

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Two Dinner Invitations**
TEXT: ***Proverbs 9:1-18***

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: An invitation to dinner is always welcome, until you get invitations to two *different dinners*, each held at the same time as the other. Then you have to decide which one to accept and which one to decline. Proverbs 9 presents this very dilemma—invitations to two dinners held simultaneously. How do you decide which invitation to accept?

No doubt you'll make your decision based on many factors—the reputation of the host and hostess, the prospects for a good time, your own tastes in people and food. All these factors appear in the two invitations that conclude Solomon's introduction to the book of Proverbs. Other factors appear as well—such as how long you'll live and how prosperous you'll be.

You see, these are no ordinary dinners, and the invitations come from no ordinary hostesses. Which one you attend will largely determine your health, your wealth and your happiness for the rest of your life.

1. What benefits do you expect to receive from studying the Proverbs of Solomon?
2. Do Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly invite the same people or different people to their feasts?
3. Do you think you're among those specifically invited to this dinner? Explain.
4. Do you think Lady Wisdom would welcome the mocker of verses 7-8? Why or why not?
5. How are the two hostesses alike, and how are they different? Explain.
6. Which hostess has the greater resources to deploy in her guests' behalf?
What are some of these resources?

7. Which hostess appears to offer the most pleasure to her guests? Explain.
8. What do verses 7-12 tell us about *how* Lady Wisdom imparts benefits to her guests?
9. After reading verse 10, do you think that knowledge and understanding must be explicitly Judeo-Christian in order to be genuine? Why or why not?
10. Proverbs 9 is, of course, an extended metaphor - a parable. Wisdom is *like* a wealthy woman inviting guests to a feast. What people do you know who embody the person of Lady Wisdom in their relationship to you?
11. In whom, or where, or in what circumstances have you encountered Woman Folly?
12. No matter which "invitation" you accept, your decision will result in both *pleasure* and *pain*. How do the pleasure and pain from dining at lady Wisdom's house differ from the pleasure and pain one finds at Woman Folly's abode?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **The Simple**

TEXT: **Proverbs 7:6-23; 14:15; 14:18; 19:25; 21:11; 27:12.**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: As P. T. Barnum was fond of saying, "A sucker is born every minute." The book of Proverbs agrees! Proverbs teaches through images and metaphors like that of the simple young man. The tale of his seduction serves as a concrete example of the way in which folly can capture a simple-minded person. From Solomon's point of view, every one of us was born "simple"—that is, gullible, credulous, naive. But while Barnum saw human gullibility as an opportunity for profit, the proverbs see the condition as a character weakness to be corrected. All around us people appeal to our gullibility in one area or another. If we're to escape with our money, health and integrity intact, we need to develop what the proverbs call *prudence*.

The first practical step to wisdom is to identify the simpleton in ourselves. The proverbs in this study are a mirror which lets us see where and how we are naive. And more than that, they will set us on the road to wisdom.

1. All of us would agree that young children are naive or simple in all areas of life. But all of us *remain* naive or simple in some areas. Why does this happen?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Proverbs 7:6-23 gives us the first full-blown portrait of the simpleton. What does the seductress say that is probably true? What does she say (or imply) that is actually false?
3. Men and women "without judgment" can be persuaded to do foolish things other than adultery. From your own recollections, describe a case of persuasion which follows the same pattern as Proverbs 7.
4. How are the individual proverbs about the simpleton exemplified in the young man in Proverbs 7?
5. All of us have spheres of living where we, like the simpleton in Proverbs 7, have little choice but to believe what we are told. What are some of these areas in your life?
6. The crown in Proverbs 14:18 is probably a reward or prize such as a winning athlete receives. What is the essential difference between receiving something by "being crowned" and receiving something through "inheriting" it?
7. What is the point of saying that the fool *inherits* folly?
8. From your own post-adolescent experience, describe one example of each line in Proverbs 19:25. (Note: "Flogging a mocker" can encompass more than mere corporal punishment.)
9. Consider a practical project we all face from time to time - buying a car. What "dangers" (Proverbs 27:12) might you face as you proceed? What should you do to "take refuge" from them without abandoning the project? What consequences might you suffer if you don't take precautions?
10. It is one thing to know we're naive in this or that respect, and quite another to develop the character strength called *prudence*. What can you begin doing now that will make you more prudent in the future?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Avoiding the Fool**

