

A *Discover Together*  
BIBLE STUDY

*by Sue Edwards*

# Proverbs

*Discovering Ancient Wisdom  
for a Postmodern World,  
Volume 1*



LEADER'S GUIDE

 Kregel  
Publications

*Proverbs, Volume 1: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World*  
Leader's Guide  
©2013 Sue Edwards

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## Before You Begin . . .

I'm delighted that you've chosen *Proverbs: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World* to enrich your understanding of God's Word and help others in the process. Familiarize yourself with this overview as you prepare to lead the study and invite women to join you.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

- *Videos.* Supplemental teaching videos of various lengths are available for individual or group use at [www.discovertogetherseries.com](http://www.discovertogetherseries.com). For quick access with your smart phone or other handheld device, QR codes within each lesson correspond to these videos. These videos contain personal testimonies, related stories, and historical background. The introductory video can be used in your initial gathering to excite and inform your students as they embark on this adventure together.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

In addition, there is a "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" available at [www.discovertogetherseries.com](http://www.discovertogetherseries.com).

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Life is confusing. One expert says, "Watch out for fats—they'll clog your arteries and kill you!" Another insists, "No, stay away from carbs—they're the real enemy." Next year, another so-called



breakthrough will contradict yesterday’s findings. We often hear contradictory voices telling us how to live. Where can we discover timeless truths? In God’s Word—specifically the book of Proverbs. Solomon wrote Proverbs to show us how the world works and how to become wise women.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

“Why Study Proverbs” (pages 9–10) shows how the study is organized and how to interpret Proverbs. This information will help you explain the study to interested women and teach it correctly.

## KEY WORDS: WISDOM AND FEAR

Help participants understand these important words. *Wisdom* means “skill in living.” Wise women know how to make prudent decisions in their everyday lives. The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*, referring to the skill of craftsmen, sailors, singers, and administrators—knowledgeable, experienced experts in their field. Psalm 107:27, for example, describes sailors in a violent storm: “They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits’ end.” The original language reveals that their seafaring skills were useless. The author refers to these skills as *hokmah*—wisdom, the ability to *do* something.

Exodus 28:3 provides another example. The author writes, “Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters . . . to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest.” Moses commands the Israelite tailors and seamstresses to make an exquisite garment for the priest. The passage says these skilled tailors possess the spirit of wisdom. They not only knew about tailoring; they were skilled at *doing* it!

Women face important decisions daily. Do they want to know what to do in complex circumstances? If so, this study is for them. The book of Proverbs was written to make women wise—to show them the best way to handle whatever comes their way.

Wisdom begins, though, with a right relationship to God, bringing us to our second key word—*fear*. The theme verse of the book is Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Some women are confused about the meaning of the word *fear*, especially if they grew up hearing more about God’s wrath than his love. They think of fear as terror. That interpretation, however, is wrong. Fear of the Lord refers to reverence and awe, not dread or anxiety. As you encounter this term throughout the book, remind women of its proper meaning.

## FOUR GROUPS OF PROVERBS PEOPLE

As you navigate your way through Proverbs, you'll encounter four different kinds of people. Distinguish between them. These groupings help you understand people and their varying responses to God's instructions, an important skill required to be wise.

- Simpletons (the simple): ignorant people who need to be taught
- Fools: impulsive, unbalanced people who resist God's instruction and hate discipline
- Mockers: wicked scoffers, evil people who ridicule God's wisdom and attempt to snare others
- Wise people: upright, humble, and righteous people who seek God's instruction

## RESOURCES

Allender, Dan B., and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1993, 229–309. A good book for an in-depth study on the people of Proverbs.

## WEEK 1

# The Author, Purpose, and Power

### GET ACQUAINTED

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or icebreaker games. For an extended community builder, ask participants to name the wisest person they've ever known and explain why.

