This week’s lesson looks at how effective and powerful the quiet voice of wisdom can be in the situations we face from day to day.

OPENING ACTIVITY: Surprising Strength

The mild-mannered Clark Kent has super powers? The pen can prevail over the sword? An unconquerable walled city can be sacked by the gift of a wooden horse? The power of secret weapons is often in their unassuming appearance.

Invite class members to talk about a time when they were surprised by the strength of something that they didn’t think could be so strong. Perhaps it was an ant carrying a load twice its own size, a powerful current in a small stream, or a small child belting out a song with great vocal prowess.

Talk about an occasion when a “quiet” time was surprisingly powerful in your life. Maybe it was standing in a national park in absolute quiet and being struck by the lack of noise as you realized just how much noise surrounds us in our world today. Maybe it was a time of prayer when you heard God’s still, small voice.

Quietness is a quality that should be learned by all people. We will learn how the person we are reading about this week, Brad Pitt, may need to exhibit quietness when speaking to the media.

OPENING STORY [Read the story to your class, or make copies and pass it around]

Brad Pitt is an Oscar nominated movie actor who has appeared in movies such as “Thelma and Louise” (1991); “Interview With a Vampire” (1994); “Ocean’s Eleven” (2001) and its sequels; “Troy” (2004); “Mr. and Mrs. Smith” (2005); and “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” (2008).

He is almost just as famous for his marriage to Jennifer Aniston. They are divorced now and Brad has a new love, Angelina Jolie. It is not unusual for ex’s to have nasty things to say about their former spouses. However, Brad had never done that—until a recent interview with Parade Magazine. Pitt started the interview by stating that 10-12 years ago he was
a “pathetic slacker sitting on a couch, holding a joint. I wasn’t leading an interesting life.”

Brad had more to say but he should have kept it to himself. He spoke about his marriage to Jennifer Aniston saying, “I think my marriage [to Jennifer] had something to do with it. I was trying to pretend the marriage was something it wasn’t.” After the media interpreted the statement as negative, Brad tried multiple times to clarify his comments. Brad told a reporter, “Nowadays, I’m satisfied with making true choices and finding the woman I love, Angie, and building a family that I love so much.”

Brad’s rep also contacted E! News to provide further clarification. Brad wanted to make sure the media, and most importantly Jennifer, knew that the comments were misinterpreted. “It grieves me that this was interpreted this way. Jen is an incredibly giving, loving, and hilarious woman who remains my friend. It is an important relationship I value greatly. The point I was trying to make is not that Jen was dull, but that I was becoming dull to myself. That, only I am responsible for.”

Jen was once quoted as saying, “Brad was missing ‘a sensitivity chip.’” Based on his comments, she may have been right. It can’t feel good to hear Brad brand her a mind-numbing bore and his whole life with her was a lie. Some believe it was not mere thoughtlessness but Brad expressing his pain in seeing Jen and Justin Theroux, so in love.

Reporters who are familiar with Brad feel he is one of the most private and least malicious guys around. They believe he did not mean to harm Jennifer Aniston in any way. Let’s hope Jenn has the same feelings. Words have power so we have to be wise when we speak. It is often better to be quiet. Let’s hope Brad Pitt has wisdom enough to not feed the media any more foolishness. Other entertainers such as Charlie Sheen, and Kanye West could follow the same advice.

[Now form small groups and have your class discuss these following questions.]

♫ What can we learn from Brad Pitt about what not to do and say if we want to be wise?

♫ Why do we often pay more attention to some people’s foolishness than to the wise words and actions of others?

♫ Describe someone you know who is characterized by quiet wisdom. Do people regularly consult that person for wisdom?

♫ When have you seen quiet wisdom help a person or situation?

— Ecclesiastes 9:16
[When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your Adult Teacher's Guide.]

News Sources:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad_Pitt

www.perezhilton.com/category/Brad-Pitt


The Quiet Voice of Wisdom

Lesson 6
October 9
2011

for use as
STEP 4

Lesson 6
Focus:
A loud fool can out shout quiet wisdom.