TEXT: **Proverbs 13:19; 17:12; 18:2, 7; 20:3; 26:11.**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: Proverbs 27:22 makes one very clear point about fools—they're incorrigible: "Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him." But if fools can't be reformed, why do we find such an abundance of proverbs about them? The answer is simple—to help us recognize fools, their foolish behavior, and to warn us about the consequences of both.

Our greatest danger from fools is meeting them unexpectedly, not recognizing them until it's too late. Recognizing and avoiding fools is our only defense from being undone by their folly. Defensive driving techniques protect us from foolish drivers. The proverbs in this study equip us for "defensive living."

1. When you think of a fool, what images come to mind? (For example, a drunk at a party with a lampshade on his head.)
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Proverbs 17:12 poses a riddle - why are you better off to meet a rampaging mother bear rather than to meet a fool in his folly?
3. Describe an episode from your experience or from the experience of someone you know which illustrates the point of Proverbs 17:12.
4. Proverbs 18:2 tells us that opinionated people are apt to be fools—they're always ready with a viewpoint and ever eager to broadcast it. How would you expect a prudent or wise person to behave differently than the fool?
5. When have you seen a fool's mouth become his or her undoing (Proverbs 18:7)?
6. How does Proverbs 18:2 account for the truth of Proverbs 18:7?
7. In Proverbs 13:19, the second line would be better translated with the word *so* than *but*. What does this proverb tell us about the character of the fool?
8. Proverbs 20:3 gives yet another mark of a fool—his quickness to quarrel with others, even if it brings dishonor on himself! By referring to the proverbs, how can we explain this quickness to quarrel?
9. According to Proverbs 26:11, what characteristics do the dog and the fool share in common?
10. Jesus warned, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Mt 7:1). When we use the proverbs about the fool to evaluate people and conclude they are indeed foolish, do we ignore Jesus' warning? Why or why not?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Finding Wisdom**

TEXT: **Proverbs 13:10, 20; 14:12; 15:12; 21:30; 25:12.**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: A factory manager's assembly line was down, so he summoned a consultant to suggest remedies. After inspecting a huge piece of machinery, the consultant produced a small hammer, reached between some gears, and gave a small tap. The assembly line worked again, and the factory manager got a bill for \$10,000. Aghast, the manager demanded another bill itemizing the charges. When it came, the second bill read:

Tapping with hammer: \$5.00

Knowing where to tap: \$9,995.00

Wisdom is "knowing where to tap." When we need some tapping done, we'll do it ourselves if we're wise enough; otherwise we'll need someone who knows where to tap. The book of Proverbs points us in both directions—by showing us "where to tap" in many areas of life, and by helping us seek out those who understand what we cannot yet perceive. The proverbs not only show us wisdom, they show us how to seek wisdom. The proverbs in this study will equip you for your own unique search.

1. In Proverbs to seek wisdom is to seek skill. What specific types of skill would you like to acquire in your work or in your relationships?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. We often say that someone is "street smart," meaning that the person has become "shrewd through enrollment in the School of Hard Knocks." Which proverbs show that wisdom is gained through experience?
3. Can we get wisdom without the "hard knocks"? Defend your answer from the proverbs themselves.
4. In Solomon's day, the wisdom of Proverbs was probably taught in two places—the home and wisdom schools. Today the "wisdom school" takes many forms, from apprenticeships in trade unions to enrollment in universities. Using the proverbs above as a guide, what would you look for when trying to select such a school?
- 5- Of course, formal schooling isn't the only way to get wisdom. Think of a person within your circle of acquaintances who has wisdom which you do not have. How would you describe his or her area of wisdom?
6. What specific steps might you take to acquire the wisdom from that wise man or woman?
7. Why do you think there is often such a huge gulf between what seems right to us and what is truly wise (Proverbs 14:12)?
8. Proverbs 21:30 assures us that certain advice will come to nothing. How can you know if the advice you've gotten is of that kind?