### GET FOCUSED

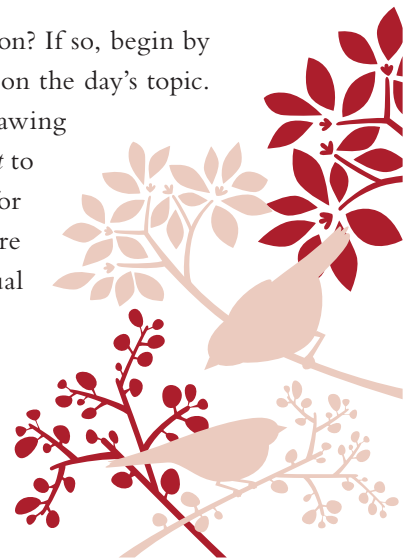
Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule provides time for both.

### DISCUSS WEEK 1

To enhance your small-group leading skills, study the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders." Leading a small group is a complex task, requiring lots of practice. Be patient and reread the Training Guide often.

Did you ask women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, begin by quickly summarizing the introductory page to focus their minds on the day's topic. Guide the group through the study by reading the questions and drawing the women into discussion and discovery. Your role as leader is *not* to illumine the group with your answers but to provide a safe place for them to share what God is teaching them. Set an atmosphere where they can respectfully explore different ideas. Roadblocks to spiritual maturity become dismantled in these kinds of groups.



Don’t expect deep sharing for the first few weeks. Women on occasion do bond quickly but often they need time to trust one another. If you find that time prohibits group discussion of all the questions, plan ahead. Choose blocks of questions to cover and eliminate others, or skim over observation questions and spend time on opinion and application questions.

## LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 chronicles the life of Solomon, beginning with his request for wisdom as a young king and culminating with his downfall as a result of his disobedience later. Also students will be introduced to four kinds of Proverbs people and the concept of the fear of the Lord, both explained above. To ensure application, include the “So What?” questions in your discussion (pages 18–19).

## WEEK 2

# Why Seek Wisdom?

### TROUBLESHOOTING

Week 2 enumerates the benefits of seeking wisdom. Solomon insists that wise women are more likely to stay out of trouble, enjoy safety and security, live longer, and be blessed and respected. During the discussion, participants sometimes ask, “Then why do bad things happen to wise women?” If you encounter this question, remind them that proverbs are not promises but general statements about the way the world works. Those who seek wisdom generally will enjoy these benefits, but bad things still happen to good people.

Women who, for example, eat in healthy ways, exercise regularly, and see their doctors periodically generally live longer. This is the way the world works. Some individuals, though, are struck down in their youth by accident or disease. Nevertheless, the principles are true. But life is mysterious, and so are the ways of the Lord.

Also, believers enjoy long life when they live wisely—yet children die. Again, this is not a promise of a particular number of years on the earth, but a statement that those who seek wisdom will not cut short their years by foolish actions that lead to premature calamity.

In addition, children who are loved unconditionally, disciplined fairly, and trained carefully will usually grow up to love the Lord. Other factors, however, come into play, such as free will and bad companions. Life is complex. If your group struggles with these issues, reiterate the concepts presented in “Why Study Proverbs” (pages 9–10).

Do any of the group’s participants adhere to prosperity theology? This view insists that every righteous believer is promised physical health and monetary wealth. Prosperity theologians use Proverbs to substantiate their claims, often confusing believers. If women in your group hold this view, gently remind them that Jesus, Paul, and other biblical characters did not enjoy physical health or monetary wealth—nor does the Bible promise this for all Christians. Suggest women consider John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:10–12, and James 1:2–3 as they wrestle with this issue. Remind the group to listen respectfully to everyone’s ideas, even when they disagree.





## CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

The “What’s Standing in Your Way?” questions (pages 29–30) focus on hindrances to wisdom. How can you help women express ways to overcome these hindrances? Consider these creative activities.

- Ask each woman to write her obstacle on biodegradable paper, then dig a hole outside, and bury it. We planted small flowers over the buried papers to symbolize the growth and beauty we expected as we immersed ourselves in God’s Word throughout the coming year. As the women watched the plants grow and blossom, they were reminded of their own “growth” in wisdom as a result of their study. If weather does not permit this exercise, consider purchasing artificial plants. Place the papers on the bottom of the pots and use the plants as centerpieces.
- Ask participants to write their obstacle on a piece of paper. Line a container with foil. Then burn the obstacles, symbolically showing God’s power to overcome these roadblocks in their lives. If you’re meeting in a church, check with your building supervisor for guidelines in using fire, and, of course, be careful.
- Nail the papers to a cross or other object. Display the object throughout the study to remind the participants that God can enable them to overcome whatever threatens their spiritual growth.

