

LISTEN TO GOD'S WISDOM

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 34:11-18

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 1

PROVERBS 1:1-4, 7, 8, 10, 20-22, 32, 33

¹The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

²for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;

³for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;

⁴for giving prudence to those who are simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young.

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

⁸Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

.....
¹⁰My son, if sinful men entice you,
do not give in to them.

.....
²⁰Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,
she raises her voice in the public square;

²¹on top of the wall she cries out,
at the city gate she makes her speech:

²²“How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?”

.....
³²“For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

³³but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

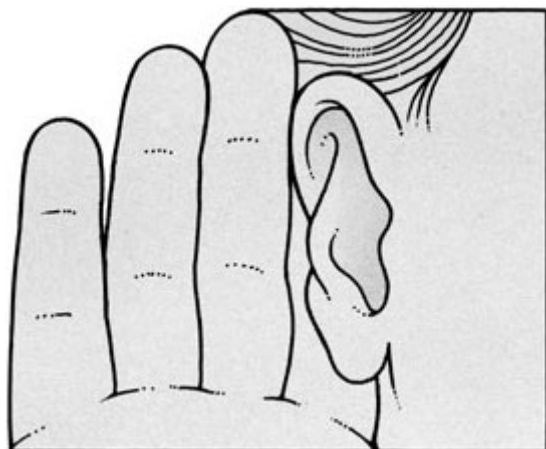


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KEY VERSE

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.—**Proverbs 1:7**

p 346 MANY FACES OF WISDOM

Unit 1: Wisdom in Proverbs

LESSONS 1-4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the nature of biblical wisdom.
2. Contrast biblical and nonbiblical wisdom.
3. Propose one way for adults to model biblical wisdom at home and work.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Commencement Season
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. Introducing a Book (PROVERBS 1:1-4)
 - A. Author (v. 1)
 - B. Purpose (vv. 2-4)
 - II. Introducing Wisdom (PROVERBS 1:7, 8, 10, 20-22, 32, 33)
 - A. Divine Origin (v. 7)

Begin Here!

- B. Human Instruction (v. 8)
- C. Potential Opposition (v. 10)
- D. Powerful Outreach (vv. 20-22)
Speakers' Corner
- E. Promising Offer (vv. 32, 33)

Conclusion

- A. Heed Warnings
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

p 348 HOW TO SAY IT

Agur	Ay-gur.
Ecclesiastes	Ik-leez-ee-as-teez.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Lemuel	Lem-you-el.
patriarchal	pay-tree-are-kul.
Solomon	Sol-o-mun.

p 346 Introduction

A. Commencement Season

June concludes the usual season for graduations from high school and college in the USA. Hearing a commencement speaker address the graduating body of students is a standard part of almost any graduation ceremony. Yet how much of what is said reflects genuine wisdom, and how much merely sounds good at the time?

Let's imagine for a moment a person getting up at any state university and

presenting the graduation speech. The speaker begins, “I want you graduates to strive to be wise and prudent in your behavior. Do what is right and just and fair. Teach others the right way to live; pass along the knowledge that you have.” Some polite applause would perhaps follow these statements. Then the speaker says, “And remember, graduates, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

In this secular setting, no doubt some in the audience would object to the use of religious language. Even more likely is that people would question the truth of the assertion that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. Yet a biblical understanding of wisdom must begin with the fear of the Lord. Like a college graduate starting the next chapter of life, we are invited in this lesson to choose what our lives will look like.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Proverbs is the third of the five books in the Old Testament that are often called “wisdom literature.” (The group also includes Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.) When most people think of proverbs in general (not just the biblical ones), they probably call to mind pithy statements of truth that are good, general advice for navigating life. “Haste makes waste” and “He who hesitates is lost” are generally true state-

ments, but one can see how these statements might contradict each other.

