

Faith and Trust

Devotional Reading: Psalm 56
Background Scripture: Proverbs 3:1–12

Proverbs 3:1–8

- ¹ My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
² for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.**
- ³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.**
- ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.**
- ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.
⁸ This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.**



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Key Text

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;—***Proverbs 3:5**

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 2: Learning About Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify principles that lead to a blessed life.
2. Explain why fear of the Lord is foundational to other proverbial principles.
3. Make a plan to identify and change an area of life to align more closely with the Lord's will by application of a proverbial principle.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Whose Influence?
 - B. Lesson Context
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 - Do Not Forget*
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- Conclusion**
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How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
omnipotent	ahm-nih-poh-tent.
omnipresent	ahm-nih-prez-ent.
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.

Introduction

A. Whose Influence?

Who do you regard as an authoritative voice? Perhaps you consider a particular writer, podcast host, or teacher as such an influence. When I think about the voices that influence me, I immediately think of my professors from Bible college. After graduation, I kept and organized all my notes from their classes for future reference. These notes even went with me during my time as an overseas missionary! I trusted the expertise and wisdom of those professors and wanted to ensure that I would not forget their teachings.

One of the earliest authoritative voices in a person's life is a parent. Most parents want to see their

children flourish. Therefore, they will teach their children to become kind, thoughtful, and intelligent people. Parents who follow Jesus will also desire that their children seek God’s wisdom and experience a personal relationship with Jesus.

The book of Proverbs invites us to hear the teachings of a father to his son. Regardless of whether or not our parents have taught us God’s wisdom, we can learn from this father figure and apply his wisdom to our lives.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Proverbs is generally attributed to King Solomon (see [Proverbs 1:1](#)). His wisdom was renowned (examples: [1 Kings 4:30–31](#); [10:24](#)), and over 3,000 proverbs originated with him ([4:32](#)), so he was an ideal person to write this book of wisdom literature. Additionally, the text attributes two other sections to Agur ([Proverbs 30:1](#)) and King Lemuel ([31:1](#)). However, we know nothing about these two men.

The text does not indicate when these texts were consolidated into the form of Proverbs that we read today. Further, the text does not have a direct recipient. The significance of Proverbs is not found in its original writers, date of composition, or original audience. Instead, its importance is in how it communicates what makes up a life of wisdom. All people can learn and apply the wisdom taught in the book of Proverbs.

For some readers, the book of Proverbs reads like disjointed sets of oracles without any connection. However, five sections divide the book: an introduction to wisdom ([Proverbs 1–9](#)), the proverbs of Solomon ([10:1–22:16](#); [25:1–29:27](#)), the words of the wise ([22:17–24:34](#)), the words of Agur ([Proverbs 30](#)), and the words of King Lemuel ([Proverbs 31](#)).

The first section begins with an explanation of the importance of wisdom (see [Proverbs 1:1–7](#)). After the introduction, most of that section is written from the perspective of a father advising his son on the importance of seeking wisdom from the Lord.

With one exception (see [Proverbs 3:5](#)), the poetic order of each pair of verses in today’s Scripture follows the same pattern. First, the father gives his son a negative command (example: [3:1a](#)). Second, the father gives a positive command (example: [3:1b](#)). Finally, the father concludes that section with a promise for the son (example: [3:2](#)).

I. One Law ([Proverbs 3:1–2](#))

A. Remembering Commands (v. 1)

1a. My son, do not forget my teaching,

Although the text leaves the speaker unidentified, we assume that a father is instructing his son (see [Proverbs 4:1](#)). The book of Proverbs presents wisdom from God as a quality that can be passed from generation to generation through teaching ([4:3–7](#)). The commands of a father and the law of a mother are understood to be one of the most influential voices for a child in this regard (see [6:20](#)).

Frequently in the Old Testament, teaching can refer to God’s law for his people (examples: [Exodus 24:12](#); [2 Kings 17:34–37](#)). However, the qualifier *my* indicates that this particular *teaching* consists of a father’s instruction to his son. Such instruction is a prominent theme in the first section of Proverbs (see [Proverbs 1:8](#); [4:2](#); [6:20](#); [7:2](#)).