## WEEK 3

# Action Steps to Wisdom

### ARE YOU ENDING EACH SESSION WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. The “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” provides sound principles to help you lead your group. Note that when you wear your small-group leader’s hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher’s hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five minute formal lecture, more like a pastor’s Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you’re meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

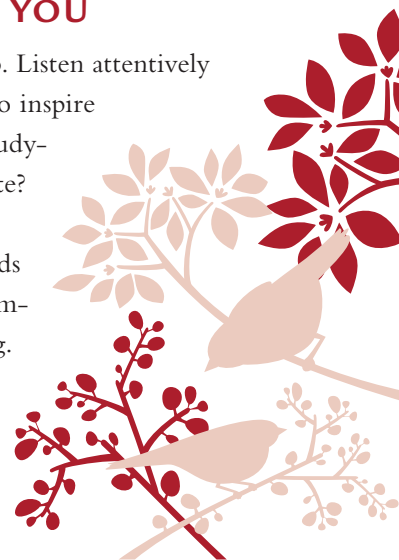
Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed at the end of lesson guides. Feel free to draw from the teaching of other reliable Bible teachers (citing your sources, of course). You can ask your pastor to help you find additional trusted online or printed sources. If you believe, though, that God may want *you* to teach the Bible, step out and try.

Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD or over the Internet. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts, too. So if something in you says “teach!”—then go for it!

### ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature?

Beginning with lesson 5, the study will focus on particular kinds of wisdom. Future lesson topics include, for example, authentic community, organization and discipline, neighbors, and peacemaking.



Some students may be experts on these topics, modeling wisdom and integrity and having life experience to share. If so, consider asking these women to prepare a testimony or message for the entire group that week.

Presenters also need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I’ve worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they’re a “time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

### CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Suggest participants attend in gym attire—the way they might dress to walk, run, or work out. Their outfits will remind everyone that the focus of the lesson is action. To be wise, we must take action! Stress that dressing this way is, however, voluntary, especially if some women go to work or other functions after the study.

### RESOURCES

- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (See also <http://christiancourses.com> for an online course.)
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

## WEEK 4

# Beware the Snare

### LESSON CONTENT

In my experience, lesson 4 creates more discussion than any other lesson in the study. The subject—women’s struggles with romantic and sexual temptation—is taboo in many churches. Yet women struggle with sexual desires and attractions just as men do. The motivation and needs are often different, but the temptations are just as real. As a result, participants welcome the opportunity to bring these issues into the light and learn wise responses.

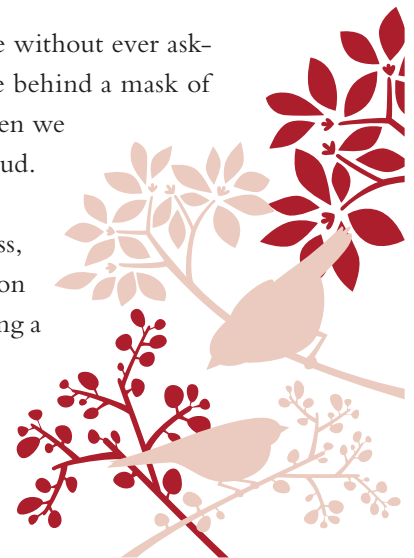
Please be sensitive to single and divorced women during the discussion. The introductory text contains a note to singles and “a word to the divorced” (page 48). While we should never encourage or condone divorce, neither should we ostracize divorced women. Create an environment in which women in various situations are free to share what they’ve learned, even from poor choices.