The wisdom of each saying is situational. Biblical proverbs are as well, though they are more than just good advice. They are godly advice, based on the crucial premise that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). p 347 Keeping that premise in mind helps the wise person discern when a certain course of conventional wisdom might not be best for obeying God’s laws. Knowing God yields the wisdom to decide well.

The book of Proverbs divides itself into three major sections: (1) a long introduction to the collections of proverbs (chap. 1-9), (2) the collections of the proverbs themselves (10:1-31:9), and (3) an acrostic conclusion (31:10-31). There are six collections: (a) proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16), (b) words of the wise (22:17-24:22), (c) more words of the wise (24:23-34), (d) more proverbs of Solomon (25:1-29:27), (e) words of Agur (chap. 30), and (f) words of King Lemuel (31:1-9).

The four lessons in this unit are drawn from the nine opening chapters of Proverbs (1-9) that exhort the audience to choose to live by God’s wisdom. In these chapters, we find more association between individual proverbs than the more randomized sayings that appear

from chapter 10 forward. Most scholars see 10 fatherly appeals or lectures in chapters 1–9. These are 1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12; 3:21–35; 4:1–9; 4:10–19; 4:20–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; and 7:1–27. Our text today includes part of the first appeal.

I. Introducing a Book

(PROVERBS 1:1–4)

A. Author (v. 1)

1. The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

King *Solomon* (reigned 970–930 BC) is mentioned by name at two other places in the book, establishing the origin of the book’s contents (Proverbs 10:1; 25:1). According to the latter verse, “the men of Hezekiah king of Judah [compiled]” *the proverbs of Solomon* found in the succeeding chapters (25:2–29:27). Hezekiah (reigned about 729–700 BC) and his assistants may well have produced the final edition of the book of Proverbs, probably adding proverbs of Solomon that were not part of an earlier edition. Since Solomon produced 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:30–32; see also Ecclesiastes 1:1), there was more than enough material to choose from.

Solomon’s wisdom was a gift from God (1 Kings 4:29–34). Like any spiritual gift, wisdom has to be accepted and practiced regularly. Though he was a wise

man, the direction Solomon’s life took shows how he himself ignored the very words with which he desired to guide others. Solomon married women from other nations who worshipped other gods; these women lured Solomon into worshipping those gods. As a result, the Lord told Solomon that the impressive kingdom that *David*, his father, had left for him to rule would be divided after Solomon’s death (11:4–13). If anything, Solomon’s failure to continue to practice wisdom underscores the accuracy and soundness of what is recorded in Proverbs (example: Proverbs 4:23).

B. Purpose (vv. 2–4)

2a. for gaining wisdom and instruction;

This verse and the next four (Proverbs 1:3–6) portray in broad strokes what this collection of proverbs intends to accomplish. *Gaining wisdom* is recognizing the best course of action for a given situation and following through on that action. The Hebrew word translated *instruction* carries the idea of admonishing or correcting someone. It implies disciplining (as a daily practice, not as punishment) a person in the correct way of living in the sight of God.

2b. for understanding words of insight;

Words of insight must become more

than just theory or good advice. They must be personally embraced and applied in order to be of genuine value. Otherwise they are not really perceived.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to ensure that we not only hear but also apply God's wisdom?

Digging Deeper

How will those steps differ, if at all, when interacting with fellow believers vs. unbelievers?

3. for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair;

Instruction is repeated to emphasize its importance (see [Proverbs 1:2](#)). The word translated *prudent behavior* emphasizes discernment. In this verse, one sees the ways in which godly wisdom [p 348](#) is to manifest itself. The Hebrew word translated *right* is translated elsewhere as “righteous” (examples: [Deuteronomy 33:19](#); [Psalm 4:1](#)). Being *just* does not apply only to an ethical standard in a judicial setting. It also includes to the idea of applying good reasoning to situations that confront one daily, especially those involving others in need (example: [Exodus 23:6](#), where it’s translated “justice”). Fairness is closely tied to this and relates to our treatment of others.

What Do You Think?

In what ways should our church's concern for justice be apparent?

