

PARENT GROUP SERIES

Proverbs Parenting

BRINGING THE WISDOM OF
PROVERBS INTO YOUR HOME

Leader's Guide

Lesson 1: Generation "Me"

Parent Take Away: This lesson will help equip parents to know how to identify ways their kids are being wooed by worldly wisdom, and how to guide them toward godly wisdom. They will be able to better teach their children to see life from God's perspective and according to His Word, resulting in kids who make life-long wise and godly decisions.

Scripture Focus: *"Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment." Proverbs 9:10*

Overview of Lesson: Most people use cause-and-effect theology when making life decisions. This theology is also called sowing and reaping: the choices we make are causes (what we sow), whether they are conscious or unconscious, and will produce corresponding outcomes or effects (reaping). This worldly wisdom might be well reasoned and seem effective on the surface, but the formula won't work with God. This kind of wisdom, based on puffed up knowledge, is foolishness in God's eyes (1 Cor. 3:19). Godly wisdom is living in, through, and from our relationship with Christ. Kids might want better friends, new clothes, a higher-paying job, or even a new car, but God's goal for them is none of these things. Proverbs 8:11 states that acquiring these desirable things can never compare with acquiring *true* wisdom. Godly wisdom is a priceless blessing God gives to those who attentively search for it like a hidden treasure (Prov. 2:4-7).

God wants a deeper dependence on, a richer relationship with, and a more authentic experience of Himself for kids. Thus, more than providing children with material possessions, the parent's most important role is to instill in their children a deep and abiding respect for the Lord. This week, parents will learn that wisdom is acquired through knowing God and consulting Him before making decisions. When kids fear (have a deep reverence for) God, they are able to see life from God's perspective and respond according to His Word. They will be able to make wiser decisions in their lives. This point is crucial to understand in parenting, for it takes the parent back to the main goal in Christian parenting: to raise wise, godly children. Many parents are raising foolish children because they are following the wisdom of the world and therefore, fulfilling the wrong goal.

Main Idea:

Teen and tweens are living in a world that communicates they are the center of the universe. Kids learn to believe *they* are what are most important, and thus they are entitled to certain benefits – without having to do much to earn those benefits. On top of this, they are taught to make decisions in life based on what feels good to them at the moment, or by what the world tells them is right or wrong. The problem with living life with this philosophy is that it leaves God out of the picture. And God gave parents the great responsibility train up their children, not the school system, the government or the media. God tells parents to "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it" (Prov. 22:6). He also tells parents to "Repeat [His commandments] again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Doing so will

instill God's Word in their minds and secure it in their hearts, and give them a framework from which to make life decisions.

This week, parents will learn why it is so important to instill a deep reverence of God in their children.

Lesson Goals:

This lesson contains three elements of discussion: The *Set Up* section brings in the main idea of the lesson. *Going Deeper* digs into the bulk of the lesson, with a Bible Study component. The *Take Away* section offers action items for parents to do on their own and with their children based on the topic of the week.

In this lesson we will explore these ideas:

- The difference between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom
- What it means to "fear the Lord"
- The difference between childishness and foolishness
- The blessing that comes from fearing God

Read to the group out loud:

Parents who are trying to raise Christian sons and daughters face a daunting task! It is paramount you lay the foundation for the work of the Holy Spirit. It is your responsibility to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and might and to teach your children the commandments of the Lord by talking about them in all the various situations in your life (Deut. 6). From this stems one of the most important goals as a parent: to raise wise adults. This begins with a proper and healthy fear of the Lord. Your children must learn about God, His character, His works and His authority as well as His commandments. They need to know that God created them and will hold them accountable to keep his commandments, and that it is this fear of the Lord that will keep them away from evil (Prov. 16:6).

The book of proverbs overflows with reasons why fearing the Lord brings blessing. Proverbs 2:1-11 says:

"My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe."

For the next four weeks, we will be looking at how parents bring the wisdom of proverbs into their home. This week, we will look the foundation for wisdom: a reverence for God. We will

examine the culture teens and tweens are enmeshed in today, and how this is grooming “foolish” adults. We will discuss how important it is for parents to teach their children where true wisdom comes from, so that they might grow up to be wise in the Lord.

