

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Proverbs

*Discovering Ancient Wisdom
for a Postmodern World,
Volume 2*



LEADER'S GUIDE

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Publications

Proverbs, Volume 2: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World
Leader's Guide
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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. 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.

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 9–19) 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.

LESSON 1

Raising Up the Next Generation

BE INCLUSIVE

Often Bible lessons on raising up the next generation target biological parents, forgetting that many women struggle with infertility or are single. Parenting the next generation is primarily in the hands of biological parents and grandparents, but they need help from the whole community. The next generation needs multiple Christian voices speaking into their lives to counteract strong destructive influences in the culture that contradict biblical principles.

Most women without biological children yearn to be influential in the lives of younger generations, and these women have much to offer. Scripture encourages women to serve other women as mentors, spiritual mothers, and coaches (Titus 2:3–5). When young women leave home, they need older women to guide them as they adjust to adult life. Seasoned working women aid novices just as new mothers benefit from the advice of experienced mothers. Remind your group to be inclusive as they discuss this lesson.

RAISE UP MENTORS

In addition to teaching godly parenting principles, this lesson is designed to challenge women to step out and become mentors, spiritual mothers, and coaches. Most women desire to connect in authentic relationships for mutual benefit, but I have seen many women hesitate to become mentors, especially older women. Some are not confident in their Bible knowledge, believing they must be “Bible answer women” to mentor. Others are intimidated by younger women who may be more educated, more worldly-wise, and more technologically savvy. Some look at past failures in their lives and fear they have little to offer.

As the leader, speak boldly against these false disqualifiers. Older women need to hear that younger women can benefit from their experiences, even past mistakes and failures. Older women also need to realize that younger women enrich their lives by exposing them to new ways of thinking.

In my experience, younger women are the ones asking for a mentoring relationship and expecting someone else to create a program to meet their need. They need to learn that a mentoring relationship cannot be artificially created. It involves chemistry. Teach younger women to be initiators in the relationship. It is awkward for an older woman to approach a younger woman and say, “Dear, I know you could benefit from my vast experience.”



Finding the right mentor begins with prayer rather than a program. If you want to encourage mentoring relationships, consider creating events, such as a dinner or dessert, where older and younger women can engage in conversation. Instruct the younger women to follow up with women they sense might be God’s choice for their mentor. If you have mixed ages in your Bible study group, you have already provided an incubator. As younger women understand their responsibility for finding a mentor and older women understand their value as mentors, relationships blossom and lives are changed!

ENLIST WOMEN TO SHARE THEIR STORIES

A short testimony from a mentor, mentee, or both could encourage women to work toward creating a mentoring relationship in their own lives. Ask mentors and mentees to script what they plan to say, time it, and review it with you before you give them the floor.

TROUBLESHOOTING

In this lesson more than any other, women struggle to understand proverbs as principles instead of promises. Most biological and spiritual mothers care deeply that their protégés love God and lead wise lives. As a result, they sometimes forget that ultimately protégés choose whether or not to love and serve. These choices cannot be forced. Many women want guarantees so badly that they are willing to misinterpret the Scriptures to soothe their fears.

Question 13 may be particularly difficult for women with prodigal children. To prepare yourself, review “What You Need to Know About Proverbs” (pages 9–10). Before you begin the lesson, consider discussing the interpretive principle that proverbs are not promises made to individuals. Be kind to women who struggle and don’t resort to arguing. Pray that God will comfort them and work in their hearts.

Do you believe group members may have strong opinions on the question set, “Discipline and Correction” (pages 22–23)? If so, remind them that ideas should be respected and interaction should be gracious. We all benefit from hearing others’ perspectives, whether or not we agree.

RESOURCES

Hislop, Beverly. *Shepherding a Woman’s Heart*. Chicago: Moody, 2003.

Hunt, Susan. *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992.

Inrig, Elizabeth. *Release Your Potential: Using Your Gifts in a Thriving Women’s Ministry*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2001.