Digging Deeper

What would you like your neighbors to say about your commitment to justice?

Clearly, biblical wisdom is to be demonstrated in practical ways more than in one's academic prowess. Formal education has no bearing on whether a person can attain wisdom. Moreover, Solomon's call for his readers to learn the virtues of righteousness, justice, and fairness resonates in cultures around the world, regardless of religious belief or educational background.

4a. for giving prudence

The Hebrew word translated *prudence* can have a negative connotation (example: “schemes” in [Exodus 21:14](#)). In fact, one form of the Hebrew word is used of the serpent in [Genesis 3:1](#); he was “more crafty” than any other creature the Lord had made. But the same root can also imply a more positive quality (examples: [Proverbs 12:23](#); [13:16](#); [14:15](#)). This positive nuance is what Solomon intends here.

4b. to those who are simple,

The victim of scheming and craftiness is someone who lacks life experience and knowledge (compare “the unwary” in [Psalm 116:6](#); “anyone who sins ... through

Psalm 116:6; “anyone who sins ... through ignorance” in Ezekiel 45:20). Such a person must be teachable, willing to listen to the instruction and discipline that wisdom has to offer.

4c. knowledge and discretion to the young.

The designation *the young* can refer to children or young adults. This suggests that the reason for ignorance is partially a matter of lack of time to have already learned. This usage complements the frequent references to “my son” in the first nine chapters of Proverbs (examples: Proverbs 1:8; 2:1).

This emphasis on the male child reflects the patriarchal society of that time and the importance placed on fathers to train their sons. Though the son is emphasized throughout Solomon’s writings, the principles found throughout Proverbs are clearly valuable for both men and women.

The word translated *discretion*, like the Hebrew word for prudence, can have a positive or negative meaning (compare “schemes” in Job 21:27; “evil schemes” in Jeremiah 11:15); here again the positive meaning is clearly implied. Godly wisdom will help a young person navigate a sin-infested world by learning to choose what is right and acceptable in God’s sight.

II. Introducing Wisdom **(PROVERBS 1:7, 8, 10, 20–22, 32, 33)**

A. Divine Origin (v. 7)

7a. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,

Following additional descriptions of the wise person in Proverbs 1:5, 6 (not in our printed text), Solomon reveals that the key to obtaining *knowledge* is *the fear of the Lord* (see also Proverbs 9:10; 15:33). The word *fear* covers a broad range of mind-sets in the Old Testament, from simple respect to awe to sheer terror (examples: Genesis 20:11; Job 28:28; Psalm 55:5). In the context of this passage, it means primarily to acknowledge and submit to the Lord as the source of true knowledge and wisdom. If one is not grounded in that understanding of the Lord, knowledge and wisdom will remain foreign to that person. p 349 As long as an individual possesses the fear of the Lord, he or she is on the path to wisdom (compare 112:1; Isaiah 33:6; 50:10).

Though the world may agree that prudence, righteousness, justice, and fairness are worthy pursuits (Proverbs 1:3, above), many scoff at the assertion that knowledge of God’s ways is necessary for human excellence in any field of inquiry. Wisdom comes from many places, it is thought, especially from the minds of people who have spent their

lives thinking. Yet the rejection of the fear of the Lord as the basis for knowledge (and of the God who is the source of wisdom) is precisely the cause of the strife, turmoil, and disorder that mark current society (see 8:33–36).

What Do You Think?

What's one step you need to take to be more fully submitted to God?

Digging Deeper

What is your plan for putting that step into practice? What part will increased "fear of the Lord" have in your plan? Why?

BEGIN HERE!

The movie *Love Story* features a musical theme recorded by Henry Mancini. Realizing the popularity of the instrumental tune, the distributors of the movie's music decided that the tune needed lyrics to have greater commercial impact. So they contacted Carl Sigman, a man who later was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Imagine Sigman's surprise when the distributors promptly rejected his lyrics! Purportedly, Sigman was furious about being asked for a total rewrite. Still, he decided to try. He turned to his wife and asked, "Where do I begin?" That question became the first line of the rewrite, as well as the title for what would become a

best-selling record! Crooner Andy Williams's recording of the song spent 13 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1971.