The Set Up

- **Goal:** To introduce parents to the idea that the influences of the world on their children affects their decisions.
- **Set Up:** None

First say something like:

Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to come together and talk about the topic of how to bring the wisdom of Proverbs into your home. There are so many worldly things that influence our children – media, politicians, friends – and without a plumb line to measure truth by, they will make decisions based on whatever they think is right. Unfortunately, this leads to what the Bible calls foolishness. In our time together over the next four weeks, I’m hoping we can partner together on this topic and gain encouragement from one another to stand firm on the truth of the Word of God, and to commit to teaching our children how to do that as well.

Then ask something like:

Why don’t we go around the room and share reasons why we decided to attend the class?

Take a few moments and allow parents to share what they are hoping to learn. You may want to highlight these ideas in the coming weeks.

Now say something like:

The world seems to be obsessed with materialism, and our kids are not immune! Let’s read the following paragraph together:

Some tweens and teens not only want the latest games and clothes, but also think owning these things will bring them happiness, friends and popularity. Tweens spend \$28 billion a year, not including the more than \$200 billion their parents spend on them, according to the market research company C+R Research. This current generation of young people grew up in self-focused era; this focus on self was not only tolerated but also actively encouraged. These kids expect to go to college, make lots of money, and perhaps even be famous without having to work hard. They are different than the baby boomer generation.

(Have another participant read the lists below, of the difference between Baby Boomers and Generation Me)

THE SELF ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

Baby Boomers

Self-Fulfillment

Journey, potentials, searching

Change the world

Generation Me

Fun

Already there

Follow your dreams

PROVERBS PARENTING: BRINGING THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS INTO YOUR HOME

Protests and group sessions
Interest in government
Spirituality
Philosophy of life

Watching TV, surfing the web and texting
Interest in yourself and your friends
Things
Feeling good about yourself

Then say something like:

Twenge describes these kids as enjoying unprecedented freedom to pursue whatever makes them happy. This generation focuses on individual, personal needs. These teens and tweens end up moving through the world beholden of few social rules and with the unshakable belief that they are important.

Discussion Questions:

Read the statement below out loud, and then discuss the questions below with the group:

Jean M. Twenge states that the current generation of kids is heavily focused on pursuing whatever makes them happy with no set social rules.

- Does this information surprise you?
- Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?
- How is this different from the generation you grew up in?
- What potential problems might surface later in life for children raised with these values?
- How might this result in a generation of “foolish” adults?

Going Deeper

- **Goal:** To show parents that teaching their children to revere God will result in their ability to take that knowledge and make wise decision.
- **Set Up:** None

Say something like:

It will help us to understand God's wisdom if we look at the meaning of the original word for wisdom. Let's read the below, and see if we can begin to piece together how this affects our kids:

The Hebrew word for wisdom (chokmah) comes from a root word meaning “skill,” and refers to the ability to skillfully apply knowledge. The Greek word for wisdom (sophia) has a similar meaning. An artist such as a painter knows all about his craft and can *skillfully apply that knowledge* to create a masterpiece. In the same way, a man who is wise about life *skillfully applies his knowledge* of it to make choices that will result in fulfilling purpose and meaning of life.

Now have a participant read the following:

Paul brings out the contrast between the worldly wise and the godly wise in 1 Corinthians 1:18–21:

"The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.'

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe."

Now say something like:

In raising children, you will have to decide whether it will be according to the wisdom of the world or according to the wisdom of God. If your goal for your children is worldly success, material wealth, fame, power and pleasure, then you are teaching them to reject what the Word of God teaches. Godly wisdom comes from something completely different.

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF WISDOM?

Now say something like:

Let's look at the following verses, written by the man whose "wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:30)." Have a participant read through each verse out loud:

Proverbs 3:7-8 "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil"

Proverbs 8:13 "All who fear the LORD will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech."

Proverbs 9:10 "Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment."

Proverbs 1:7 "Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."

Proverbs 15:33 "Fear of the LORD teaches wisdom; humility precedes honor."

Proverbs 19:23 "Fear of the LORD leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm."

Proverbs 23:17 "Don't envy sinners, but always continue to fear the LORD."

Discussion Questions

Discuss the questions below with the group:

- What does godly wisdom begin with?
- What does it mean to “fear God?”
- Who does God say is foolish?

- What does godly wisdom result in?
- How do these verses contradict what the world communicates is wise?