Lesson 6
Bible Basis:
Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

Lesson 6
Memory Verse
So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.”
—Ecclesiastes 9:16

REACH FOR WISDOM

Even as the loud foolishness of worldly perspectives blares all around us, we should tune it out and listen for God’s wisdom to direct our lives. What will this godly wisdom look like in action? Wisdom that is from above, James wrote, “is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere” (James 3:17). It looks like Jesus in action as He was pure, peace-loving, considerate, and submissive to His Father. When we need to know how to reach for wisdom, we can look to His example.

[Activity]

Have your students return to the groups they had in Step 1 and discuss these questions.

- When you read James’s description of wisdom, what strengths can you identify in his list that you want growing in your own life?
- Have you been able to bring quiet wisdom to a past situation? If so, describe what happened.
- What situation in your life now needs the strength of quiet wisdom? What first things can you begin doing to bring wisdom to the situation? [For example, an attitude or behavior change, more carefully choosing your words, listening more, speaking up for the truth, etc.]. Pray for the strength of God’s quiet wisdom to prevail in the situation.

Close the lesson in prayer, asking God for the strength of His wisdom to prevail in the circumstances mentioned in the groups and that His voice would be clear to all of us.

(David C Cook is not affiliated with and does not endorse any website listed on these pages.)
CHAPTER THREE

Proverbs 2—4
THE PATH OF WISDOM AND LIFE

A newspaper cartoon shows an automobile balancing precariously over the edge of a cliff, with an embarrassed husband sitting next to him. Meekly, he says to his wife, “Honey, there’s got to be a lesson here somewhere.”

There’s a lesson there all right, and it’s this: The only way to end up at the right destination is to choose the right road. If you’ve ever made a wrong turn in a strange place and found yourself lost, then you know how important that lesson is.

The metaphor of life as a journey is a familiar one; it is found in the Bible as well as in classical literature. The Odyssey of Homer describes Ulysses’ ten-year journey from Troy to his home in Ithaca, and Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress is an account of Christian’s journey from the City of Destruction to the heavenly city. The Bible frequently exhorts us to choose the right path, but the contemporary world thinks there are “many ways to God” and any path you sincerely follow will eventually take you there.

Jesus made it clear that in this life we can take only one of two ways, and each of them leads to a different destination. Everybody has to choose either the crowded road that leads to destruction or the narrow road that leads to life (Matt. 7:13–14). There’s no middle way.

In the book of Proverbs, the words path and way (and their plurals) are found nearly one hundred times (kjv). Wisdom is not only a person to love, but Wisdom is also a path to walk, and the emphasis in chapters 2, 3, and 4 is on the blessings God’s people enjoy when they walk on Wisdom’s path. The path of Wisdom leads to life, but the way of Folly leads to death; when you walk on the path of Wisdom, you enjoy three wonderful assurances: Wisdom protects your path (ch. 2), directs your path (ch. 3), and perfects your path (ch. 4).

1. Wisdom Protects Your Path (Prov. 2)
The key verse in chapter 2 is verse 8: “He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints” (NKJV). The repetition of the phrase “my son” (2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; and 6:1) reminds us that the book of Proverbs records a loving father’s wise counsel to his family. The British statesman Lord Chesterfield said, “In matters of religion and matrimony I never give any advice; because I will not have anybody’s torrents in this world or the next laid to my charge.” But Jewish fathers were commanded to teach their children wisdom (Deut. 6:1–9); if the children were smart, they paid attention and obeyed. Life is dangerous. It is wise to listen to the counsel of godly people who have walked the path before us.