The son is told not to *forget* his father’s teaching because of possible risks that such forgetfulness might incur (compare [Proverbs 4:5](#)). Similarly, the Israelites were warned the same regarding God’s law and his covenant with them (see [Deuteronomy 4:23](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you ensure you do not forget the wisdom others have given you?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to pass along wisdom to younger generations?

Do Not Forget

“It’s always something. It’s never simple. It’s always late.”

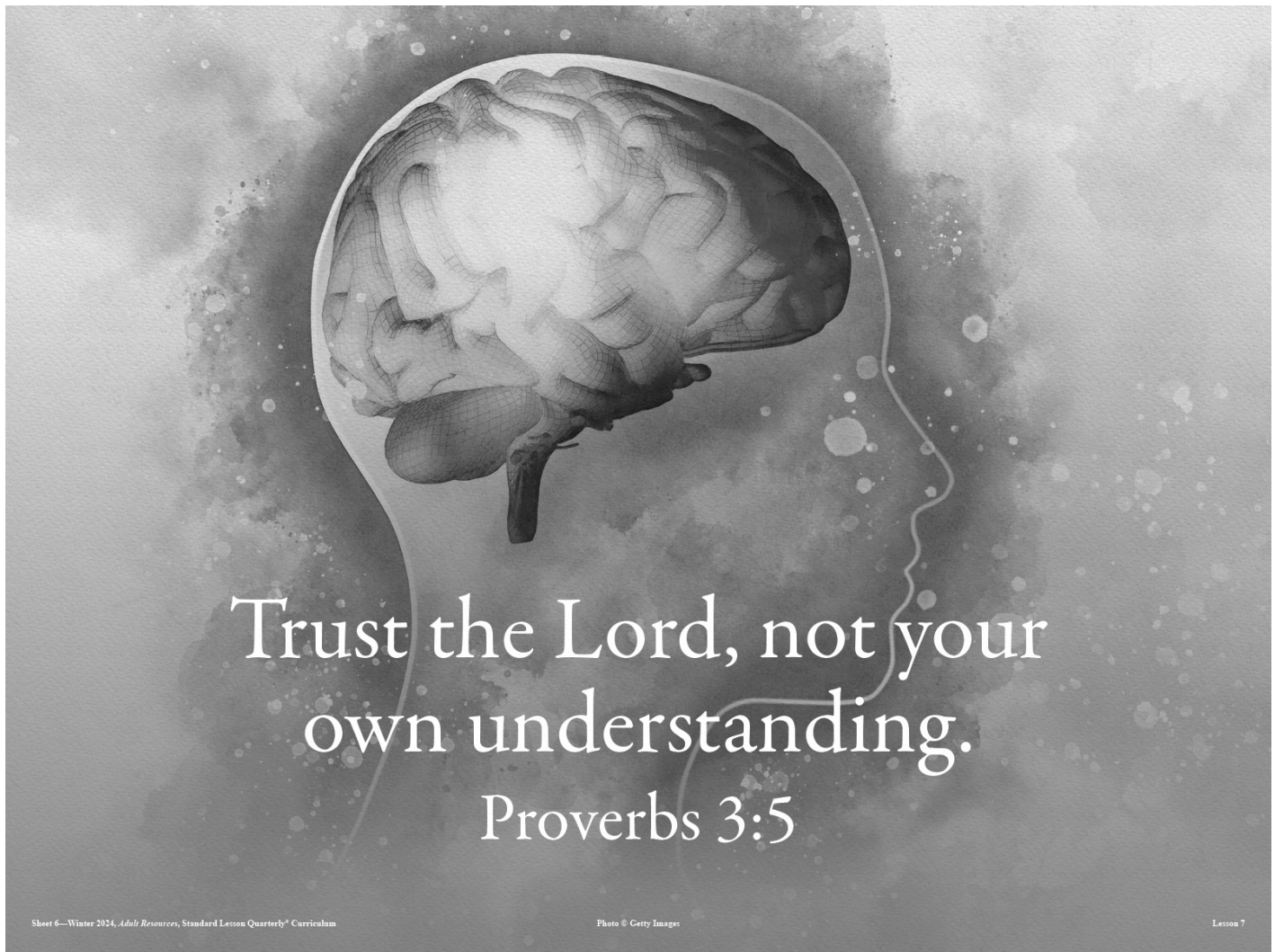
When I was a child, my dad constantly repeated these maxims in moments when I felt exasperated by life’s challenges. At the time, I couldn’t understand what he meant by these sayings. However, after several decades of life experience, my father’s wisdom now makes sense. His point was that life is filled with complications and challenges. He wanted me to expect these challenges rather than become frustrated and angered by them. These days, I share that same wisdom with my children and students. They frequently disregard my counsel because they consider it inapplicable or untimely. But perhaps someday—maybe decades later—they’ll remember what I’ve told them.