LESSON 2

“Fear” the Lord

A FORMAT CHANGE

Lesson 2 is a “Probe the Passage” format supplemented with questions similar to those in the previous lesson. You’ll be familiar with the format if you’ve already completed *Proverbs: Discovering Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World, Volume 1*. The lesson begins by asking the women to read Job 38 and 39 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 2, find “Table Talk” at the end of the lesson (pages 31–34). 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 Press, 1991).

OPTIONS

Several options are open as you lead the group through this lesson. 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 those found in question 9.
- 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.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Remember the theme verse of the book, 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*. They think of fear as terror. However, fear of the Lord refers to reverence and awe, not terror, dread, or anxiety. On the other hand, some women think of God in such familiar terms that they forget he is holy, righteous, and all-powerful. He is worthy of endless worship. If you observe either extreme being expressed during discussion, guide group members toward balance by soliciting perspectives from women who will give sound answers.

WRAP-UP TEACHING IDEA

Consider wrapping up the discussion by teaching Job 42:1–6 and the epilogue of Job, 42:7–16. Remember to wear your small-group leader’s hat while you facilitate the discussion and then replace it with your teacher’s hat to expound on the lesson theme. Review the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” if you need a refresher on the difference between small-group facilitating and teaching.

Job 42:1–6 records the final exchange between Job and God. In these verses, Job finally realizes two things: (1) he may never know the reasons *why* calamities befell him and (2) he doesn’t need to know. But he learns that he can know the character of God, his loving and trustworthy Father. Job’s response is to repent of his doubting and accusatory attitude toward God. “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

The epilogue reveals that God restored twice the amount of what Job had lost, except for his children, because they were not really lost to him. He would see them again in heaven. Compare the last chapter with the first two chapters for details, revealing the amazing love of God for his children.

RESOURCE

Enroth, Ronald M. *Churches That Abuse*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992. If women in your group have suffered at the hands of abusive churches and you need to better understand these women, I highly recommend Enroth’s book.

LESSON 3

Cool Down Those Hot Flashes

LESSON CONTENT

The topic of anger easily evokes guilt in women who struggle with inappropriate anger. The stress of caring for small children, guiding teens, working in a demanding career, or simply keeping up with the pace of today's high-energy lifestyle can lead to outbursts of anger. In our quick-fix, microwave world, we usually get what we want quickly. As a result, our expectations are unrealistic and skewed. So when our desires are not fulfilled immediately or we find ourselves in situations demanding patience, we often "lose our cool."

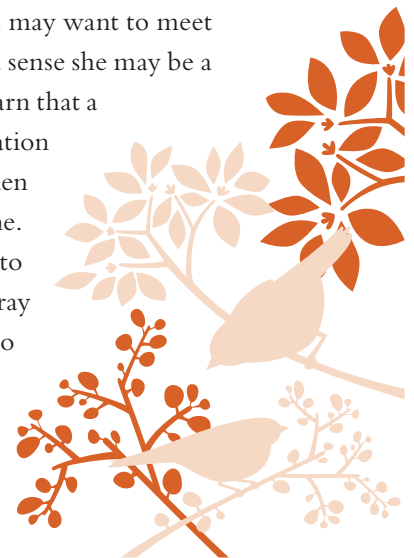
Women are, however, often willing to openly discuss their struggle with inappropriate anger. Pray that the women in your group will feel that they can be honest about their lack of patience and outbursts of anger. Honesty is the first step toward self-control and change. But you must do more than pray. You must create an environment of care and understanding mixed with tough love. Review the "Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders" to ensure you are employing creative strategies that produce this kind of sharing and confession. Be sure to remind your group of confidentiality before discussing the lesson.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Lesson 3 is long and jam-packed with share questions. Be sure to move the group along so that you save time for the "How Do You Handle Anger?" questions (pages 43–45). If you sense that your group battles anger, consider dividing the lesson in half and meet a second week for discussion. If anger isn't particularly problematic for your group, you may wish to eliminate question sets. Plan ahead, deciding which questions you want to cut as you prepare to lead the group.

