▶ Why do you think this is an either/or statement?
- ▶ In your own words, explain how someone can be a friend of God.

Proverbs 3:13, 17-18

<sup>13</sup>Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding,  
<sup>17</sup>Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.  
<sup>18</sup>She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

James 3:13—4:4

<sup>3:13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.  
<sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.  
<sup>4:1</sup>What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup>When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.  
<sup>4</sup>You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

cut here

»mon

Read James 3:17. Wisdom has nothing to do with intelligence. Based on this verse, come up with a short definition of wisdom. Begin it with the phrase "Wisdom is . . ." Ask God to give you this kind of wisdom.

»tues

Ambition isn't necessarily a bad thing, but you do have to check your motives for being successful. Use James 3:13-18 as a guide for godly motives.

»wed

Read James 3:17-18. The wisdom from heaven is peace-loving. Think of ways

you can bring peace to others. Come up with a specific plan of action. Ask God for the opportunity to be a peacemaker.

»thurs

The wisdom from heaven is considerate and submissive—not exactly popular terms these days. With God's help, practice putting other people first today. At the end of the day, write how you felt about being submissive and considerate.

»fri

The wisdom from heaven is impartial and sincere. Think back over the last week. Have you been just the opposite? Ask God to make you wise in the way you treat others.

»sat

Read James 3:13-14, and 17. Find a quiet place and spend a few minutes confessing any sin of envy or selfish ambition you've been hanging on to. Thank God for forgiving you and ask Him to give you His wisdom.

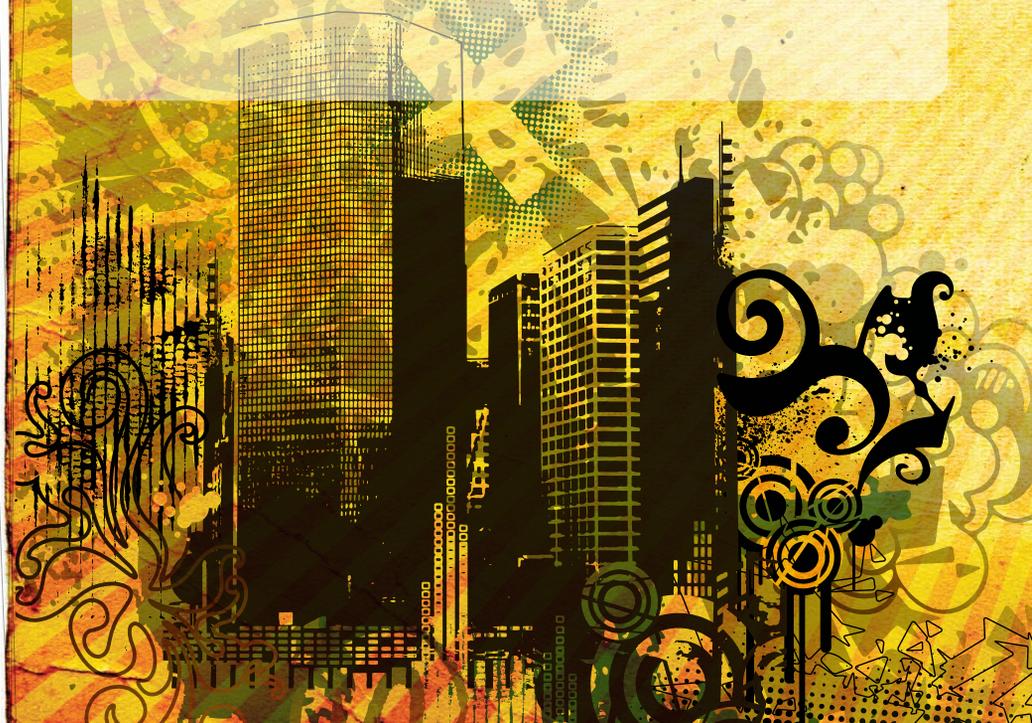
The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

—James 3:17

# GOSPEL MUSIC & CHRISTIAN

# HIP HOP TRIVIA

1. Who started the oldest black-owned gospel recording label in the nation?



2. Who was the first Christian hip-hop group to be nominated for a Grammy in the Rock Gospel category?

3. Who wrote the longest running #1 single in radio across all genres in the history of Billboard analysis?

4. Who is considered the grandfather of Christian hip-hop?

5. Who's credited as the author of the first published/copyrighted gospel song?

6. Who's known as "the father of gospel"?

7. Who was the first Christian rapper to release a full-length Christian rap album?



1. Dr. Leonard Scott; 2. Cross Movement; 3. Marvin Sapp; 4. Michael Peace; 5. Charles Tindley; 6. Thomas Dorsey; 7. Stephen Wiley 1985

People keep messing with me online. I dunno if it's a big deal. They don't even say stuff to my face they just post [bad stuff] about me. I told one of my teachers but he said that since it isn't happening on school property he can't do anything. My parents aren't any help. I don't know what to do.

—Greg

Hi Greg,

First of all, what you're describing has a name and it's becoming increasingly common among youth—it's called cyber-bullying, and it is a big deal.