Every story—be it a love story, heroic tale, or book of wisdom—needs a place to start. In introducing the book of Proverbs, Solomon answered Sigman's lyrical query. Where does one begin in explaining the source of principles that can lead to a successful life? If you are wondering where to begin (or begin *again*), start with fear of the Lord.

—J. E.

7b. but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

To ignore *wisdom* is to embark on the path of *fools*. Such individuals demonstrate their contempt for God and his *instruction* (see [Proverbs 19:16](#)). In general, foolish people can expect to experience unnecessary trials ([13:18](#); [15:32](#)).

B. Human Instruction (v. 8)

8. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Some have suggested that the term *son* in Proverbs should be interpreted as a disciple or student, as in the literal translation "sons of the prophets" ([2 Kings 6:1](#), KJV). However, the context supports translating this word in familial terms instead of educational. Both father and

mother are instrumental in teaching wisdom to their children ([Proverbs 6:20](#)). It is a team effort, very much in keeping with the counsel found in [Deuteronomy 6:6, 7](#) (compare [Proverbs 2:1-5](#); [3:1](#); [4:1](#); etc.). The consequences of not hearing, or of forsaking, the *instruction* and *teaching* of parents will be discipline and potential disaster ([Deuteronomy 21:18-21](#)).

What Do You Think?

What should a teacher of children do when realizing that a child's instruction received from a parent is unbiblical?

Digging Deeper

What are some examples of unbiblical "wisdom" you have heard from your own parents? How do you handle these in light of [Exodus 20:12](#) and [Ephesians 6:1-3](#)?

C. Potential Opposition (v. 10)

10. My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them.

Peer pressure has been around for all of human history (compare [Genesis 3:6](#); [11:1-9](#); [1 Kings 12:1-14](#)). The behavior of friends can influence one's behavior, often in a negative way ([Psalm 1:1](#); [Proverbs 16:29](#)). The son's resisting invitations [p 350](#) from *sinful men* will save the young man much trouble (compare [Deuteronomy 13:6-10](#)).



Visual for Lesson 1. Use this visual as a discussion starter regarding what kind of wisdom fills your learners' lives.

[Proverbs 1:11-19](#), not in our printed text, includes more specific words of enticement from plotting, scheming sinners. They are not just out to participate in some good-natured fun. Rather, they clearly want to do harm to someone, to "lie in wait for innocent blood" ([Proverbs 1:11](#); compare vv. [12-14](#)). An extended plea from the father for his son to shun these wicked people follows ([1:15-19](#)). Danger awaits, not for the innocent victim of the sinners' plans, but for the perpetrators themselves. *They* are the ones who "lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush only themselves!" ([1:18](#)).

D. Powerful Outreach (vv. 20-22)

20a. Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square;

Whereas the father has been the one

who issues warnings to his son to this point, now *wisdom* itself is pictured as appealing to anyone who will listen. Wisdom will be described (just below) with the pronoun *she*, perhaps in part because the Hebrew word for *wisdom* is a feminine noun. More importantly, wisdom's personification as a woman may also reflect the fact that the students are young men. By contrast, folly is portrayed as a loose woman who tempts men to their ruin (example: [Proverbs 9:13-18](#); see lesson 4).

21. on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech:

One must not overlook the places where the *voice* of Wisdom seeks an audience. Wisdom is not cloistered behind academia's ivy-covered walls. *She* is out in *the public square*, where life is lived each day, making her appeal. The square appears to describe any location that is busy, with lots of people moving about.