God has surrounded you with wise people—some older than you and some younger than you. What instruction from them do you need to remember, even if you don’t fully understand its importance in the current moment?

—N. G.

1b. but keep my commands in your heart,

Most modern-day perspectives consider the heart the emotional center of a person. Such views believe this emotional center lacks the capacity for rational guidance or direction. In the Old Testament, however, the *heart* refers to a person’s inner being. Among other aspects, this inner being includes a person’s volition (examples: [Genesis 6:5](#); [Exodus 25:2](#); [Proverbs 16:9](#)), emotions (examples: [Isaiah 30:29](#); [Nehemiah 2:2](#)), and knowledge (example: [1 Kings 3:9, 12](#)). The centrality of the heart led the father in Proverbs to warn his son regarding its safe keeping (see [Proverbs 4:23](#)). The son must be willing and able to receive his father’s exhortations and apply them to his life.



Sheet 6—Winter 2024, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly Curriculum

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Lesson 7

Visual for [Lesson 7](#). Display this visual as you discuss the commentary and discussion questions associated with [Proverbs 3:5](#).

One way that the son could *keep* his father’s *commands* would be to commit them to memory and obey them (compare [Psalm 119:11](#)). The Law of Moses commanded parents to teach their children about God’s law (see [Deuteronomy 6:4–9](#)). Parents honor God when they train their children to follow God. Further, children obey God and receive a blessing when they give honor to their parents and follow their commands (see next verse; see also [Ephesians 6:1–3](#); [Colossians 3:20](#)). Remembrance of the law and commands is the foundation of a life strengthened by God (see [Psalm 119:93](#)).

B. Promise of Life (v. 2)

2. for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

When a child honors his or her parents, that child “may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” ([Exodus 20:12](#)). The promise of a long *life* stands in contrast to the promise that “whoever pursues evil finds death” ([Proverbs 11:19](#)). The wicked person does not follow the commands of God. Such a person “will not remain in the land” ([10:30](#)). As a child follows and honors his or her parents,

that child is entering a life of wisdom. Later, the father describes wisdom as a woman who holds “long life ... in her right hand” (3:16, not in our printed text). While a long life is not inevitable, a flourishing life begins with seeking wisdom from godly parents.

The Hebrew understanding of peace sometimes does imply an absence of conflict (example: 1 Samuel 7:14). However, the Hebrew word for *peace* can also encompass ideas of flourishing (see Jeremiah 29:7), relational harmony (Isaiah 57:18–19), or the completeness of God’s work (54:10; Nahum 1:15). It is the first two aspects that this father is most concerned about for his son.

II. Two Virtues

(Proverbs 3:3–4)

A. Bind and Write (v. 3)

3a. Let love and faithfulness never leave you;

Love and *faithfulness* are key words in the Old Testament, especially regarding the attributes of God. *Love* frequently refers to God’s loyalty and commitment toward his people (example: Psalm 136). *Faithfulness* conveys the idea of reliability (examples: 71:22; Isaiah 61:8). God’s love is rooted in his faithfulness and promises (see Deuteronomy 7:9, 12; 1 Kings 8:23; Psalm 26:3). His love seeks redemption and safety for God’s people (example: Exodus 15:13).

The father’s concern is not only his son’s behavior; the father also desires to see the son’s heart transformed. A transformed heart will result in changed behavior (see Matthew 15:19). A life that appears righteous but lacks a rightly ordered heart is full of hypocrisy and sin (see 23:28). The heart’s deception will someday be exposed (Proverbs 26:24–26). The father wants his son to do good actions—actions that come from a heart transformed and oriented toward the virtues of mercy and truth.