Three different “walks” are described in this chapter. Walking with God (vv. 1–9). Chapters 2—4 all begin with an admonition to listen to God’s words and take them to heart (3:1–12; 4:1–9), because that’s the only way we can walk with God and live skillfully. Eight imperatives in this paragraph reveal our responsibilities toward God’s truth: receive (accept) God’s words and hide them (store them up) in our minds and hearts; incline the ear and apply the heart; cry after knowledge and lift up the voice for understanding; seek for wisdom and search after it. If you want wisdom, you must listen to God attentively (Matt. 13:9), obey Him humbly (John 7:17), ask Him sincerely (James 1:5), and seek Him diligently (Isa. 55:6–7), the way a miner searches for silver and gold.

Obtaining spiritual wisdom isn’t a once-a-week hobby; it is the daily discipline of a lifetime. But in this age of microwave ovens, fast foods, digests, and numerous “made easy” books, many people are out of the habit of daily investing time and energy in digging deep into Scripture and learning wisdom from the Lord. Thanks to television, their attention span is brief; thanks to religious entertainment that passes for worship, their spiritual appetite is feeble and spiritual knowledge isn’t “pleasant to [their] soul” (Prov. 2:10). It’s no wonder fewer and fewer people “take time to be holy” and more and more people fall prey to the enemies that lurk along the way.

If we do our part, God will keep His promise and protect us from the enemy (vv. 7–8): “He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones” (NIV). “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11 NKJV).
People are willing to work diligently in their jobs because they know they’ll earn a paycheck, but what about applying themselves diligently to God’s Word in order to gain spiritual riches that are more valuable than gold and silver and jewels, riches that will last forever? (See 2:4; 3:13–15; 8:10–21; 16:16.) There’s a price to pay if we would gain spiritual wisdom, but there’s even greater price to pay if we don’t gain it. We must walk with God through the study of His Word.

Walking with the wicked (vv. 10–19). Here we meet “the evil man” and “the strange woman,” two people who are dangerous because they want to lead God’s children away from the path of life. The evil man is known for his perverse (“froward,” KJV; crooked) words (see vv. 12, 14; 6:14; 8:13; 10:31–32; 16:28, 30). He walks on the dark path of disobedience and enjoys doing that which is evil. He belongs to the crowd Solomon warns us about in 1:10–19. The person who walks in the way of wisdom would immediately detect his deceit and avoid him.

The “strange woman” is the adulteress, the wayward wife described so vividly in 7:1–27. If the evil man uses perverted words to snare the unwary, the adulteress uses flattering words. Someone has said that flattery isn’t communication; it is manipulation; it’s people telling us things about ourselves that we enjoy hearing and wish were true. The strange woman knows how to use flattery successfully. She has no respect for God because she breaks His law (Ex. 20:14); she has no respect for her husband because she violates the promises she made to him when she married him. She no longer has a guide or a friend in the Lord or in her husband because she has taken the path of sin. Anyone who listens to her words and follows her path is heading for the cemetery.

Walking with the righteous (vv. 20–22). Note the argument that Solomon gives in this chapter that begins with the “if” of verse 1 and continues with the “then” of verse 9 and the “thus” of verse 20. If we receive God’s words and obey them, then we will have wisdom to make wise decisions, and thus God will keep His promise and protect us from the evil man and the strange woman. When you obey God, you have the privilege to “walk in the ways of good men” (v. 20 NIV). If you follow the Word of God, you will never lack for the right kind of friends.

The wicked may appear to be succeeding, but their end is destruction (Ps. 37). The godly will be rooted in the place of God’s blessing (Ps. 1:3), but the ungodly will be uprooted from the land. The safest and most satisfying path is the path of wisdom, the path of life.

2. Wisdom Directs Our Path (Prov. 3)

The key verses in this chapter are verses 5–6, a promise God’s people have often claimed as they have sought the Lord’s direction for their lives. And this promise has never failed them—if they have obeyed the conditions God has laid down in verses 1–12. God keeps His promises when we obey His precepts, because our obedience prepares us to receive and enjoy what He has planned for us.