**A vast majority of kids admit someone has said mean or hurtful things to them online.**

And unfortunately, teens who are cyber-bullied often lash out online themselves. Most teens don't tell their parents about the mean and hurtful things that happen online. Even worse, the consequences of cyber-bullying can be extreme and can even end with suicide.

If you are the victim of cyber-bullying, protect yourself—emotionally and physically. Don't give your password to anyone. (They might hack your accounts.) Don't open anything that you know will be mean. (But don't delete them, either; keep it as evidence for future action.) Block those who post mean or inappropriate things.

Also, don't give in to cyber-bullying yourself. It's tempting to lash out at those who are being jerks to you, but keeping yourself above the fray is the only way to break the cycle of online cruelty.

Most importantly, tell a trusted adult and keep telling them until they understand how serious a problem this really is and help you take action. Initially, they may think you are exaggerating the problem. But enough horrible news stories have started to emerge that should help the adults around you understand how bad cyber-bullying can be.

Q. Dear Blueprint,  
If God knows everything, then He already knows the stuff I'm praying about. So why should I bother?

—Danny (17)

A. Awesome. Good question to ask. Why? Why do we pray? If God is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-everything, the beginning and the end, then He would certainly know my prayers before I ask, right? So why should I waste my time?

To start, you're totally right. God knows all and sees all. He knows your wants and needs before you ask for them. In the Bible, people often pray or seek God first before impossible battles were won or the sick were healed. Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

Prayer shouldn't be words that are thrown out to look impressive, but prayer is simply talking to God. Prayer can go from straight-up seeking guidance in your life, overcoming a problem, or praying for a friend or family member. Yes, He knows your life before you live it—what you'll do, what will happen, but get this: He still wants to hear from you. He desires to talk with you daily and to have a personal, one-on-one relationship with you. Now here's where it gets good. Not only did the people from the Bible pray to God, but so did the King of kings, Jesus. Multiple times Jesus woke early in the morning (sometimes before the sun was up) to spend time with the Father, asking for counsel, wisdom and guidance.

You see, God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants you to cry out to Him, to pray to Him, to ask Him the needs of your heart even though He already knows what they are. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). Pray to the Father who made all of everything, knows everything, and yet still wants a relationship with you.

—Elisha (19)

# close relationships

James 4:6-10; 5:7-11; Psalm 24:3-5

**When other Christians** talk about having a close relationship with the Lord, do you ever wonder how you can have that kind of relationship?

James explains how to have and maintain a close relationship with the Lord. And David gives us some essential ingredients for that kind of relationship too.

## ▶ Read James 4:6.

- ▶ What attitude blocks a close relationship with God? What kind of attitude does God want His followers to have?

## ▶ Look at verses 7-10.

- ▶ List 10 guidelines for rooting out pride and developing a humble attitude.

## ▶ Read verses 8-10 again.

- ▶ Explain these verses in your own words.

## ▶ Read James 5:7-9.

- ▶ What practical advice does James give?

## ▶ Read James 5:10-11.

- ▶ What, if anything, do you remember about Job? What happens when a Christian perseveres in suffering? (Check out James 1:2-4, too.)

## ▶ Read Psalm 24:3-5.

- ▶ Sound familiar? Why is it absolutely necessary to get rid of sin in order to have a close relationship with God?
- ▶ Look at the list you made for question two. Choose two or three items from the list and explain, for example, how someone can submit to God or resist the Devil.

### James 4:6-10

<sup>6</sup>But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

<sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

### James 5:7-11

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup>You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. <sup>9</sup>Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

<sup>10</sup>Brothers, and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

### Psalm 24:3-5

<sup>3</sup>Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup>The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

<sup>5</sup>They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.

»mon

Read James 4:8. What does it mean to come near to God? How could you build a closer relationship with God today?

»tues

Read Isaiah 55:6. God wants us to seek Him while He can still be found. What might this verse mean to you? Write down a few ways you will seek Him this week.

»wed

Read James 4:8 again. If you come near to Him, God promises that He will come near to you. He doesn't want to feel far away. Pray to Him right now and thank Him for being there.

»thurs

Write down the first thing you think of when you hear the words "humble" and "submit." According to James 4:6-8, what happens when a Christian is humble and submissive to God?

»fri

Read James 4:10. Draw a sketch of this verse. Spend some extra time in prayer today. Thank God for His greatness, power, and control of the universe. Also thank Him for His love for you.

»sat

Fill in this sentence: I get impatient and complain when \_\_\_\_\_. Read James 5:8-9. Ask God to help you see things from His perspective and trust Him.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.  
—James 4:7

# Really?

Martin Luther, the German monk who started the Protestant Reformation, was well known for praying one or two hours every day.

One busy morning, with several services planned in Wittenburg, Luther passed a friend in town. His friend commented that with so many scheduled events, Luther would have to curtail his customary prayer time.

"On the contrary," Luther replied,

**"I HAVE SO MUCH TO DO TODAY THAT I SHALL NEVER GET THROUGH IT WITH LESS THAN THREE HOURS' PRAYER."**



Developing a regular time of Bible study and prayer can be difficult. There are a lot of legitimate things demanding your time these days. What's the best way to make time for God?