9. Think of various kinds of "how to" books being sold today. Which ones do you think might fail because of Proverbs 21:30?
10. Wanting wisdom isn't enough. To get it we must be able to receive it. From each of the proverbs in this study, suggest a character weakness which hinders a person from becoming wise - one character weakness per proverb.
11. At the beginning of the study, you named areas in which you need wisdom. What can you do in the week ahead to begin acquiring it?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Bad Words**

TEXT: **Proverbs 6:12-14; 16:30; 17:4; 18:8; 26:23; 29:5**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: A childhood taunt says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." The sentiment may be brave, but we know from painful memory that words can be exceedingly painful. Solomon's proverbs speak straightforwardly of the harm that words can work—harm when they are spoken to us, by us or about us. And for all their power to work evil, bad words can be surprisingly (and disconcertingly) pleasant to hear or to speak! The proverbs below warn us about bad words, spoken by evil or foolish people for selfish or wicked ends. The world is awash with bad words. The wise man or woman knows how to recognize them, not only so they can purge bad words from their own speech, but also to escape the menace of bad words from others.

1. How do you usually respond when someone offers a juicy bit of gossip?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Evil communication can occur without a word being spoken (Proverbs 6:12-14; 16:30). What types of nonverbal gestures do people use?
3. Why do you think a mischief-maker communicates in that way?
4. Why is *receiving that* kind of communication dangerous to you?
5. Suppose you hear an inflammatory report about someone else. By hearing it, do you show yourself to be wicked or a liar (Proverbs 17:4)? Why, or why not?
6. Do you think there's any danger in "innocently" overhearing the bad words which come from evil lips and malicious tongues? Explain.
7. Imagine a plate of choice morsels—elaborately decorated cookies/biscuits, or something similar (Proverbs 18:8). What characteristics do those choice morsels and the words of a gossip have in common?
8. How does a coating of glaze over earthenware illustrate the dangers of fervent lips with an evil heart (Proverbs 26:23)?
9. How might we or others be tripped up by flattery (Proverbs 29:5)?
10. Why is flattery simple to offer?
11. Why is flattery simple to accept?
12. Thinking back over your previous answers, do you suppose bad words are easy or difficult to produce? Explain.
13. Like smog, bad words are difficult to escape when they're "in the air." What can you do to reduce your exposure to such words in the coming weeks?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Good Words**

TEXT: **Proverbs 10:19; 16:24; 17:10; 24:26; 25:11.**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: Jesus powerfully underscored the immense power of words to shape our destiny. Speaking of the final judgment, he said, "By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt 12:37). He was reflecting a similar idea found in Proverbs 18:21: "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Our previous study displayed the awesome power for evil which words have. But they also have an awesome power for good. For all that, words are not magic; their power lies not so much in themselves as it does in the characters of those who speak them and those who hear them. In this study, you'll uncover some of the ways you can wisely fashion words for wholesome ends.

1. Would you describe yourself as a person of few or many words? Explain.
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Proverbs 10:19 insists that the mere quantity of words produces sin. The best words, then, are often those we never say. In what kind of situation are you apt to be most wordy? **34 Proverbs: Learning to Live Wisely**
3. Why do you think that quantity *alone* is sufficient to generate sin from our words?
4. What strategy might you employ to reduce or eliminate your wordiness? (Hint: don't ignore the help that a friend or spouse can provide in these settings.)
5. Flattery is *meant* to be pleasant. How, then, can we distinguish flattery from the pleasant words Proverbs 16:24 talks about?
6. It is simple to understand how a deserved rebuke benefits a person with discernment. Imagine, however, that you receive an unjust or unfair rebuke. How might you still profit from it?
7. Take the previous situation one step further—how might onlookers benefit from observing how you profited from an unjust rebuke?
8. Ordinarily we exchange kisses on the lips only with special people in our lives. What characteristics distinguish these people from others we know?
9. Proverbs 24:26 likens kisses to honest answers. How are the answers and the kisses alike? (Note: *honest* in Proverbs 24:26 has the sense of *straightforward* or *candid*).
10. Proverbs 25:11 compares apt words with a work of art wrought from gold and silver. What characteristics do they have in common?
11. Think of one or two people you know whose speech is good. How do the ways they express themselves demonstrate one or more of the proverbs listed in this study?
12. Now that you have surveyed what the proverbs say about good and bad speech, which do you think is easier—to rid yourself of unwholesome speech habits or to build wholesome speech habits? Explain.