Say something like this to the group:

No one is born into the world instantly wise; we all begin this life as sinners. A major task of parenting is dealing with the foolishness bound up in a child's heart, and shepherding them towards wisdom (Prov. 22:15). Sometimes what God's Word tells us to do – and therefore what our kids to do – seems backwards. For example, to forgive those who have hurt you. Fearing God means you will do whatever His Words tells you to do, regardless of how “foolish” it seems. In God's economy, following God's instruction results in true wisdom. Helping kids grow in their knowledge of the Word of God moves them to the place of being able to skillfully apply that knowledge when making choices and decisions. This will result in God's purpose for their life!

Let's Talk About This

What is the difference between childishness and foolishness?

After the group shares their thoughts on childishness verses foolishness, offer some supporting information. They may be right on track, or they might be a little off. Clarify the following:

Childishness

Childishness is inability because of ignorance or lack of physical ability. A very young child might spill a glass of milk because of his inability to pick it up. A student gets a problem wrong in math, because he doesn't know the concepts yet. Childishness is overcome by instruction, which results in knowledge, which results in skill and strength.

Foolishness

Foolishness is the outpouring of rebellion in the heart that moves a child to do things his or her own way, regardless of the instruction previously given. A young child is told not to touch a hot pan because he will get burned, but he refuses to listen and touches it anyway. A math student fails a test, because he refused to get help or do the required homework that would have explained the problems. Foolishness results in consequences that often involve discipline.

Then say something like this:

As parents, our goal should be to raise children who respond to everything in life with godly wisdom, based on a healthy fear of the Lord. This avoids what God calls “foolishness.”

Let's Talk About This:

Read the following verses and discuss questions that follow:

"My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe." – Proverbs 2:1-11

- According to Proverbs 2:1-11, why does fearing the Lord bring blessing?
- What are some of these blessings?

Let's Talk About This:

- Are there ways you are modeling to your child worldly wisdom, rather than godly wisdom, but not fearing God?

Wrap up the group time by pointing participants toward the "Parent Challenge" for the following week.

Say something like:

We've spent the evening talking about how important it is to instill a fear of God in our children's hearts. We've studied how having this reverence for God results in great blessing! Below is a parent challenge to consider meditating on at home. There are also some ways you can open up discussion with your kids at the dinner table or during a devotion time on the topic of fearing God.

Parent Challenge

Activity:

In the space below, write about your own relationship with God. Would you say you have a deep reverence, or "fear" of God? Do you filter your life decisions through God's Word? How might your life look different to your kids if you did?

Take Away

Activity:

At the dinner table or while sitting on the couch some evening, solicit your teen or tween to make a list (out loud) of people they think have a reverence for God and why. Encourage them to think beyond their social circles, but to media personalities, youth group workers, teachers, and even their friend's parents.

15 Minutes of Fame:

Identify a topic that is hot in the media that your kids are aware of, where people differ on what is "right." Discuss with your kids how they can discern whether something is right or wrong. For example, with an older teen you might bring up the issue of abortion. Discuss how many people in our world believe in the woman's right to choose whether to abort her baby or not. Bring up verses where God sets the standard for life, such as Jeremiah 1:4-5, Psalm 139:13-14, Luke 1:15 and Deuteronomy 30:19.

Discuss why it is important to search out God's perspective, not man's perspective, when making decisions.

Parent Guide

Lesson 1: Generation “Me”

What You Will Take Away From This Lesson: This lesson will help equip you to know how to identify ways your kids are being wooed by worldly wisdom, and how to guide them toward godly wisdom. You will be able to better teach your children to see life from God’s perspective and according to His Word, resulting in kids who make life-long wise and godly decisions.

Scripture Focus: *“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.” Proverbs 9:10*

Overview of Lesson: Most people use cause-and-effect theology when making life decisions. This theology is also called sowing and reaping: the choices we make are causes (what we sow), whether they are conscious or unconscious, and will produce corresponding outcomes or effects (reaping). This worldly wisdom might be well reasoned and seem effective on the surface, but the formula won’t work with God. This kind of wisdom, based on puffed up knowledge, is foolishness in God’s eyes (1 Cor. 3:19). Godly wisdom is living in, through, and from our relationship with Christ. Your kids might want better friends, new clothes, a higher-paying job, or even a new car, but God’s goal for them is none of these things. Proverbs 8:11 states that acquiring these desirable things can never compare with acquiring *true* wisdom. Godly wisdom is a priceless blessing God gives to those who attentively search for it like a hidden treasure (Prov. 2:4-7).