A heart filled with love and faithfulness should be the foundation for the son’s behavior. A life seeking God’s wisdom results in that life developing mercy and truth that will bear fruit through righteous and wise actions. These attributes are part of God’s character, so they should be part of the character of his people (compare Proverbs 16:6; 20:28).

3b. bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

In biblical times, necklaces were signs of honor or rank (examples: Genesis 41:42; Daniel 5:29). To *bind* something around one’s *neck* revealed the importance and significance of that item to the wearer. The figurative language in this verse highlights the extent that the son should go to develop a life of love and faithfulness. The opposite of a life with these virtues would be considered “stiff-necked”—rebellious and disobedient (examples: Exodus 32:9; Jeremiah 17:23; Acts 7:51).

The command to *write* love and faithfulness *on the tablet of the heart* is another example of figurative language. This verse also alludes to Deuteronomy 6:6–8. In those verses, God commanded the people of Israel to internalize his law and apply it to all areas of life. Such virtues are not to be hidden from the world. Instead, a wisdom-filled life will develop these virtues in the heart. Such lives are shown to be “a letter from Christ” through God’s Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:3).

What Do You Think?

How will you continue to “write” these virtues “on your heart”?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to ensure you are attentive to the Spirit’s leading in this regard?

B. Promise of Favor (v. 4)

4. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

To *win favor* means to be held in high regard (example: [Daniel 1:9](#)). Even children, when they follow God, can receive favor from other people and God (example: [1 Samuel 2:26](#)). To have a *good name* signifies character and integrity of insight that leads a person to act righteously. This character develops when a person seeks the wisdom of the Lord and lives in obedience to him (see [Psalm 111:10](#)).

A life of character will not only be pleasing *in the sight of God*, but other people will also recognize it (compare [Luke 2:52](#)). The apostle Peter admonished believers to live in a way that would lead unbelievers to glorify God (see [1 Peter 2:12](#); compare [Matthew 5:16](#); [1 Timothy 3:7](#)). A good name and good reputation take time to develop. Not only do these things provide a personal benefit, but they are also avenues to honor God and reveal God to other people.

III. One Trust

(Proverbs 3:5–6)

A. Relying on the Lord (v. 5)

5a. Trust in the LORD with all your heart

We tend to place trust in things and people other than God (examples: [Psalm 52:7](#); [Isaiah 42:17](#); [Jeremiah 17:5](#)). At best, this misplaced trust can lead to futility. At worst, however, it can lead to destruction (see [13:24–27](#); [49:4–5](#)). Misplaced trust does not lead to any lasting and eternal wisdom.

However, the father’s efforts were intended to result in his son’s developing *trust in the Lord* (compare [Proverbs 22:19](#)). The Lord is worthy to be trusted because, among other things, he is the source of salvation (see [Isaiah 12:2](#)). When people trust the Lord, they experience blessing from him (see [Psalm 37:3–7](#); [Jeremiah 17:7–8](#)).

To display trust *with all your heart* implies a total commitment. As with showing love and devotion to the Lord (see [Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [10:12](#)), this kind of trust is an all-encompassing act; it requires the totality of a person’s being, beginning with one’s inner being (see commentary on [Proverbs 3:1](#), above).

5b. and lean not on your own understanding;

The book of Proverbs contains numerous warnings against pride (examples: [Proverbs 8:13](#); [11:2](#); [16:5](#), [18](#)). The reminder to *lean not on your own understanding* is another warning in that regard. Only foolish people trust themselves more than the wisdom of the Lord (see [28:26](#)). Their downfall is inevitable (see [18:12](#)). When people consider themselves to be wise in the eyes of the world, their so-

called wisdom amounts to foolishness in the eyes of God (see [1 Corinthians 3:18–19](#)).

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure you trust the Lord with *all* your heart?

Digging Deeper

How do you establish personal guardrails when you want to lean on your own knowledge and expertise?

B. Promise of Direction (v. 6)

6. in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

To *submit to* God means to know him and give him proper recognition for his activity in a person's life (compare [Proverbs 2:1–5](#)). It involves intimate knowledge of God and a willingness to yield to his will. When people submit to God, they do not forge ahead as though God does not exist. Instead, they recognize God's power and presence (see [Philippians 3:7–11](#)).