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **The Sluggard**

TEXT: **Proverbs 6:6-8; 13:4; 15:19; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:14-16**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: You've felt the urge before; you've attended the soft voice that says: "The messy garage will still be there tomorrow; the chaotic closet won't run away. You've done enough for today. Leave that weedy flower bed till the weekend. Wait a few more days for the rest of the bills to arrive, and then you can pay them all at once! If you wash the car now, it'll rain, and then where will you be? Rest up for tonight's party; you don't want to appear haggard. There's enough time to prepare the house after you're feeling refreshed!" These seductions routinely beset a character the proverbs call *the sluggard*. We are apt to laugh in sympathy with the sluggard's feeble struggles to develop personal industry. After all, don't we know too well the sensual pleasures of a catnap? The proverbs laugh too, but it's more a snicker of scorn. The proverbs in this study afford a bracing look at the sluggard, his prospects, and a few correctives that will save us from his fate.

1. What tasks are you most tempted to put off until tomorrow?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Which proverbs match up with the following characteristics of the sluggard? Never finishes things:
Fond of sleep:
Rationalizes:
Believes his own excuses:
Never starts things:
Never satisfied:
Works harder than a diligent person:
Give one additional characteristic:
3. Which of these characteristics of a sluggard seemed unexpected to you? Explain.
4. In these proverbs, what character qualities are contrasted with sluggard-liness?
5. Why would a sluggard work harder than anyone else (that is, when he or she works at all)?
6. Describe one area of your life where two or three characteristics of a sluggard are evident (for example, housework, desk, various chores, yard-work, grooming, wardrobe and so on). Be honest!
7. How does the example of the ant in Proverbs 6:6-8 highlight one remedy for sluggard-liness?
8. How would you apply the remedy suggested by the ant to the one area of sluggard-liness you mentioned previously?
9. How is the poverty that overcomes the sluggard like a thief? (What characteristics, for example, do such poverty and a thief have in common?)
10. How is the poverty that overcomes the sluggard like an armed man?
11. The proverbs hold out little hope for reforming a committed fool. On the other hand, why might there be some hope for reforming a sluggard?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Wealth & Poverty**

TEXT: **Proverbs 10:4, 15, 22; 13:8; 18:11, 23; 19:4; 21:6; 30:8-9**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: When others are obviously rich or poor, we infer many things about their talents, education, personality, tastes and personal influence. But, from the perspective of the proverbs, wealth and poverty are poor standards to use in judging others. Furthermore, Proverbs tells us it is foolish to suppose that wealth is an unmixed blessing and that poverty is always a curse.

In a world that views wealth and poverty from faulty and imperfect perspectives, we need the precise, pithy standards in the proverbs to guide our steps away from snares that lie on every side. The proverbs in this study are only a few that help us think wisely about our possessions.