Help your group see that hiding is harmful. Think of an oozing wound on your arm. Instead of inspecting it carefully, treating it with antibiotic, and exposing it to the air to heal, you simply slap a Band-Aid on it and go your way. My husband tells the story of his great grandmother’s unnecessary death. When she was shelling green beans, a piece lodged deep in her fingernail bed. Busy and distracted, she ignored the injury. Soon, infection festered, but she continued to disregard red streaks and swelling. Ultimately toxicity spread, killing her. Ignoring or hiding sin kills too.

Hiding ultimately makes us vulnerable to *more—not less—sin*, especially sexual sin. It has become the sin above all sins—horrible, appalling, beastly, heinous, shameful—and unspeakable, the one sin that we hide at all costs, the one sin we don’t share with our spouse or best friend. It is *the* taboo subject. Few teach or preach about it. Leaders rarely admit they struggle—and what stays in the dark has a secret place to grow, the perfect incubator.

When we hear about couples who leave the church to divorce without ever asking for help, we wonder why. Yet we know how easy it is to hide behind a mask of spirituality. Will church people accept, understand, and aid us when we confess our sin to one another? We are embarrassed, afraid, and proud. Often, our willingness to confess depends on the sin.

Sins on the “approved list” are easy to confess—selfishness, pride, anger, even general lust . . . but it’s dangerous to confess sins on the black list. Specific sexual sins rank high there: habitually savoring a



forbidden sexual fantasy in your mind, deliberately pursuing a risky relationship with a married member of your small group or workplace, surfing the Internet for pornography in the middle of the night. Listen to the words of a pastor who hid his sexual addiction for ten years, all the while carrying on his day-to-day responsibilities in his church and speaking all over the country:

I wish we in the church did a better job, conveying God’s love for sinners. From the church, I felt mainly judgment. I cannot bring my sin to the church until it has been neatly resolved into a warm, uplifting testimony. For example, if I had come to the church in the midst of my addiction to lust, I would have been harshly judged. That, in fact, is why I had to write my article anonymously. Even after the complete cycle of confession and forgiveness, people still wrote in comments, “The author cannot possibly be considered a Christian.” . . . We in the church could learn from Alcoholics Anonymous. Somehow they require accountability and communicate the Immanuelness of God. He is with you when you succeed and when you fail. He does not wait with folded arms for you to pick yourself up out of the gutter. His hands are stretched out toward you, eager to help. Where are the hands of the church?<sup>1</sup>

Jesus’ hands are eager to embrace sinners who are bound in sexual sin. He doesn’t condone their sinful acts or attitudes. He doesn’t wash away the consequences of their sin. He demands that they change. But he does so in a way that is respectful and not demeaning. His magnetic love compelled them, calling them into the light. We are called to do the same.

This lesson may surface women who need help. Are you willing to meet privately? Suggest resources—books, conferences, and counselors.

## RESOURCES

Dillow, Joseph C. *Solomon on Sex*. New York: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Dillow, Linda, and Lorraine Pintus. *Intimate Issues: 21 Questions Women Ask About Sex*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 1999; 2009. (See <http://www.intimateissues.com> to learn more about their conferences.)

Edwards, Sue, Kelley Mathews, and Henry Rogers. *Mixed Ministry: Working as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society*. Kregel, 2008.

## WEEK 5

# The Power of Friendship and Community

### A NEW FOCUS

Week 5 is the first topical lesson drawn from Proverbs chapters 10 through 30. Beginning with chapter 10, proverbs are recorded randomly, on a variety of subjects. I've grouped the proverbs on specific subjects of particular interest to women—lesson 5 on friendship and community. Women will be looking up and studying proverbs from throughout chapters 10 through 30 on this particular topic. This approach helps us dig deep into one aspect of wisdom.

Remember that a proverb is a short, pithy couplet that teaches truth in a memorable way. Instruct participants to ponder each proverb for its deep, rich meaning. When we study biblical accounts, we study the whole account and then attempt to discern biblical principles. When we study Paul's letters, we read portions of the letter and then try to understand the meaning for us. Studying proverbs is different. We won't cover large sections of Scripture. Instead, we slow down to ponder each couplet carefully, as if we were mining for diamonds, deeply buried and tiny but beautiful and many faceted.