Conditions to meet (vv. 1–12). The first condition for receiving God’s guidance is that we learn God’s truth (vv. 1–4). The will of God is revealed in the Word of God (Col. 1:9–10), and the only way to know His will is to study His Word and obey it. By receiving the Word within our hearts, we experience growth in godly character so that mercy and truth (“love and faithfulness,” NIV) become beautiful ornaments in our lives (Prov. 3:3; 1:9). It isn’t enough for believers to carry the Bible in their hands; they must let the Holy Spirit write it on their hearts (3:3; 7:3; 2 Cor. 3:1–3). Obedience to the Word can add years to your life and life to your years.

Second, we must obey God’s will (vv. 5–8). “He shall direct your paths” (v. 6 NIV) is the promise, but the fulfillment of that promise is predicated on our obedience to the Lord. We must trust Him with all our heart and obey Him in all our ways. That means total commitment to Him (Rom. 12:1–2). The word translated “trust” in verse 5 means “to lie helpless, facedown.” It pictures a servant waiting for the master’s command in readiness to obey, or a defeated soldier yielding himself to the conquering general.

The danger, of course, is that we lean on our own understanding and thereby miss God’s will. This warning doesn’t suggest that God’s children turn off their brains and ignore their intelligence and common sense. It simply cautions us not to depend on our own wisdom or experience or the wisdom and experience of others. Abraham did this when he went to Egypt (Gen. 12:10–20), and so did Joshua when he attacked the little town of Ai (Josh. 7). When we become “wise in [our] own eyes” (Prov. 3:7), then we’re heading for trouble.

Share God’s blessings (vv. 9–10) is the third condition we must meet if we want God to direct our paths. There’s no such thing as “spiritual” and “material” in the Christian life, for everything comes from God and belongs to God. The Old Testament Jews brought the Lord the firstlings of their flocks (Ex. 13:1–2) and the firstfruits of their fields (Lev. 23:9–14), and in this way acknowledged His goodness and sovereignty. The New Testament parallel is seen in Matthew 6:33.

If we don’t faithfully give to the Lord, we don’t really trust the Lord. Of course, our tithes and offerings aren’t “payment” for His blessings; rather, they’re evidence of our faith and obedience. Christian industrialist R. G. LeTourneau used to say, “If you give because it pays, it won’t pay.” Giving is heart preparation for what God wants to say to us and do for us. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21 NIV).

Our fourth responsibility is to submit to God’s chastening (Prov. 3:11–12). Chastening is a part of God’s plan to help His sons and daughters mature in godly character (Heb. 12:1–11). God chastens us, not
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as a judge punishes a criminal, but as a parent disciplines a child. He acts in love, and His purpose is that we might become “partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). Sometimes He chastens because we have rebelled and need to repent; other times He chastens to keep us from sinning and to prepare us for His special blessing. No matter how much the experience hurts us, it will never harm us, because God always chastens in love (Deut. 8:2–5).

Blessings to enjoy (vv. 13–35). If we trust and obey, our Father will direct our path into the blessings He has planned for us; the first of these blessings is the true wealth that comes from wisdom (vv. 13–18). Some people know the price of everything but the value of nothing; consequently, they make unwise choices and end up with shoddy merchandise. An acquaintance of mine, thinking he was getting a bargain, bought a box of white shirts from a street vendor for just a few dollars. When he opened the box at home, he discovered they weren’t shirts at all: they were dickeys made to be used on corpses. So much for his bargain. You take what you want from life, and you pay for it.

It’s good to have the things money can buy; provided you don’t lose the things money can’t buy. What good is an expensive house if there’s no happy home within it? Happiness, pleasantness, and peace aren’t the guaranteed by-products of financial success, but they are guaranteed to the person who lives by God’s wisdom. Wisdom becomes a “tree of life” to the believer who takes hold of her, and this is a foretaste of heaven (Rev. 22:1–2).