God wants a deeper dependence on, a richer relationship with, and a more authentic experience of Himself for your kids. Thus, more than providing your children with material possessions, your most important role is to instill in them a deep and abiding respect for the Lord. This week, you will learn that wisdom is acquired through knowing God and consulting Him before making decisions. When your kids fear (have a deep reverence for) God, they are able to see life from God's perspective and respond according to His Word. They will be able to make wiser decisions in their lives. This point is crucial to understand in parenting, for it takes you back to your main goal in Christian parenting: to raise wise, godly children. Many parents are raising *foolish* children because they are following the wisdom of the world and therefore, fulfilling the wrong goal.

The Set Up:

Some tweens and teens not only want the latest games and clothes, but also think owning these things will bring them happiness, friends and popularity. Tweens spend \$28 billion a year on these things, not including the more than \$200 billion their parents spend on them, according to the market research company C+R Research. This current generation of young people grew up in self-focused era; this spotlight on self was not only tolerated, but was actively encouraged. These kids typically expect to go to college, make lots of money, and perhaps even be famous without having to work hard. They are different than the baby boomer generation, which is focused on external things. Jean M. Twenge calls this generation of kids “Generation Me.” Compare the following chart from her book by the same title, *Generation Me*:

THE SELF ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

Baby Boomers

Self-Fulfillment
Journey, potentials, searching
Change the world
Protests and group sessions
Interest in government
Spirituality
Philosophy of life

Generation Me

Fun
Already there
Follow your dreams
Watching TV, surfing the web and texting
Interest in yourself and your friends
Things
Feeling good about yourself

Discussion Questions:

Jean M. Twenge states that the current generation of kids is heavily focused on *self*.

- Does this information surprise you?
- Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?
- How is this different from the generation you grew up in?
- What potential problems might surface later in life for children raised with these values?
- How might this result in a generation of “foolish” adults?

Going Deeper:

The Hebrew word for wisdom (chokmah) comes from a root word meaning “skill,” and refers to the ability to skillfully apply knowledge. The Greek word for wisdom (sophia) has a similar meaning. An artist such as a painter knows all about his craft and can *skillfully apply that knowledge* to create a masterpiece. In the same way, a man who is wise about life *skillfully applies his knowledge* of it to make choices that will result in fulfilling purpose and meaning of life.

Paul brings out the contrast between the worldly wise and the godly wise 1 Corinthians 1:18–21:

*“The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say,
'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.'*

So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.”

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF WISDOM?

Proverbs 3:7-8 “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil”

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Proverbs 19:23 “Fear of the LORD leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm.”

Proverbs 23:17 “Don't envy sinners, but always continue to fear the LORD.”

Discussion Questions:

- What does godly wisdom begin with?
- What does it mean to “fear God?”
- Who does God say is foolish?
- What does godly wisdom result in?
- How do these verses contradict what the world communicates is wise?
- No one is born into the world instantly wise; we all begin this life as sinners. A major task of parenting is dealing with the foolishness bound up in a child's heart, and shepherding them towards wisdom (Prov. 22:15).

Read the following verses:

“My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe.” – Proverbs 2:1-11

Let's Talk About This:

- According to Proverbs 2:1-11, why does fearing the Lord bring blessing?

- What are some of these blessings?

Parent Challenge

In the space below, write about your own relationship with God. Would you say you have a deep reverence, or “fear” of God? Do you filter your life decisions through God’s Word? How might your life look different to your kids if you did?

Take Away:

Activity:

Have your child brainstorm different ways your family reflects to others they love and revere God. Brainstorm ways they may be reflecting to others they do not revere God.

15 Minutes of Fame:

Identify a topic that is hot in the media that your kids are aware of, where people differ on what is “right.” Discuss with your kids how they can discern whether something is right or wrong. For example, with an older teen you might bring up the issue of abortion. Discuss how many people in our world believe in the woman’s right to choose whether to abort her baby or not. Bring up verses where God sets the standard for life, such as Jeremiah 1:4-5, Psalm 139:13-14, Luke 1:15 and Deuteronomy 30:19.

Discuss why it is important to search out God’s perspective, not man’s perspective, when making decisions.

Leader's Guide

Lesson 2: From the Heart the Mouth Speaks

Parent Take Away: This lesson will help equip parents teach their children about the power of words, and how the condition of their child's heart affects everything that comes out of their mouths.