Those who submit to God can be assured that he will *make their paths straight* (compare [Jeremiah 10:23](#)). God is all-knowing (omniscient), all-present (omnipresent), and all-powerful (omnipotent). Therefore, we can trust that he will provide his people with a wise and righteous path (see [Psalm 16:11](#); [Proverbs 2:8](#)). This is not a promise of an easy life—trials are inevitable (see [James 1:2–3](#); [1 Peter 4:12](#)). However, God has provided us with an avenue of peace through Christ Jesus (see [John 16:33](#)). Through Christ Jesus, we can trust that God will guide and deliver us, no matter the nature of that path.

What Do You Think?

How do you overcome obstacles that prevent you from fully submitting to God?

Digging Deeper

Who will you recruit as an accountability partner in this regard?

IV. Two Actions

([Proverbs 3:7–8](#))

A. Fear and Avoidance (v. 7)

7a. Do not be wise in your own eyes;

The opposite of trusting in and submitting to God is to consider one's wisdom as the final say. To *be wise in your own eyes* is to be sure that one's own wisdom is superior and ultimate. When people depend on their own wisdom and do what seems right to them, they are no better than fools (see [Proverbs 18:2](#))—or worse (see [26:12](#)).

God is the source of wisdom (see [Proverbs 2:6](#)) and desires to give his people wisdom through his Spirit (see [1 Corinthians 2:6–16](#); [James 1:5](#)). As a result, God's people should avoid lives of pride and arrogance (see [Romans 12:16](#)) and seek out wisdom from God (see [James 3:13–16](#)).

The example of King Solomon provides us with a warning based on this verse. He received wisdom

from God (1 Kings 3:5–14). However, he failed to follow God’s wisdom (11:1–8). As a result, he experienced heartache and the promise of consequences that would extend past his lifetime (11:9–13).

Wise in My Own Eyes

I was one of a few high school freshmen who lettered in track; the hurdles were my specialty. One day, three guest coaches came to work with my team. The coaches adjusted familiar drills to force us to change our approach to training. For example, they placed the hurdles farther apart than usual. So, instead of taking three steps between hurdles, the drill forced us to take five or more steps.

I wanted to show off my power and strength. On my turn to complete the drill, I stretched out and only took three steps between hurdles. After the exercise, one of the coaches said that he liked my power and strength but that my form was also essential to develop. Hearing only what I wanted to hear, I drank in his praise, and my ego swelled. The next time my teammates ran the drill, I offered them unprompted advice for their improvement. Eventually, one of my teammates proclaimed an honest-but-harsh opinion about my new attitude. My ballooning ego popped.

In retrospect, I hadn’t heard all that the coach had told me. I had ignored the coach’s directives regarding my form. I only listened to the coach’s praise and considered myself skilled and wise. Is your self-determined wisdom causing you to be unable to hear the wisdom of others?

—N. G.

7b. fear the LORD and shun evil.

Scripture provides instances when people were afraid of the Lord and his power (example: Genesis 3:10). In this verse, however, to *fear the Lord* involves having an attitude of reverence, awe, wonder, faith, and trust in the Lord. It is impossible to be wise in one’s own eyes and, simultaneously, fear the Lord. Instead, an attitude of humility is required (see Proverbs 22:4). Those who fear the Lord come to have true wisdom (see 1:7), which leads to an avoidance of evil (14:16). God delights in those who show humility and fear him (see Psalm 147:11). Christians are commanded to live in a way that reflects their fear of the Lord (1 Peter 2:17; example: Acts 9:31).

Fearing God and loving evil are incompatible (see Exodus 20:20; example: Job 1:1). Fearing the Lord requires actively turning from evil (see Psalm 34:11–14). To *shun evil* involves an attitude of repentance—turning away from sin and turning to God in faith and obedience.

B. Promise of Wholeness (v. 8)

8. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

This verse begins with a Hebrew idiom that provides difficulty to translators. The translation of “navel” (KJV) is accurate to the Hebrew text. However, the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation) has the word for *body* instead. Perhaps the Hebrew text is an example of a literary practice of using a part of the whole to represent the whole. In this case, the *health* of the “navel” would represent of the health of the entire body.

Nourishment to the bones comes from marrow, life-giving tissue located in the cavities of most bones. This substance creates blood cells and provides energy and sustenance for the body. However,

the author of Proverbs would have likely been unaware of this anatomical fact. A nourished body contains marrow and strength in its bones (see [Job 21:24](#)).