1. Whether we think we're rich or poor often depends on our point of view. In what circumstances would you "feel" wealthy or poor? (Remember, we're thinking of *material* wealth and poverty.)
 2. Read the proverbs on the facing page, looking for several advantages of wealth. Are they the ones you'd have thought of by yourself? Explain.
 3. Looking over the same proverbs, what do you see to be some of the disadvantages of wealth?
 4. Cite an example from your experience (or the experience of someone you know about) where an increase in wealth proved *disadvantageous*.
 5. Consider the first line of Proverbs 13:8—"A man's riches may ransom his life." How might that statement refer to either an advantage or a disadvantage of wealth?
 6. After the second line of Proverbs 13:8 is considered, would you say the first line is speaking of an advantage or disadvantage of wealth? Explain.
 7. Proverbs 10:15 and 18:11 have the same first line. In each case, is the line expressing an advantage or disadvantage of wealth? Explain.
 8. The top eleven per cent of wage-earners pay about fifty-three per cent of the taxes collected each year. Are these facts consistent or inconsistent with statements in Proverbs? Why or why not?
 9. Consider the disadvantages of poverty mentioned in the sampling of Proverbs. Do any of them surprise you? Why?
 10. What *advantages* of poverty are mentioned in the proverbs?
 11. Can you think of a situation where your poverty (actual or perceived) proved to be an advantage to you?
 12. It is simple to know if we're extravagantly rich or pitifully poor. But between these extremes the boundaries between poverty and wealth are hard to see. How does the prayer in Proverbs 30:8-9 help us know when we are becoming perilously rich or poor?
- To what extent have you embraced the attitude: "Give me only my daily bread"? Explain.

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Giving**

TEXT: **Proverbs 14:21, 31; 19:6, 17; 21:13**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: The poor you have with you always," Jesus insisted on one occasion. And with the poor come knotty questions for all who view them with compassion: How can I meet so much need from my limited resources? How do I choose whom to help and whom to pass by? How do I balance the needs of the poor with the requests for help from my children, my aged parents or my extended family? The proverbs in this study help us in two ways. First, they guide us through the moral conflicts we encounter when confronted with the material neediness of others. Second, they give an antidote to the folly which exalts acquisitiveness as a social and economic virtue. Our prosperity, it turns out, may be a result of our *giving* rather than our getting!

1. How do you tend to respond to requests for money which show starving people in far-off lands?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Is Proverbs 14:21 referring to all the needy in the world, or is a narrower group in view? Explain.
3. What needy people do you know who fall into that category?
4. The Hebrew original of Proverbs 14:31 is delightfully ambiguous. A translation that preserves the ambiguity reads: "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors him." *Whose* Maker is shown contempt by oppression—the poor man's Maker or the oppressor's Maker? Explain.
5. Whose Maker is honored by kindness to the needy—the needy person's Maker or the kind person's Maker?
6. Whatever your answer to the previous two questions, explain why God is either honored or dishonored.
7. What experience have you had with the problem mentioned in Proverbs 19:6?
How can we avoid that problem?
8. Do you think that the "friends" who flock around a generous giver are always a problem? Why, or why not?
9. Proverbs 19:17 implies a motive for giving that is almost never mentioned or, if mentioned, viewed as sub-Christian. What is it?
Why do you think people are uncomfortable with that kind of motive?
10. Suppose the mail carrier brings you a request for money to feed hungry orphans in some far-off land. Suppose further that you throw this appeal into the wastepaper basket. Do you thereby call down on yourself the calamity Proverbs 21:13 speaks of? Explain.
11. Beginning this week, how can your giving to the poor reflect the wisdom of these proverbs?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Getting Along with Others**
TEXT: **Proverbs 15:1; 17:14; 20:3; 25:15, 28**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: The book of Proverbs is something like "How To Win Friends and Influence People" written for monarchs (see *Introducing Proverbs* for more information). But it is also helpful for people like you and me, living our lives in daily relationships with family members, fellow workers and anyone else with whom good relations mean personal profit. Getting along with others is a key skill which is necessary if we're to live productive, happy lives. The proverbs in this study are a sample of those which teach us how to achieve harmonious and successful relationships with others.