Scripture Focus: *"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life."* – Proverbs 4:23

Overview of Lesson: Few subjects are more essential to life as a follower of Jesus than the power of words. The Bible is not quiet about the power of the Lord's words, as well as about the influence of the words that you and I speak. Scripture promises that "the words of the wise bring healing," that whoever guards his mouth "will stay out of trouble," and that "a gentle answer deflects anger" (Prov. 15:1). As adult followers of Jesus, God continually moves us towards purity regarding our speech. It's important for parents to help their children begin to understand the importance of guarding their tongues, too.

Everything God created came about by words. The verbal activity of our sovereign God literally decreed the existence of the universe. In Genesis 1, God spoke, and all things came into being: "God said...and it was so...God called...and it was good...then God blessed..." (v. 3, 7, 10 & 28). God used speech to create everything! Isn't that profound? What is even more incredible is that He gave you and me the same capacity. The words we speak can be creative and breathe life into another person; or, they can negatively affect those around us, pierce the soul, and bring death (Prov. 18:21). It is important for parents to teach their children that their words overflow "from what is in [their] heart" (Luke 6:45). Heart attitudes direct behavior, including every word a child speaks. Angry words, lying and spiteful talk, as well as kind and loving words spill out from the child's heart condition. Thus, it is important that parents address their child's heart when trying to address issues with words.

Main Idea:

Tweens and teens, especially those in the public school system, are surrounded by influences that are beyond a parent's control. They hear words walking down the halls of their schools, on television, in movies and in video games that may be words a parent has worked hard to protect them from hearing. They watch other kids speak to their parents, to people in authority or even to them and begin to adapt that attitude as their own. They may begin to fib, or outright lie. This is one of Satan's great tactics: to distract God's people and move them off course through their words. Why wouldn't he! He did it himself! He said to the woman in the Garden of Eden, "You will not surely die...you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). The apostle John wrote in 8:44 that Satan "has nothing to do with the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Parents may notice a change in how a child talks, words they are using or lies they are telling and be at a loss for how to begin parenting the issue! This week, we will look at where the root problem resides: in the child's heart. We will examine some sobering statistics about use of obscene language, discuss the need to fill children's hearts and minds with the Word of God and how it will impact what a child says.

Lesson Goals:

The lesson contains three elements of discussion: The Set Up, which brings in the main idea of the lesson; Going Deeper, which digs in to the bulk of the lesson along with a Bible study component; and the To Do list which will offer a take-away for parents to engage their children on the topic of the week.

In this lesson we will explore these ideas:

- The impact the media, friends and those in authority have on children
- Where negative speech originates
- How a parent can begin changing a child's negative speech, by allowing God's Word to change their heart

Begin by asking something like:

- *Share one nugget that you learned from last week's lesson and if there were any breakthroughs at home through the activities you did, based on the lesson.*

The Set Up

- **Goal:** To introduce parents to the influences on their children that affect the words that flow out of their mouth.
- **Set Up:** None

First say something like:

- *Thank you so much for joining us again! We are on Week 3 of "Bringing Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs into Your Home." I trust these past two weeks have been constructive for you, and that the wisdom of God through His Word is helping to better equip you in your parenting. There are so many things that can influence a child's speech, including the media, their friends and even us as parents. That's scary, isn't it! The book of Proverbs speaks to this issue of speech, and how controlling the tongue is a way people show fear and reverence of God. Psalm 39:1 says, "I said to myself, 'I will watch what I do and not sin in what I say. I will hold my tongue when the ungodly are around me.'" The psalmist connects the tongue—words that flow out of a person's mouth—with sin! In our time today, I'm hoping we can learn together what is most important when training up our child in the way he or she should go, in regards to how they communicate to help them learn to avoid falling into sin with their words. Let's start by reading some statistics:*

Now, have a participant read the following out loud:

A recent Gallup Poll Youth Survey addressing the issue of swearing found that forty-six percent of teens surveyed (ages 13 to 17) used profanity at least several times a week if not daily. Twenty-eight percent said they heard their parents cursing a few times a week, if not on a daily basis. According to research done by Timothy Jay, one of the leading scholars on cursing from The Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, most teenagers swear between eighty and ninety times every single day. Roughly seventy-five percent of teenagers report hearing “adult language” in school settings. Even elementary school teachers report that children are using more offensive language at school than they have in the past! The trend is being dubbed “conversational swearing,” and it is on the rise according to Jay. Children are exposed to obscene language through the media, through video games, even in their own homes and they think such language is normal.