A life of humility, fear of the Lord, and obedience to him results in the complete wholeness of a person. The son is promised health and vitality when he follows his father’s teachings (see [Proverbs 4:20–22](#)). We know, however, that a person’s status in life does not correlate to the quality of a person’s heart. While people may experience wholeness and health in part while on earth, Scripture promises a time in the future when God “‘will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that this verse cannot be trusted because people “fear the Lord” but still experience ailments?

Digging Deeper

How do [Psalms 103:14](#); [139:13–16](#); [Isaiah 45:7](#); [Luke 12:6–7](#); [John 9:1–7](#); and [1 Peter 4:13](#) inform your response?

Conclusion

A. Voices of Authority

A 2022 study showed that most people spend about two and a half hours daily on social media platforms. While this may not seem like a lot of time, it is a significant increase from 10 years prior, when the average daily usage hovered around one hour per day. Social media has become a “voice of authority” for many people, regardless of the actual knowledge, expertise, or wisdom of that voice.

It is easy for believers to say that we are seeking the wisdom of God when in actuality, other voices influence our lives and shape our perspectives. If we’re filling our lives with human ideas rather than the wisdom of God, which will have more influence?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the inspired wisdom you have revealed to us in Scripture. Help us to listen and follow your Word. Show us how we can be more attentive to the direction of your Spirit so that we might have lives of wisdom. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God’s children seek the wisdom
of their heavenly Father.

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

Invite learners to share their favorite “word of wisdom” or proverb (example: “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth”). Ask learners where they first heard the proverb. As a whole class, discuss the meaning of these “words of wisdom” or proverbs and how people have applied them to their lives.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Words of Wisdom” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in one minute or less before comparing responses with a partner.

Say, “Most proverbs help us make good decisions and point us to having positive relationships. Today, as we study the proverbs of Scripture, consider how we can apply their wisdom to our lives of faith and trust in God.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Proverbs 3:1–2](#). Divide learners into seven equal groups. Distribute a sheet of paper, a stack of index cards, and pens to each group. Ask, “How do you remember to complete important tasks?” Have each group answer by making a list of common strategies (examples: writing the task on a sticky note, setting a cellphone alarm, using mnemonic devices). Challenge groups to write down at least two commands from Scripture and discuss how to apply their memory strategies to remember to follow the commands.

Alternative. Distribute the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete row one as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Proverbs 3:3–4](#). Write [Psalm 15:1–3](#); [Matthew 9:12–13](#); and [1 Corinthians 13:4–7](#) on the board. Invite the small groups to look up the references and discuss how those Scriptures relate to [Proverbs 3:3–4](#).

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row two of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” exercise.

Invite another volunteer to read aloud [Proverbs 3:5–6](#). Assign one of the following Scriptures to each small group: [Psalm 18:2](#); [Jeremiah 29:11](#); [Romans 11:33](#); [Ephesians 1:11–12](#); [Hebrews 13:8](#); and [James 1:17](#). Allow five minutes for groups to read their assigned Scripture and discuss how it relates to [Proverbs 3:5–6](#).

Write the following phrase on the board:

We can trust the Lord because he is ...

With the help of the assigned Scripture, have each group think of one adjective that describes God.

Invite a volunteer from each group to share their group's adjective and write it on the board to complete the phrase.

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row three of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” exercise.

Ask a final volunteer to read aloud [Proverbs 3:7–8](#). Have groups answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1—What does “fear of the Lord” mean? 2—How is “fear of the Lord” foundational for today’s Scripture? 3—As described in these verses, what are possible steps for a healthy life?

Challenge small groups to come up with one example for how to follow the imperatives in [Proverbs 3:7](#) (example: A person might be not wise in their own eyes by asking for advice from a more mature and knowledgeable person).

Alternative. Instruct groups to complete row four of the “World’s Way vs. God’s Way” activity.

Into Life

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner. Place learners into pairs and allow five minutes for them to identify an area of their life that they can change by applying one of the principles from Proverbs. Ask learners to write down that change on their index card. Have learners share their plan for change with their partners. Encourage learners to place the index card in a visible location where they can see it in the upcoming week.