Another blessing is harmony with God’s creation (Prov. 3:19–20). The person who walks according to God’s wisdom can sing, “This is my Father’s world,” and really mean it. The wisdom of God brought everything into being (8:22ff.), including what science calls “the laws of nature.” Obey these laws and creation will work with you; disobey them and creation will work against you. People in the so-called “New Age” movement try to be “at one” with creation, but they’re doomed to fail because they reject the wisdom of God. Christians who live by God’s wisdom will be good stewards of His creation and will use His gifts for His glory.

A third blessing is the Father’s providential care (3:21–26). Because God directs our path, He is able to protect our path. The Lord isn’t obligated to protect His children when they willfully go their own way. They’re only tempting Him, and that’s a dangerous thing to do. Back in the early 1940s an angry unbeliever asked a pastor friend of mine, “Why doesn’t God stop this terrible war?” My friend quietly replied, “He doesn’t stop it because He didn’t start it.” It was started by people who rejected God’s wisdom and pursued their own selfish passions.

When you surrender yourself to God, every part of your body belongs to Him and will be protected by Him. He will help you keep your eyes from wandering (v. 21), your neck from turning your face away from God’s path (vv. 22; see Luke 9:53), your feet walking on the right path (Prov. 3:23, 26), and even your backbone safe while you’re sleeping (v. 24). If something frightening suddenly happens, you won’t be afraid (v. 25; see Ps. 112:7; 121:3–6), because the Lord is protecting you. How we sleep is sometimes evidence of how much we trust the Lord (Ps. 4—5).

A positive relationship with others (Prov. 3:27–35) is a fourth blessing the believer enjoys when he or she walks in the wisdom of God. Wise Christians will be generous to their neighbors and live peaceably with them (vv. 27–30), doing their best to avoid unnecessary disagreements (Rom. 12:18). After all, if we truly love God, we will love our neighbor as we would want him to love us.

On the other hand, if our neighbor is a perverse person who scolds at our faith (Prov. 3:31–35), the Lord will guide us in letting our light shine and His love show so that we will influence him but he won’t lead us astray. Sometimes it takes a great deal of patience, prayer, and wisdom to rightly relate to people who don’t want Christians in the neighborhood, but perhaps that’s why God put us there.

It’s possible to have a godly home in the midst of an ungodly neighborhood, for God “blesses the home of the righteous” (v. 33 NIV). We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and one dedicated Christian in a neighborhood can make a great deal of difference and be a powerful witness for the Lord.

3. Wisdom Perfects Our Path (Prov. 4)

The key verse in chapter 4 is verse 18: “But the path of the just is like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” The picture is that of the sunrise (“the first gleam of dawn,” niv) and the increasing of the light on the pilgrim path as the day advances. If we walk in the way of God’s wisdom, the path gets brighter and brighter and there is no sunset! When the path ends, we step into a land where the light never dims, for “there shall be no night there” (Rev. 22:5).

God has a plan for each of His children (Eph. 2:10), and if we walk in His wisdom, we can confidently say, “The Lord will perfect that which concerns me” (Ps. 138:8 NKEV). Our path may not be an easy one, but it will always be a fulfilling one as we walk in the will of the Father. This involves three responsibilities on our part: knowing God’s Word (Prov. 4:19), trusting God’s providence (vv. 10–19), and obeying God’s will (vv. 20–27).

Knowing God’s Word (vv. 1–9). Some children don’t like to hear Dad say, “Now, back when I was a boy …” but they might learn a lot if they paid attention and listened. He learned wisdom from his father, and now he’s passing it on to the next generation. This is the primary way God has ordained for His truth to be preserved and invested from generation to generation (Deut. 6:3–9; Eph. 6:1–4; 2 Tim. 1:3–5; 2:2; 3:14–17). Children who have godly parents and grandparents ought to give thanks to the Lord for their rich
The writer of Psalm 119 who prayed, “Turn us will have security (4:6), outlook deteriorates in a later chapter, Proverbs has a heritage, instead of scoffing at that heritage and abandoning it for the way of the world.