In addition to foul language, a recent study by Penn State found that ninety-eight percent of teenagers lie to their parents about things like what they did after school (such as whether or not they’ve watched R-rated movies, and whether or not they’ve ever ridden with a driver who has been drinking). People lie because they fear the consequences of telling the truth, including children and teens.

Discussion Questions:

Read the questions below, and discuss with the group:

- *Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?*
- *Do you think most young people can control their mouths, by not lying, not swearing or not gossiping?*
- *Is the use of obscene language different from the generation you grew up in?*
- *What trends technology might be encouraging this increase in lying among children and teens?*

Going Deeper

- **Goal:** To direct parents to the root of the problem of foul language, disrespectful talk or unkind words, which is the heart.
- **Set Up:** None

Say something like:

It will help you as parents to be more loving, patient and understanding of your children's attitudes and the words that reflect those attitudes, if you understand God's perspective of speech and communication and where He says it originates.

Then have a volunteer read the following, out loud:

The Bible is full of instruction about the power of words; clearly God knew the people He created would have difficulty controlling their tongues! The problem is deep, and goes back to the condition of a person's heart.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote about the importance of controlling the tongue in James 3:2-12. Consider the following verses:

"Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring."

Then, have a volunteer read the following out loud:

In this passage from the Bible, James talks about a horse being led around by a very small bit, and a huge ship being steered by a tiny rudder to express how much power such a small part of the body, the tongue, has! He also uses the imagery of a tiny spark causing a great fire. If words have such a vast capability of blessing or cursing, of "corrupting your entire body," and "setting your whole life on fire," how is one to control them? Words cannot be controlled by trying to change a child's behavior...the issue of what comes out of the mouth goes right back to the heart. This is where parents should focus their attention when helping their children control their speech.

Now say something like:

In raising children who love God and others, you will have to commit to working toward changing more than external behavior. Even a child will learn quickly to change behavior for the environment they are in. Some kids hold everything together while they are at school, and then come home only to "spit vinegar" at their parents! Or they will do the opposite, and control their tongue at home, but let loose at school to try out obscene language they hear from their peers. Let's look at some Scripture, to see where the real problem lies:

WHERE WORDS ORIGINATE

Proverbs 15:28 "The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words."

Luke 6:45 "A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."

Psalms 139: 23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way."

Psalms 19:14 "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Discussion Questions:

Discuss the questions below with the group:

- *Where does God say our words originate?*
- *What does God want us to do with our hearts?*
- *According to these verses, what is the ultimate reason a person would want to control the words coming out of their mouth, and thus their hearts?*

Then, read the following to the group:

The heart is the innermost part of a person's being. It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. In our own power, we cannot change our hearts and neither can our kids change theirs. In and of themselves, our kids' hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things. No person on earth knows the heart fully! Only God does. Our hearts will hide their own evil from us to some extent, so that we are not overwhelmed with the pain of our own sin.

Yet the power of God's Word is so great that it can change the heart.

Let's Talk About This

- *Do you agree with the statement in the paragraph above, "Their (your kids') hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things"?*
- *Think of your own heart; how hard is it to change your attitude toward something?*
- *Considering this, how might you change how you parent a child who is struggling with lying, obscene language, or angry talk?*
- *What are other examples of a heart issue that is manifesting itself in negative words? (example: a disrespect toward an adult)*

After the group shares their thoughts on how words flow directly out of the innermost parts of who a person is, read the following verse to the group:

Read the following verses:

*“My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying. Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation. Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”—
Proverbs 3:1-6*

Let’s Talk About This:

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- *According to Proverbs 3:1-6, above all else, what should a godly father and/or mother be seeking for their children?*
- *Why do you think it’s important to help a child store up God’s commands in their heart?*
- *What are some of the blessings God promises for those who do?*

The reason negative speech, obscene language or a nasty tone should be a concern to parents is because it is a direct indicator of where the child is in relationship to God. Proverbs 23:26 says, “O my son, give me your heart. May your eyes take delight in following my ways.” God wants control of your child’s heart! The only way for a child’s heart to be transformed is to understand the heart of God—and this happens through the Word of God. Filling your child’s heart and mind with the Word of God will result in speech that will reflect this. But be patient! Think of yourself and your own heart.

It’s a process that takes a lifetime.