Portraying her *on top of the wall* emphasizes that she is calling as many people as possible to follow in her ways, rejecting foolish paths. *The city gates* are where business is often conducted and where key decisions or announcements occur (examples: [Joshua 20:1-4](#); [Ruth 4:1, 2, 11](#)). Wisdom's words are desperately needed everywhere.

SPEAKERS' CORNER

Do you have something to say? Have you ever wanted to stand up in public and tell an audience exactly what you think? If so, consider visiting a speakers' corner.

The original Speakers' Corner is in the northeast corner of Hyde Park in London, England. The corner dates back to 1866. Riots occurred after large meetings of working-class protesters caused the government to lock the park. After heated political debate, the 1872 Parks Regulation Act established the right to free speech and association in Hyde Park. At Speakers' Corner, anyone can turn up unannounced and talk on almost any subject. Over the years, this spot was frequented by Karl Marx, George Orwell, Tony Benn, and many other notables.

The image of someone standing in public to proclaim a message boldly is nothing new. Solomon described Wisdom as doing that very thing ([Proverbs 1:20, 21](#)). What does wisdom call you to proclaim publicly?

—J. E.

22. “How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?”

Wisdom calls for people to rearrange their priorities, to reorient their entire value system. Instead of being *simple* and *mockers* who scorn Wisdom's invitation

(Psalm 50:17; Proverbs 7:7), they are challenged to embrace *knowledge* (8:5; 9:1-4a; see lessons 3, 4).

p 351 Proverbs 1:23-31 (not in our printed text) includes a warning of the high price one will pay for continuing to scorn knowledge. The time will come when those who have done so will desire Wisdom's assistance. But by then they will have already reaped the consequences of their contempt.

E. Promising Offer (vv. 32, 33)

32. “For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;

The rejection of Wisdom's call is a decision that has a major impact on one's life. *The waywardness* of turning away from wisdom is fatal (Proverbs 5:22, 23; 15:10; Isaiah 66:4). The combination of *kill* and *destroy* conveys the great violence that awaits those who reject Wisdom's call. In context, *complacency* suggests being at ease or feeling secure because of one's situation, especially financially. There is a smugness that gives the foolish person a false sense of security.

33. “but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

This chapter closes with a statement of the blessings that follow from heeding Wisdom's invitation (compare Deuteron-

omy 33:28; Proverbs 3:23). Safety comes because the wise person has chosen to ignore foolish and sinful voices that offer invitations to pursue their path of wrongdoing.

The Hebrew word translated *harm* can be used in a moral sense, like “evil” (Proverbs 1:16). But in some cases it refers to the harm that is one of the consequences of living in a world under the curse of sin (“destruction” in Jonah 3:10; “disaster” in Micah 1:12). God, of course, does no moral evil. He does, however, judge justly and bring judgment. Unfortunately, judgment can be perceived as evil by those who experience it.

The wise do not need to *fear* the harm that often comes to those who live by the sinners' code. True, the wise or godly person may be the target of the ungodly and may suffer harm from them (or suffer other types of harm in this fallen world). But *fear* of such an outcome does not trouble or overwhelm the godly person. Instead, like any wise person, he or she is grounded in and guided by the fear of the Lord.

What Do You Think?

Without giving directive advice, how would you use this verse to support a fellow believer who is beset with anxiety?

Digging Deeper

How would you *not* use this verse?

Conclusion

A. Heed Warnings

What happened to Solomon? Why didn't he follow his own advice? Thinking of Jesus' statement "Physician, heal yourself!" ([Luke 4:23](#)), we may wish we could advise Solomon by saying, "Wise man, heed your wisdom."

Can what happened to Solomon happen to us? Certainly! We will not be tempted, as Solomon was, by the beliefs and lifestyles of 700 spouses. But the need to guard our hearts and our ways is as urgent now as ever.

We should view Solomon with compassion, not criticism. Anyone's spiritual failures, whether we read about them in the Bible or see them reported in the media, should humble us. Paul's warning to the Corinthians contains its own words of wisdom: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" ([1 Corinthians 10:12](#)).