“Get wisdom” (Prov. 4:5) suggests “buy wisdom” because the Hebrew word carriers the idea of a commercial transaction. There’s a price to pay if you want to know God’s truth and obey it. “Buy the truth, and sell it not” (23:23). Parents and grandparents can teach us, but only we can receive the Word into our hearts, cherish it, and pay the price to obey it.

The father tells his sons to treat wisdom the way they would treat their mother, sister, or wife: love her, honor her, embrace her, exalt her! The bumper sticker that asks, “Have you hugged your children today?” ought to be balanced with, “Have you hugged wisdom today?” In Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a beautiful woman who invites us to her lavish banquet, while folly is the adulteress or prostitute who tempts us to poverty and death. The ancient Romans, listening to one of their orators, would look at each other, smile, and say, “Cum grano salis”—“Take it with a grain of salt.”

But Christians are supposed to put the salt into their speech and keep their words pure and honest.

As we shall see in a later chapter, Proverbs has a great deal to say about human speech; in fact, the word mouth is used over fifty times and the word lips over forty times in the Authorized Version. Among other things, Solomon warns us about perverse lips (Prov. 4:24), lying lips (12:22), flattering lips (20:19), deceptive lips (24:28), and undisciplined lips (10:19). “He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin” (13:3 NIV).

“What is before my eyes?” (v. 25). Outlook determines outcome. Abraham was the friend of God because he walked by faith and “looked for a city … whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). Lot became a friend of the world because he walked by sight and moved toward the wicked city of Sodom (Gen. 13:10, 12). Everybody has some vision before them that helps to determine their values, actions, and plans. We would all be wise to imitate David who said, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes” (Ps. 101:3), and the writer of Psalm 119 who prayed, “Turn my eyes away from worthless things” (v. 37 NIV). If you are “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) as you walk the path of life, then keep that posture of faith. If you look

Proverbs

Obeying God’s will (vv. 20–27). This is a wonderful paragraph to us as a personal spiritual inventory to see if we’re really living in obedience to the Lord. Let’s ask ourselves:

“What comes into my ears?” (v. 20). Whatever enters our ears will ultimately influence our mind, our heart, and my decisions, so I’d better be careful what I listen to. Paul warns us to beware of “obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking” (Eph. 5:4 NIV), and Psalm 1:1 tells us to avoid ungodly counsel. When people speak, we must be able to identify God’s voice (John 10:3–5, 16) and obey what He says.

“What is within my heart?” (v. 23). Whatever the heart loves, the ears will hear and the eyes will see. When our children were small, no matter where we were driving, they could usually find the ice cream shops and the toy stores; I must confess that I managed to locate the bookstores! “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (v. 23 NIV). If we pollute that wellspring, the infection will spread; before long, hidden appetites will become open sins and public shame.

The Bible warns us to avoid a double heart (Ps. 12:2), a hard heart (Prov. 28:14), a proud heart (21:4), an unbelieving heart (Heb. 3:12), a cold heart (Matt. 24:12), and an unclean heart (Ps. 51:10). “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (139:23).

“What is upon my lips?” (v. 24). Whatever is in the heart will ultimately come out of the mouth (Matt. 12:33–34). God’s children must be careful to have “sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Titus 2:8), speech that’s gracious and “seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6 NIV).

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Proverbs

back (Luke 9:62) or around (Matt. 14:30), you may go on a detour.

"What is beyond my path?" (vv. 26–27). The Hebrew word translated "ponder" means "to weigh" or "to make level." It is related to a word that means "scales" (16:11). In his final speech before he drank the hemlock, Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living"; Paul wrote, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5 niv). The Lord is weighing our ways (Prov. 5:21) and our hearts (21:2), as well as our actions (1 Sam. 2:3), and we had better do the same. Life is too short and too precious to be wasted on the temporary and the trivial.

If we're walking in the way of wisdom, God promises to protect our path, direct our path, and perfect our path.

All folly can offer us is danger, detours, and disappointments, ultimately leading to death.