If a group member confesses her anger is "out of control," you may want to meet with her individually or refer her to a professional counselor. If you sense she may be a danger to herself or others, insist she get help. Remember, if you learn that a woman is physically abusing her children, you must report the situation to the authorities. But don't be alarmed. I have ministered to women for more than thirty years and I have never needed to report anyone.

If a woman in the group breaks down and cries, remember to comfort her for a few minutes, offer help after group time, and pray for her. Then return to the discussion. Groups often want to try to



fix emotional issues on the spot, but they should not attempt it. You are there to learn what the Bible says about anger, and the woman who breaks down is more likely to find help from God’s Word than from the group’s amateur counseling. You are not an anger support group; you are a Bible study!

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Introduce the lesson by showing a film clip depicting a woman whose anger is “out of control.”
- Give women an opportunity to write down their greatest temptation to blow up or lose patience. Set aside time to pray and ask the Lord for help. Play some quiet instrumental music in the background during this time. After prayer, symbolically give these situations to God. For example, place the papers in a miniature coffin and bury them, or nail them to a cross.
- Pair women who will act as accountability partners, giving them someone to contact when they need help controlling their anger. (For volunteers only.)

RESOURCES

- Allender, Dan B., and Tremper Longman III. *Bold Love*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1992.
- . *Cry of the Soul*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1994.

LESSON 4

In the Shadow of Shaddai

LESSON CONTENT

Fear paralyzes. Satan uses fear to hinder women from becoming what God created them to be. Fear inhibits women from stepping out and courageously pursuing passionate service for God. Lesson 4 helps women overcome their fears, setting them free to love themselves and others and to serve God wholeheartedly.

Lesson 4 is titled “In the Shadow of Shaddai” to reflect a significant name of God as revealed in the first verse of Psalm 91. “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the *Almighty*.” The Hebrew word for “Almighty” is *El Shaddai*. Jill Briscoe writes:

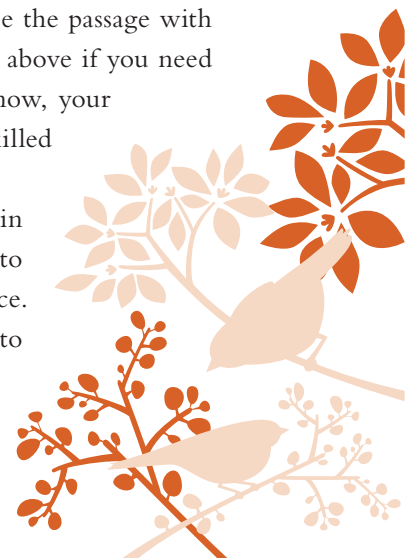
The root idea of this name gives us the idea of “the breast”—the nourisher or supplier of needs, the satisfier of the thirsty soul—the God who is sufficient. This particular aspect of God has an especially tender place in my heart. If indeed God is enough, then I do not need more than an Elohim [the God who stands in a covenant relationship with me] who answers all my needs. He will nourish and satisfy me whether or not I have a husband to help me, children to love me, or health to sustain me. In my past, present, and in my future, I know El Shaddai will be all that I need, as the occasion arises.¹

Explain the origin of *El Shaddai* as you introduce the lesson or use this concept in a wrap-up lecture.

ANOTHER “PROBE THE PASSAGE” FORMAT

Lesson 4 is a “Probe the Passage” format. The lesson begins by asking the women to read Psalm 91 at least five times during the week, and then probe the passage with questions. Review lesson 2’s “A Format Change” and “Options” above if you need a refresher on how to use the “Probe the Passage” format. By now, your group should be familiar with this format and becoming more skilled at wringing out a passage for themselves.