B. Prayer

Father, help us to heed your call to wisdom. As we do, may we lead others to heed your voice as well. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Fear the Lord and learn wisdom.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 350) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Summer 2020 Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 4628120 from your supplier.

p 352 INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write this quote on the board:

I'm intolerant often, especially of incompetence, particularly my own.

—Liz Trotta

Ask volunteers to share times when they've felt incompetent. Discuss together reasonable ways to gain competence.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Decode It" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow

class members to work in pairs to complete the activity according to instructions. After completion, discuss conclusions by asking learners to identify the common theme of the decoded phrases, which relate to feelings of inadequacy or incompetence.

After either activity say, “We all have times when we feel unqualified, unprepared, or incompetent to address a task. How do we overcome these feelings? Let’s find out.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of three to five. Give each group a copy of the lesson text, paper, and two or three nonfiction/how-to books with back-cover copy to use as an example. Give groups about 15 minutes to summarize the lesson text as back-cover copy promoting the entire book of Proverbs. Suggest this general format: 1—Choose a catchy title for the summary. 2—Tell what the reader will gain by reading the book of [Proverbs \(1:1-4\)](#). 3—Describe the basic point of the book of Proverbs ([1:7](#), [8](#), [10](#)). 4—Explain why the instructions in the book of Proverbs differ from advice from other sources ([1:20-22](#), [32](#), [33](#)).

As groups work, move among them to help them construct their summaries. Refer to the commentary to clarify the meanings of words or phrases in the text.

Here is a sample of how such a summary might look:

Live Life Right!

This collection of wisdom from Solomon is a must-read for everyone seeking to live a successful life. This wise king offers to the young and inexperienced information everyone needs, including how to treat others fairly and helpful tips for making sound decisions.

Solomon teaches that there is a right way to live, and that way is found by listening to the right voices. Reverence for God and his words is credited as the starting point for everything worth knowing. Parental advice is praised, and peer pressure is discounted.

Other sources of advice entice a reader with cynicism or promises that one way is no better than any other. Proverbs is different. Solomon assures the reader that knowledge based in the fear of the Lord will lead to a godly life, while following the crowd is a path to failure.

Allow groups to read and explain their summaries. Make sure the contrast of earthly wisdom and godly wisdom is made clearly and accurately.

Into Life

Have a volunteer read [Romans 2:18-24](#) aloud. Discuss what Paul says or implies about a believer who fails to practice biblical wisdom. (*Expected response: those*

claiming to be Christians but who do not live accordingly give others an excuse to disbelieve.)

On the board write, “I know that a Christian should _____, but too often I am tempted to _____.” Ask for volunteers to supply ways these blanks can be filled (example: “I know that a Christian should be honest, but too often I am tempted to slant the truth.”) As you solicit responses, point out the importance of modeling biblical wisdom in various contexts of life.

Option. Distribute copies of the “On Trial” exercise from the activity page as a take-home to be completed as indicated. As a motive to complete it, state that you will begin the next class session by reviewing results.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(June 7—Listen to God’s Wisdom\)](#)

CROKCR VL / DECODE IT

Decode these common phrases by substituting one letter for another. The encoding of the title of this activity will get you started. For additional help: S=a, I=n, Y=u

- 1. VI KWRT JF ERSC _____
- 2. KYL KX JF RBRJRII _____
- 3. VI LKK CRRD _____
- 4. OS’L QRL JF ERSC STKYIC VL _____
- 5. VL ARSLH JR _____
- 6. NYHL LTRSCVIQ PSLRT _____
- 7. OKJVIQ YD HEKTL _____
- 8. IKL YD LK LER LSHU _____

ON TRIAL

A slogan from years past read, “If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Think of someone you know well that you believe exhibits godly wisdom. List behaviors of that person that would give evidence that he or she is led by godly standards of behavior.

Evidence in this person’s home life:

Evidence when this person is at work:

Evidence when this person is with friends:

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