Take a look at the ways some very busy, very godly people in the Bible developed their relationship with God. Look up the following verses and see what you can learn about prayer, Bible study, and worship from each Bible character.

REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS, WHO SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD TO YOU, CONSIDER THE OUTCOME OF THEIR WAY OF LIFE AND IMITATE THEIR FAITH.

—HEBREWS 13:7

# Disciplined Disciples

What can you learn about **prayer** from this person?

What can you learn about **Bible study** from this person?

What can you learn about **worship** from this person?

*Joshua*

Joshua 10:12-14

Joshua 1:8

Joshua 24:15

*David*

Psalms 17

Psalms 119:1-8

Psalms 134

*Daniel*

Daniel 6:10-11

Daniel 9:2, 13

Daniel 10:15-19

*Ezra*

Ezra 10:1

Ezra 7:10

Nehemiah 8:6

*John*

1 John 5:14-15

1 John 2:7-8

Revelation 1:10

*Paul*

Colossians 1:3-14

Acts 17:2

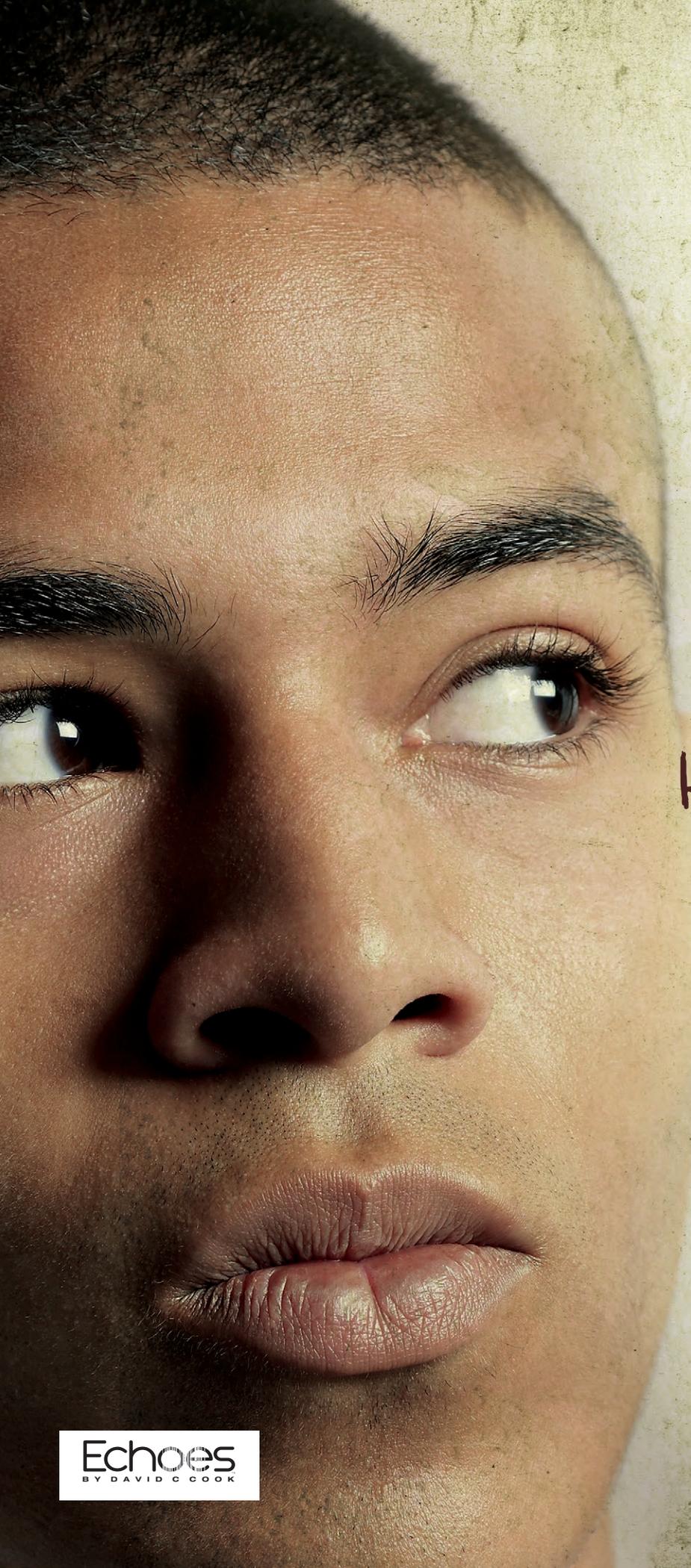
Acts 16:25

*Jesus*

Luke 5:16

Matthew 4:1-11

Luke 4:8, 16



BUT IF FROM  
THERE YOU SEEK  
THE LORD YOUR  
GOD, YOU WILL  
FIND HIM IF  
YOU SEEK HIM  
WITH ALL YOUR  
HEART AND WITH  
ALL YOUR SOUL.

-DEUTERONOMY  
4:29