### RESOURCES TO HELP INTERPRET PROVERBS

If you need help interpreting Proverbs, consider these fine books:

Bridges, Charles. *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1964. Reprint, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981.

Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

———. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–30*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

### A NOTE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Remind the women that the author used the 2011 *New International Version* (NIV) to prepare the Bible study guide. Don't require them to



use this translation, but suggest they do if they own one. Confusion can result if an interpreter translates a single word of a proverb differently.

## TROUBLESHOOTING

Week 5 asks women to label qualities of a good friend and then answer questions related to each quality. Participants should fill in the blanks, reflecting the answers below:

- A good friend is *loyal and steadfast* (Prov. 17:17).
- A good friend is *honest, truthful, and genuine* (Prov. 27:6; Eph. 4:15).
- A good friend is wise, challenging, and gives good counsel (Prov. 27:9, 17).
- A good friend is not overbearing, smothering, or jealous (Prov. 25:17).

Expect different perspectives as women fill in this final blank, and discuss the suggested proverbs. Help them see that a good friend employs healthy boundaries, is not intrusive, understands the importance of good timing, and does not use humor to hurt others.

Question 16 should help the women minister effectively to hurting friends. Draw out skilled women, experienced in working with the wounded and discouraged. When a friend is downhearted and discouraged, a ministry of presence is more helpful than, for example, “singing songs” and inappropriately quoting Bible verses.

## CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Ask women to come prepared to discuss these questions: “Who has been a good friend to you? Why?” They might bring a picture or an artifact that helps the group understand the relationship.
- Show a painting that expresses friendship or community. Ask the women what they see and what genuine Christian community and friendship means to them.
- Listen to a contemporary song about friendship. Display the words and discuss its meaning.

## RESOURCES

Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Gorman, Julie. *Community That Is Christian*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

## WEEK 6

# Get Organized!

### LESSON CONTENT

Does God want us to plan ahead? Do we direct our lives or does God? Women in our studies often struggle to understand the balance between planning for the future and giving God his rightful, sovereign place. The first question set, under “Plan Ahead,” guides women to think through and discuss this tension. Draw out women who understand that a wise woman plans carefully and lives a disciplined life, but remains flexible, entrusting everything to God.

Work your way through each question set. Don’t water-ski over the passages. Don’t settle for incomplete or haphazard answers. Challenge the group to discover together the beauty of these proverbs. Keep up a brisk pace so you will have time to tackle the wrap-up application questions (“Is It Worth the Effort?” on pages 83–84). This lesson challenges women to recognize excuses to be lazy, to remember their days are numbered, and to invest themselves wisely in kingdom work. Our culture promotes indulgence, but the Bible exalts self-discipline and hard work.

### TROUBLESHOOTING

The second question set, “Portrait of a Sluggard’s Mind-Set,” asks women to study proverbs that paint pictures of lazy people. For example, Proverbs 26:14 says, “As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.” Picture a woman who is tied to her bed, rolling back and forth, over and over, but unable to get up. Solomon shows us what happens when we sleep too much—we become lethargic and unproductive. Help participants understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

The third question set, “Portrait of an Irresponsible Sluggard,” continues to paint pictures of lazy people—they exhibit such a poor work ethic that they’re too lazy to feed themselves, or to cook their food. Of course, these are extremes for effect. In this section, Solomon compares irresponsible people to “vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes” (Prov. 10:26). In this imagery, he highlights that lazy people are irritating and exasperating.

Participants are often confused by Proverbs 14:4, “Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox come an abundant harvest” (question 24). This pregnant proverb explains that life is messy. In our work, marriages, and child-rearing,





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we encounter problems that complicate our lives. But ultimately, through these entanglements come rich blessings and learning experiences.

## RESOURCE

Mackenzie, Alec. *The Time Trap: The Classic Book on Time Management*. 3rd ed. New York: American Management Assoc., 1997.