It shouldn't be too difficult to make the right choice!

Notes

1 This has been my life verse since 1948 when I entered seminary to prepare for ministry, and I can bear witness that it has never failed me. When you walk on God's path, you delight in God's presence and enjoy God's pleasures. You have life, joy, and pleasure—and it gets better and better as life progresses!

CHAPTER FOUR

Proverbs 5–7

THE PATH OF FOLLY AND DEATH

You shall not commit adultery."

The Lord God spoke those words at Mount Sinai, and we call what He said the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14). It declares that sexual intimacy outside the bonds of marriage is wrong, even if "between consenting adults."1 This law specifically mentions adultery, but the commandment includes the sexual sins prohibited elsewhere in Scripture (Lev. 18; Rom. 1:18–32; 1 Cor. 6:9–20; Eph. 5:1–14). God invented sex and has every right to tell us how to use it properly.

However, on hearing the seventh commandment, many people in contemporary society smile nonchalantly and ask, "What's wrong with premarital or extramarital sex, or any other kind, for that matter?" After all, they argue, many people indulge in these things and seem to get away with it. Furthermore, these activities are more acceptable today than they were in Solomon's day; why make a big issue out of it? "Life is a game in which the rules are constantly changing," says a contemporary writer; "nothing spoils a game more than those who take it seriously."2 So, the verdict's in: sex is fun, so don't take it too seriously.

It's true that some well-known people have indulged in sexual escapades and even bragged about it, including government officials, Hollywood stars, sports heroes, and (alas!) preachers, but that doesn't make it right. Sexual sin is one of the main themes of numerous movies, TV programs, novels, and short stories; yet popularity is no test of right and wrong. Many things that the law says are legal, the Bible says are evil, and there won't be a jury sitting at the White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15; 21:27; 22:15).

Why worry about sexual sins? These three chapters of Proverbs give us three reasons why we should worry if we break God's laws of purity: because sexual sin is eventually disappointing (Prov. 5), gradually destructive (ch. 6), and ultimately deadly (ch. 7). That's why God says, "You shall not commit adultery."

1. Sexual Sin Is Eventually Disappointing (Prov. 5)

When married people honor and respect sex as God instructs them in His Word, they can experience increasing enjoyment and enrichment in their intimacy. But when people break the rules, the result is just the opposite. They experience disappointment and disillusionment and have to search for larger "doses" of sexual adventure in order to attain the imaginary pleasure level they're seeking.

God created sex not only for reproduction but also for enjoyment, and He didn't put the "marriage wall" around sex to rob us of pleasure but to increase pleasure and protect it. In this chapter, Solomon explains the disappointments that come when people violate God's loving laws of sexual purity.

Their experience goes from sweetness to bitterness (vv. 1–6). We've met "the strange woman" before (2:16; niv, "adulteress") and she'll be mentioned again (5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 22:14; 25:27; 27:13). The word translated "strange" basically means "not related to." The "strange woman" is one to whom the man is not related by marriage, and therefore any sexual liaison with her is evil. The beginning of this sinful alliance may be exciting and sweet, because the kisses and words from her lips drip like honey (7:13–20), but in the end, the "sweetness" turns to bitterness, and the honey becomes poison (5:4).

The book of Proverbs emphasizes the importance of looking ahead to see where your actions will lead you (see 5:11; 14:12–14; 16:25; 19:20; 20:21; 23:17–18, 32; 24:14, 20; 25:8). The wise person checks on the destination before buying a ticket (4:26), but modern society thinks that people can violate God's laws and escape the consequences. They're sure that whatever has happened to others will never happen to them. Sad to say, their ignorance and insolence can never neutralize the tragic aftermath that comes when people break the laws of God. "Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (Deut. 32:29).

Their experience goes from gain to loss (vv. 7–14). Temptation always includes hopeful promises; otherwise, people would never take the devil's bait. For a time, it seems like these promises have been fulfilled,

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