1. How would a person normally react if someone began furiously scolding him or her? (Focus on the reaction, not the Tightness or wrongness of the people involved.)
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. How does your answer to the previous question explain why "a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1)?
3. Why, then, does "a gentle answer" turn away wrath?
4. Proverbs 17:14 refers to temporary earth dams used to direct water through a system of irrigation canals. With this information and the memories of small dams you may have built (and destroyed) as a child, what similarities might there be between the beginning of strife and a leak in a dam?
- 5- How have you or someone you know avoided an interpersonal calamity by "dropping the matter" before a dispute broke out?
6. Read Judges 8:1-3 and 12:1-6. These passages show how two different judges responded to the hotheadedness of the Ephraimites. Using Proverbs 15:1 and 17:14, explain what happened in each case.
7. Some might say that avoiding strife shows weak character, timidity in resisting evil. And certainly, there are weak-willed people who fit this description. How, then, can we explain Proverbs 20:3—that it's a honor to avoid strife?
8. In the ancient world, a city's walls were its basic defense from attack. Villages without walls were poor places; only in protected cities did civic, economic and cultural institutions thrive, bringing the city a higher standard of living and power over its surrounding territories. With this background, explain how a person with no self-control is like a city without walls.
9. Can you think of an area in your life where your "city walls" need repair? Explain.
10. Looking back on these proverbs, which is more important in living happily with those around you—the words and deeds of those you relate to, or your own words and deeds? Why?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: Friends
TEXT: **Proverbs 17:9, 17; 25:20; 27:6, 17**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: As E. C. McKenzie said, "Some people make enemies instead of friends, because it is less trouble." It takes even less effort to alienate the friends we already have. On the other hand, finding and keeping a friend requires all the skill we can muster. But the reward for that effort is correspondingly great. The proverbs in this study give advice on friendship—its maintenance, how it is strengthened or weakened, and the special value of a friend. This wisdom is particularly valuable when applied between husband and wife, parent and child. But the wonder of friendship is its capacity to transcend age and gender, and to forge bonds stronger than blood.

1. What qualities do you value most in a friend, and why?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. *Friend* in English is flexible enough in its meaning to cover everything from a casual acquaintance to an intimate soul-mate. What type of friend is being described by the proverbs in this study?
3. Proverbs 17:17 suggests that we look to both friends and family members when we need help. In what situations would you be likely to turn to a friend instead of a relative for help?
4. Do you think friendship and family bonds are incompatible? Explain.
5. Proverbs 25:20 is a riddle. To solve it, imagine your physical reaction to being out in the cold without a coat. Now think of what happens when vinegar is poured on soda (go to the kitchen and try this if you don't know). Are these physical reactions *similar* to one another or *opposites*? Explain.
6. When we act joyful in front of troubled people, Proverbs 25:20 says their reactions are *like* the soda or the chilled person. How would you describe those reactions in ordinary words?
7. If possible, recall a situation in which you either caused or experienced the reactions mentioned in Proverbs 25:20.
8. Our enemies do not actually kiss us, any more than our friends actually wreak damage on our bodies. *Kisses* and *wounds* are figures of speech. How would you paraphrase Proverbs 27:6 without using the words *kisses*, *wounds* or any other figurative language?
9. Describe a "kiss" you've received from an enemy and a "wound" you've received from a friend.
10. Proverbs 25:20 and 27:6 both speak of pain which one friend can bring to another. What is the difference between them?
11. Suppose you "wound" a friend in the sense of Proverbs 27:6. Is this the same as "repeating a matter" (Proverbs 17:9)? Why, or why not?
12. Ancient people knew, as we do, that only a harder material effectively sharpens a softer material. What happens when two objects of the *same* material sharpen one another?
13. Give an example from your own experience of how you and someone else sharpened one another.
14. How many friends (in the sense that the proverbs use the term) do you think you want? Explain.

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Planning the Future**

TEXT: **Proverbs 11:3; 14:12; 15:22; 16:9; 21:5, 31; 27:1**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: No doubt you've glanced once or twice at an astrologer's predictions in the newspaper. Even if you felt guilty or silly for doing it, you'd hardly fault yourself for wanting every possible advantage in planning your future. Planning for the future, after all, is a major industry. Hundreds of billions of dollars ride on the forecasts of economists, investment counselors, analysts of every sort, and even astrologers! Legions of advisors will sell you opinions on what will happen in the near term and long term; whether or not you take their advice, someone else will. And that person's actions may in turn affect your prosperity, health and happiness. For all their focus on the here and now, the proverbs keep a canny eye on the future. Many proverbs, in fact, offer wisdom on how to make plans, why to make them, and what we can expect of the best plans we make. Read over the proverbs in this study to begin training for planning your future.