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- *As a parent, are there ways you are modeling to your child words that bring “life”? Be specific.*
- *Are there any words you use that you wouldn’t want your child to repeat?*
- *Do you ever lie, even a “white” lie? How is this a reflection of something going on in your heart?*
- *Do the movies, television shows or music you allow your child to watch or listen to contain language you do not want him to use? Do the movies, television shows or music you watch or listen to contain language that may be negatively influencing what you model to your kids?*

Parent Challenge:

Wrap up the group time by pointing participants toward the “Parent Challenge” for the following week.

Say something like:

- *We've spent the evening talking about how important it is to work towards heart transformation rather than simply behavior change, especially in the area of speech. The following are a couple of activities to do to do on your own, and with your kids this week, to begin this process.*

Activity

In the space below, write about your own heart condition. Would you say you work to fill your heart and mind with God's Word, so that what overflows out of your mouth reflect this? Can you identify situations where you see the overflow of dark places in your heart?

[space provided on parent's version]

In response to what you wrote, how will you change your own heart condition, and how would this effect what you model to your kids in regards to words?

Encourage parents by saying:

Pay attention to things in your child's life that may be impacting how they talk to you or to others, or even in the language they might be using. Are there certain shows that you and your spouse watch while the kids are around that consistently show kids disrespecting their parents? Do your children have access to video games at your house or other houses that are filled with inappropriate language? Use the next week to take note of influences you might need to adjust in your kids' lives.

Read these verses with your kids:

Proverbs 13:3 "Those who control their tongue will have a long life; opening your mouth can ruin everything."

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

Proverbs 17:28 "Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent."

Proverbs 18:1 "Unfriendly people care only about themselves; they lash out at common sense."

Proverbs 12:18 "Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing."

Proverbs 15:4 "Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit."

Proverbs 16:24 "Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."

Next, choose a television show that is appropriate for the age of your child where the characters speak rudely towards others or towards parents. Discuss some of the character's attitudes and language, and compare this with what God's Word says about gentle and kind words verses lashing out with "cutting remarks." For example, if you have teenagers you might choose to discuss "The Simpsons." Engage your child in a conversation about how the kids on the show speak, how they talk to adults, and how they talk to each other. Ask your child how they think the show affects, even subliminally, people who watch it. Ask: "Do you think watching these kind of shows has any impact on how kids talk to each other, or their parents?"

15 Minutes of Fame:

Children learn quickly what words are "good" and what words are "bad." Discuss the topic of obscene language with your child/children. Explain that foul language is offensive to others and does not honor God. Ephesians 5:4 commands, "And coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable."

Ask your child if they hear words on television, on video games or at school that they know are "bad." Pay close attention to their response. You will likely be surprised at what words they are familiar with and how often they hear them. Ask if it's hard to avoid using those words too.

Help your child understand that the words he or she uses are a reflection of what is in his or her heart; they should try to always use words that are pleasing to God. If necessary, explain the meaning of any obscene word or phrase they may have heard in an age-appropriate way. For example you might say something such as: "That word is offensive and describes in a bad way a good thing that God made especially for husbands and wives."

Parent Guide

Lesson 2: From the Heart the Mouth Speaks

What You Will Take Away From This Lesson: This lesson will help equip you to teach your children about the power of words, and how the condition of your child's heart affects everything that comes out of their mouths.

Scripture Focus: *"Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Proverbs 4:23*

Overview of Lesson: Few subjects are more essential to life as a follower of Jesus than the power of words. The Bible is not quiet about the power of the Lord's words, as well as about the influence of the words that you and I speak. Scripture promises that "the words of the wise bring healing," that whoever guards his mouth "will stay out of trouble," and that "a gentle answer deflects anger" (Prov. 15:1). As adult followers of Jesus, God continually moves us towards purity regarding our speech. It's important to help your children begin to understand the importance of guarding their tongues, too.

Everything God created came about by words. The verbal activity of our sovereign God literally decreed the existence of the universe. In Genesis 1, God spoke, and all things came into being: "God said...and it was so...God called...and it was good...then God blessed..." (v. 3, 7, 10 & 28). God used speech to create everything! Isn't that profound? What is even more incredible is that He gave you and me the same capacity. The words we speak can be creative and breathe life into another person; or, they can negatively affect those around us, pierce the soul, and bring death (Prov. 18:21). It is important to teach your children that their words overflow "from what is in [their] heart" (Luke 6:45). Heart attitudes direct behavior, including every word that your child speaks. Angry words, lying and spiteful talk, as well as kind and loving words spill over from your child's heart—and whether they are considering what would be pleasing to God in their speech. Thus, it is important to address your child's heart when trying to address issues with words.