Use the “Table Talk” section (pages 52–56) to guide women in discussion. Emphasize the final question, “How does this apply to me?” to help women see ways to put what they learn into practice. Consider starting next week’s discussion by asking the women to



share ways they applied this week's lesson. If this is your plan, inform the women ahead of time.

RESOURCES

Kent, Carol. *Tame Your Fears and Transform Them into Faith, Confidence, and Action*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1993.

Kraft, Vickie. *Facing Your Feelings: Moving from Emotional Bondage to Spiritual Freedom*. Dallas: Word, 1996.

LESSON 5

A Ring in a Pig's Nose

LESSON CONTENT

When my daughters were teenagers, they would occasionally say or do something inappropriate or ask to wear something immodest. My reply was Proverbs 11:22, “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.” They would roll their eyes, sigh, and walk away in a huff. What they wanted to do, say, or wear did not match who they were—daughters of the King! Now that my girls are grown, we joke about this proverb, and I have no doubt they will quote this proverb to their children now that they are mothers themselves.

Some Christian women lack discernment, and as a result show little discretion in their actions. In an Easter service, my husband and I sat behind three scantily clad women—midriffs, thighs, and cleavage exposed. They looked like they just stepped out of the latest fashion magazine. We were glad they came, of course, but still were distracted by their exposed flesh.

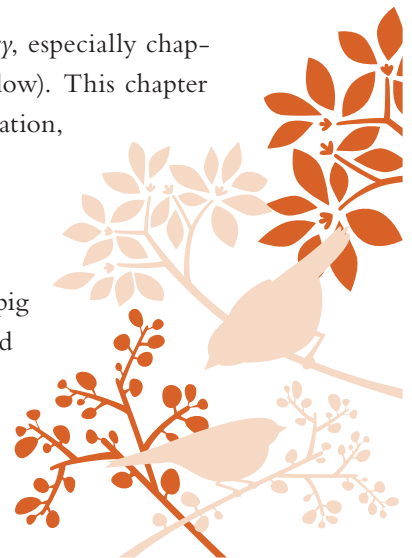
Many of today’s Christian women did not grow up in Christian homes with godly mothers as role models. Instead, they learned from a culture that often promotes foolishness over wisdom. To be discerning, women must learn from God’s Word and from wise women willing to invest in their lives. These novices must be willing to listen, accept correction, and apply what they learn with diligence and intentionality.

As you prepare to lead this lesson, ask God to show you the discerning women in your group. Draw on their insight during the discussion and direct other women to value their comments. Don’t allow the discussion to disintegrate into an exchange about rules, but instead direct the discussion so that it focuses on heart attitudes and actions that honor Christ. Help women see that discernment and discretion are life-long pursuits. With the help of wise people, we can all become discerning women who act with discretion.

To prepare to lead this lesson, consider reading *Mixed Ministry*, especially chapter 14, “Modesty: Exalting the New Taboo” (see “Resource” below). This chapter attempts to help women prioritize modesty through internal motivation, pleasing Jesus, and respecting others.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Create a visual aid for this lesson. For example, find a stuffed pig or ask an artist to paint or draw a pig. Purchase and attach gold



costume jewelry rings to the pig's nose. As a memento, give each group member a ring and a laminated copy of Proverbs 11:22.

- Acquire fashion magazines that show provocative women. Use these pictures to stimulate conversation about modesty in a culture that promotes immodesty. Again, don't focus on rules or embarrassing anyone, but direct the discussion toward God-honoring heart attitudes.

RESOURCE

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

LESSON 6

The Subtle Sin of Pride

LESSON CONTENT

Pride ruins marriages, splits churches, and pollutes friendships. Christians who exhibit a proud, judgmental attitude have inoculated many people against Christianity. God clearly expresses his abhorrence toward pride in Proverbs and in Luke 18:9–14, which is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This “Probe the Passage” lesson will take you deep into both.