1. How often do you think about and plan for the future?
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. Based on these proverbs, why might your plans for the future go awry?
3. When has one of your plans failed for one of the reasons mentioned in these proverbs?
4. The proverbs insist that *character* affects the success or failure of the plans a person makes. What character qualities mentioned in Proverbs hinder our efforts to plan for the future?
5. We usually evaluate a plan according to its merits, not on the basis of the character of the planner. Why does a planner's character make a difference?
6. Proverbs 15:22 specifies *many* counselors. What do many provide over a few or even one counselor?
7. Proverbs 21:5 says that a good plan by itself is not enough to yield success. Suppose you plan a picnic for a large number of people. Suppose further that you are diligent. How would your actions differ from those of a person who was not diligent?
8. An atheist could profitably apply much of the wisdom we've seen in these studies. Yet how do the proverbs in this study also point to a divine dimension in the plans we make (and, indeed, in all wisdom)?
9. How would your planning differ from an atheist's?
10. Do Proverbs 16:9 and 21:31 encourage or discourage careful planning?
11. Do you think that wise plans invariably succeed? Why or why not?

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Interactive Sunday school Outline

TOPIC: **Prayer**

TEXT: **Proverbs 15:8, 29; 16:3; 20:25; 28:9, 13**

Instructions: *Let the above passages be read to enable everyone to participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on certain questions. Always try to use relevant but brief Bible references to illustrate your points, and be careful not to dominate the discussion.*

Introduction: If you surveyed books on prayer in a Christian bookstore, you'd find varied and often conflicting advice. Some authorities insist that successful prayer is scheduled; others favor impromptu prayer. One writer says fasting should accompany prayer, but another tells us to pray in any circumstance. Still another says that prayer is best done when alone, though someone else urges us to join with others. Some claim that prayer requires careful preparation and thought, while a conflicting authority says prayer should flow spontaneously from our hearts. Wisdom is needed as much for prayer as for any other area of human living. The proverbs in this study furnish us wisdom for bringing our requests to God as we seek to live wisely.

1. Which of the following do your prayers most closely resemble? (Several may be correct.)
 - a. A wish made when throwing a coin in a fountain.
 - b. A shrewdly crafted proposition to your spouse when you're unsure if he or she'll agree.
 - c. A distant hope a child experiences when daydreaming of something he or she wants to have.
 - d. Some candid advice offered to a boss who needs to make certain changes for everyone's benefit.
 - e. A desperate plea made in the face of imminent disaster.
2. Read the proverbs on the facing page. In contrast to many books on prayer, Proverbs 15:8 and 15:29 ignore the context and style of praying to focus on another factor. What is it?
Why is this factor sufficient by itself to account for whether God hears our prayers or not?
3. Proverbs 28:13 assumes that sin is present in everyone. How, then, can we ever be called "upright" or "righteous" in the sense of Proverbs 15:8 or 15:29?
4. What does it mean *to commit* something to the Lord (Proverbs 16:3)?

What part do you think prayer plays in committing whatever you do to the Lord?

5. Proverbs 16:3 seems to promise unqualified success to those who commit their plans to the Lord. If this is not a "blank check" (and it's probably not), what is presupposed about our plans here?
6. The background of Proverbs 20:25 is a person's vow to God—"If you do thus and so, God, I'll do this and that." In what situations might we be tempted to make a vow rashly?
7. Why do rash vows become a trap?
8. Proverbs 28:9 is something like a Golden Rule for prayer—if we want God to hear us, we must hear him. Suppose an unmarried friend asks you to pray for the *Lord* to bring him or her a spouse. Where in Scripture might you direct your friend to what God has already said about marriage?
9. Based on the proverbs in this study, how would you summarize what it means to pray with wisdom?

10. Think a moment about your own prayers. How might you begin praying more wisely?
11. What have you enjoyed most about your study of the book of Proverbs?
What has been most challenging to you?