## WEEK 7

# Word Power

Week 7 meddles in the topic of women’s conversations, sometimes raising guilt and regret. Pray that God will use this lesson to convict women of that sin. Work hard to create a positive atmosphere where women can confess, be forgiven, and determine to change. As the leader, be a fellow struggler. We talk so much it’s impossible not to misuse words. Nevertheless, our goal is to become women who use words to build up and tell the truth in love. What kind of group atmosphere fosters this kind of spiritual growth?

### CREATE A POSITIVE GROUP ETHOS

Ethos (*e-thas*) is a place’s distinguishing environment or atmosphere. As the leader, you set the ethos and, although you cannot see it, women respond positively or shut down in response. Every home has ethos. In some homes children experience unconditional love and fair discipline. As a result they usually grow up confident and secure. Other homes exude a chill—children walk on eggshells, knowing that performance earns affection, easily withdrawn when they mess up.

Ethos has an impact in classrooms. In some classrooms, students feel comfortable to ask questions, even dumb ones. They know the teacher has their best interest at heart and won’t intentionally embarrass them. In others, students don’t dare open their mouths. Why? Ethos.

And your small group has ethos, highly influencing participants. Will it be a place where women can voice their deep hurts and difficult questions? Can they sense God’s love? Can they be honest and do business with God there? Forgiveness and healing take root in places like that. To learn how to create positive group ethos, review the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders,” focusing on the importance of affirmation and controlling your own talking. Remember, group time is not about you! It’s about giving women a safe place to discuss what *they* learned, try out *their* new ideas, and articulate *their* convictions.

### TROUBLESHOOTING

The question set “Characteristics of Good Words” includes blanks for women to fill in, reflecting the spirit of the answers below:

- Good words are *true and honest* (Prov. 12:17a; 16:13).
- Good words are *few* (Prov. 10:19).



- Good words are *gentle and patient* (Prov. 15:1; 25:15).
- Good words are *appropriate and timely* (Prov. 15:23).

Lesson 7 is long. Move through at a brisk pace to ensure you cover the last question set, “Ready for Self-Evaluation?” These questions challenge women to take inventory and action—the ultimate purpose of our study! If you lead a talkative group, making it difficult to finish the lesson, consider these strategies:

- As the leader, summarize observation questions, and then ask the group the opinion and sharing questions.
- Eliminate discussion of some question sets altogether and focus on the sets that you believe will be of greatest benefit to your particular group.
- Divide the lesson into two parts and cover the questions in two separate sessions.

## GOSSIP AND SLANDER

Question 11 asks, “What’s the difference between gossip and slander?” Help the group understand that gossip is sharing a confidence that is true but inappropriate or unkind. Slander is spreading lies. Both are sin, damaging unity in the community and destroying relationships. To gossip or slander is like tearing open a feather pillow on top of a windy mountain. It is as difficult to reclaim the damaging words as it is to collect the feathers.

## WEEK 8

# Won't You Be My Neighbor?

### A NEW FORMAT

Lesson 8 is a “Probe the Passage” format supplemented with questions similar to those in the previous lessons. The lesson begins by asking women to read Luke 10:25–37, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” at least five times during the week, and then to probe the passage with questions. The purpose of this exercise is to teach women to study the Bible for themselves.

As you prepare to lead your group through lesson 8, find “Table Talk” at the end of the lesson (pages 106–109). You may want to limit your discussion to this section. Read the instructions carefully. Three main questions are provided, followed by multiple examples. (What does the passage say? What does it mean? How does this apply to me?) Careful Bible scholars, preachers, and teachers use three steps in their approach to studying the Bible—observation, interpretation, and application—a method reflected in the “Probe the Passage” format. These methods ensure proper and thorough handling of the text. To learn more about this method, see *Living by the Book* by Howard Hendricks and William Hendricks (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

Feedback has indicated that women enjoy this process. Rather than finding the method overwhelming, they find it helpful. Begin by preparing them for the change. Assure them that you believe they will rise to the challenge. You will all be pleasantly surprised at the depth of understanding women reveal.

### OPTIONS

Several options are open as you lead the group. Pray and determine which option best fits the needs of your group.