Pride is so subtle that if we aren’t careful we’ll be proud of our humility. When this happens our goodness become badness. Our virtues become vices. We can easily become like the Sunday school teacher who, having told the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, said, “Children, let’s bow our heads and thank God we are not like the Pharisee.”²

As you discuss the lesson, attempt to cover the proverbs on pride as well as the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Both sections are short and complement one another, giving group members Old Testament and New Testament perspectives. Be sure to emphasize the “How does this apply to me?” set of questions at the end of the “Table Talk” section (pages 74–78). Pray that women will face their own shortcomings and help one another overcome the subtle sin of pride.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Show a film clip illustrating a prideful character to introduce the lesson. For example, Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* or Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*.
- Read a two-page essay by Chuck Swindoll titled “Acting Medium” before the discussion or as part of a wrap-up lecture. The essay can be found in his book *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1983). Challenge the women with his suggestion at the end: “Try not to use the word *I* today. Every time you hear it roll off your lips, chalk up 10 cents. At the end of the day give the loot to your kids or to a friend.”



LESSON 7

Money Talk

TROUBLESHOOTING

Do women in your group come from varied socioeconomic backgrounds? Do some sport large, glittering diamond wedding rings while others wear simple gold bands? What topics dominate their casual conversations—what color to paint the den? buying the newest fad in shoes? affording their dream homes? Careful listening will help you discern what each woman values.

Talking about money is tricky, especially when different members of the group live on varied incomes. Additionally, talking about money often makes women feel guilty, regardless of how generous they are. After all, Americans enjoy luxuries while people in other countries starve. People who are considered poor in the United States would be classified as rich in many third-world countries.

No matter the size of our bank account, we are all called to similar attitudes about money. Introduce the lesson acknowledging that the topic is touchy but affirming that the Bible contains helpful answers. Remind the women to listen respectfully to everyone's ideas and to understand that our answers are colored by our particular experiences with money.

Solomon's proverbs on money relate to three different groups of people: the "righteous" rich, the "righteous" poor, and the wicked (people who lack integrity in their financial dealings). Help the women see that whether they are rich or poor, they are called to righteous attitudes. They can enjoy "The 'Blessed' State" (page 80) regardless of their financial resources. In fact Solomon teaches that an abundance of money often brings its own problems and responsibilities, just like poverty.

The first goal of the lesson is to help each student rest contentedly in God's provision, without envying others. The second goal of the lesson is to teach women the importance of living above reproach in relation to money. Lesson 7 builds an argument with these goals in mind. Therefore it's important to cover each question set in order and to finish the lesson. If you sense that women in your group struggle with finances, consider breaking the lesson and discussion into two parts.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Pass out fake money to play with or chocolate coins to eat during the discussion.



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- Play a Donald Duck cartoon featuring Uncle Scrooge to introduce the lesson and add some humor.
- Play a film clip showing the original Uncle Scrooge from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* to illustrate how stinginess destroys a person—and how a person can change.
- Invite a missionary or inner-city minister to speak to your group to help women understand the devastating consequences of poverty and how they can help.

RESOURCE

Visit Crown Financial Ministries at <http://www.crown.org>. Investigate resources from this site. Suggest your church offer this training for its congregation or train to lead a group yourself.

LESSON 8

Life, Death, and Aging

LESSON CONTENT

Every morning millions of American women endure a ritual of body hatred. They are aging, inching toward the ultimate end of all people—physical death, unless the Lord returns first. Many women exercise regularly, eat healthy foods, take vitamins, and do everything possible to ward off the aging process. But ultimately, no one can. Lesson 8 is designed to help women face the aging process, and ultimately death, with courage. God reveals truth about death, especially in the New Testament. The goal of this lesson is to help women use their days on earth well, while looking confidently at the future. Be sure to pace yourself or cut question sets so you have adequate time to discuss the last question (page 107).

TROUBLESHOOTING

This lesson (particularly “Part 2: Life and Death in the New Testament,” pages 105–6) assumes a pretribulation, premillennial view of the end times—a literal interpretation of Revelation and other prophetic passages based on the rapture of Christians before a seven-year tribulation and the establishment of Christ’s thousand-year kingdom upon earth before the new heavens and new earth. If you, or women in your group, hold a different end-times view, use this lesson to better understand the pretribulation, premillennial view. For more insight into this view, see Dwight Pentecost’s *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958).

Question 21 refers to the judgment rewards ceremony for believers called the *bema*. This ceremony occurs after the rapture, according to the pretribulation, premillennial view of the end times. For more information about the *bema*, see Joseph Dillow’s *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992) and Tim Stevenson’s *The Bema: A Story About the Judgment Seat of Christ* (Gainesville, TX: Fair Havens, 2000).

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Act out Tim Stevenson’s story as if you were experiencing the *bema* for yourself. Be sure to credit Stevenson.



- Recruit an author who has written her memoirs to speak to the group about recording one's life as a celebration to pass down to future generations.
- Ask a scrapbooking expert to present a workshop on ways to create quality scrapbooks for the same purpose.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Consider wrapping up the discussion with a teaching time challenging the women not to fear death, but to live well now. Include information refuting the cultural lies about body image that constantly bombard women. Help group members to love and accept the way God created them physically and to welcome all seasons of life—even the final years.

RESOURCES

Brumberg, Joan. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Dillow, Joseph. *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*. Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 1992.

Stevenson, Tim. *The Bema: A Story About the Judgment Seat of Christ*. Gainesville, TX: Fair Havens, 2000.

LESSON 9

A Portrait of Perfection

LESSON CONTENT

The final chapter in Proverbs paints a picture of a wise woman, giving us tangible characteristics of the kind of woman we have been learning to be in our study this year. Verse 10 begins the section: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.” First, emphasize to single women in your group that almost all Jewish women were married in Old Testament times. Suggest that verses 10–31 pertain to single women also, and that women apply them when appropriate.

Second, the Hebrew word for “noble” in verse 10 is *hayel*. The word is used 246 times in the Old Testament, mostly of fighting men of valor and resilience. A better translation is “strong.” Inform your group that wise women are strong women—warrior women. They are prayer warriors and they fight to overcome whatever the enemy and the world might send to defeat them. Proverbs has been instructing us all year to become strong, resilient, courageous women.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Often women are discouraged by the perfection they observe in Proverbs 31. They see a superwoman and know they don’t measure up. If you sense this attitude in your group, remind them that this is not a real woman. She is an impossible ideal, a model for us to emulate, a picture of perfection to follow. But no one will ever attain perfection in this life. Nevertheless, it is good for us to study this ideal picture of wisdom.

Walk the women through different aspects of the woman’s life: her significant relationships, her work, her ministry, her appearance, her character, and the rewards she enjoyed as a result of faithful living. Consider how to translate her qualities and lifestyle into a contemporary setting. For example, she oversaw a thriving business enterprise that contributed to the family income. She made her husband look good through her words and actions. She worshipped God, and this deep, reverent relationship undergirded her life. Examine every detail of her life and wring out principles that help us live wisely today. Be sure to save time for question 26.



CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Ask each participant to create something that expresses what she learned through the study of Proverbs: a story, drawing, poem, drama, or sculpture. If a woman is not artistic, suggest that she bring an object that represents her progress. You may want to meet again after lesson 9 to give each woman an opportunity to show others her project or artifact and talk about it. This additional meeting would also be a good time to consider the future of the group.

SAYING GOOD-BYE OR GOING ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you're investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment and God's leading.

If you determine you're excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any.

Either way, use this last gathering to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure for this particular study, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. An example of an activity might be writing a psalm of praise, listing benefits in the lives of women as a result of the study. Share changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.

NOTES

1. Jill Briscoe, *God's Name, God's Nature* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 17.
2. Paul W. Powell, *Quotable Quotations* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 303.