- Guide the group through the “Table Talk” questions and then supplement with a short wrap-up.
- If you’re not ending group time with a teaching wrap-up, ask some of the supplemental questions, especially the “Are You a Good Neighbor?” questions.
- Cover all the supplemental questions in addition to “Table Talk.”
- Break the lesson down into two separate sessions to allow for a more thorough treatment of the subject. Include creative arts ideas and/or action steps.



## CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Create an on-the-spot drama, asking women to play the people in the parable. Visualizing the scenes cements them in women's minds. Discuss what you learned after actually walking through the story.
- Secure a DVD of the gospel of Luke and play the scene where Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

## ACTION STEPS

- Brainstorm ways your group might tackle a community project together. Consider working in the community once a month or for a season, living out what you are studying.
- Play a DVD that explains a community ministry, or invite someone from the ministry to visit and enumerate ministry opportunities.
- Ask each woman to come prepared the next week to share her testimony.

## RESOURCES

McDowell, Josh, and Don Stewart. *Answers to Tough Questions Skeptics Ask About the Christian Faith*. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1980.

Newman, Randy. *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003.

## WEEK 9

# Blessed Are the Peacemakers

### ANOTHER “PROBE THE PASSAGE” FORMAT

Review lesson 8’s discussions “A New Format” and “Options” above if you need a refresher on how to use the “Probe the Passage” format. Lesson 9 contains three sections, listed below. Determine which section or combination of sections will best equip your group to become skilled peacemakers.

- Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18:15–17
- Additional advice from Solomon and various New Testament writers (Paul, James, Peter, and the author of Hebrews)
- Three case studies (see “Table Talk”)

### MATTHEW 18:15–17— BASIC PEACEMAKER TRAINING

This familiar but often neglected passage contains three steps. If the group fails to discover the process you may want to put on your teacher’s hat and summarize the process *after* the discussion.

#### Step 1: Go and Show

There are two parties in the conflict: the offender and the offended. Both are assumed to be Christians. Jesus instructs the offended to be the initiator. Also, the offense is termed a sin. Consider these questions before you respond: Is the offense truly a sin, or could it lead to sin? Are you evaluating an action you’ve observed or a heart attitude you suspect? Can you overlook the offense (Prov. 19:11)? Can you interact with the offender without this offense coloring the relationship? If not, you need to discuss the conflict openly, *just between the two of you*. Jesus limits the first meeting to the two parties—and no one else should know about the conflict.

#### Step 2: Take Witnesses

If the first meeting is unfruitful, the offended party is responsible to call a second meeting and invite witnesses—those who may have insight concerning the offense—or a neutral party to help sort out relevant details. Be sure the witnesses are acceptable to both parties. Witnesses often serve as catalysts to bring about truth and a joyful resolution.



### Step 3: Take It to the Church

If there is still no resolution, Jesus says, “Tell it to the church.” Whomever God has placed in authority over you in the church is now in charge. Courtesy dictates that all parties are heard at the same time, and godly people follow the directives of their leaders.

## CASE STUDIES

Applying biblical principles to real-life situations is complex and challenging. Discussion group questions follow each case study to help the group decipher appropriate responses. Expect—and respect—diverse opinions. The objective is not to come to a consensus but to wrestle with options. When we actually experience conflict, we know more of the details and can depend on the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Our insight in a case study, though, is limited. Help group members apply biblical principles while giving them freedom to discuss possibilities. The exercise should embolden them to face conflict, even in messy situations; apply sound biblical principles; and become peacemakers in their daily lives.

Ask a group member to read the case study, and allow plenty of time to discuss the questions that follow. If the discussion heats up, step in and remind women to listen respectfully and disagree agreeably. Explain the limited nature of case studies and their purpose.

## RESOURCES

Sande, Ken. *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004.

Shelley, Marshall. *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994. (For ministry leaders.)

For additional resources, training, and professional mediators, please check out Peacemaker Ministries at <http://www.peacemaker.net>.

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## NOTE

1. “The War Within Continues: An Update on a Christian Leader’s Struggle with Lust” can be found at various online locations.