The Set Up:

A recent Gallup Poll Youth Survey addressing the issue of swearing found that forty-six percent of teens surveyed (ages 13 to 17) used profanity at least several times a week if not daily. Twenty-eight percent said they heard their parents cursing a few times a week, if not on a daily basis. According to research done by Timothy Jay, one of the leading scholars on cursing from The Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, most teenagers swear between eighty and ninety times every single day. Roughly seventy-five percent of teenagers report hearing "adult language" in school settings. Even elementary school teachers report that children are using more offensive language at school than they have in the past! The trend is being dubbed "conversational swearing," and it is on the rise according to Jay. Children are exposed to obscene language through the media, through video games, even in their own homes and they think such language is normal.

In addition to foul language, a recent study by Penn State found that ninety-eight percent of teenagers lie to their parents about things like what they did after school (such as whether or not they've watched R-

rated movies, and whether or not they've ever ridden with a driver who has been drinking). People lie because they fear the consequences of telling the truth, including children and teens.

Discussion Questions:

- *Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?*
- *Do you think most young people can control their mouths, by not lying, not swearing or not gossiping?*
- *Is the use of obscene language different from the generation you grew up in?*
- *What trends technology might be encouraging this increase in lying among children and teens?*

Going Deeper:

The Bible is full of instruction about the power of words; clearly God knew the people He created would have difficulty controlling their tongues! The problem is deep, and goes back to the condition of a person's heart.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote about the importance of controlling the tongue in James 3:2-12. Consider the following verses:

"Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring."

In this passage from the Bible, James talks about a horse being led around by a very small bit, and a huge ship being steered by a tiny rudder to express how much power such a small part of the body, the tongue, has! He also uses the imagery of a tiny spark causing a great fire. If words have such a vast capability of blessing or cursing, of "corrupting your entire body," and "setting your whole life on fire," how is one to control them? Words cannot be controlled by trying to change a child's behavior...the issue of what comes out of the mouth goes right back to the heart. This is where parents should focus their attention when helping their children control their speech.

WHERE WORDS ORIGINATE

Proverbs 15:28 “The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.”

Luke 6:45 “A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.”

Psalm 139: 23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”

Psalm 19:14 “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

Discussion Questions:

- Where does God say our words originate?
- What does God want us to do with our hearts?
- According to these verses, what is the ultimate reason a person would want to control the words coming out of their mouth, and thus their hearts?

The heart is the innermost part of a person's being. It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. In our own power, we cannot change our hearts and neither can our kids change theirs. In and of themselves, our kids' hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things. No person on earth knows the heart fully! Only God does. Our hearts will hide their own evil from us to some extent, so that we are not overwhelmed with the pain of our own sin.

Yet the power of God's Word is so great that it can change the heart.

Let's Talk About This:

- Do you agree with the statement in the paragraph above, “Their (our kids’) hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful above all things”?
- Think of your own heart; how hard is it to change your attitude toward something?
- Considering this, how might you change how you parent a child who is struggling with lying, obscene language, or angry talk?
- What are other examples of a heart issue that is manifesting itself in negative words? (example: a disrespect toward an adult)

Read the following verses:

“My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying. Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie

them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation. Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” Proverbs 3:1-6

Let’s Talk About This:

- According to Proverbs 3:1-6, above all else, what should a godly father and/or mother be seeking for their children?
- Why do you think it’s important to help a child store up God’s commands in their heart?
- What are some of the blessings God promises for those who do?

The reason negative speech, obscene language or a nasty tone should be a concern to parents is because it is a direct indicator of where the child is in relationship to God. Proverbs 23:26 says, “O my son, give me your heart. May your eyes take delight in following my ways.” God wants control of your child’s heart! The only way for a child’s heart to be transformed is to understand the heart of God—and this happens through the Word of God. Filling your child’s heart and mind with the Word of God will result in speech that will reflect this. But be patient! Think of yourself and your own heart.

It’s a process that takes a lifetime.

Let’s Talk About This:

- As a parent, are there ways you are modeling to your child words that bring “life”? Be specific.
- Are there any words you use that you wouldn’t want your child to repeat?
- Do you ever lie, even a “white” lie? How is this a reflection of something going on in your heart?
- Do the movies, television shows or music you allow your child to watch or listen to contain language you do not want him to use? Do the movies, television shows or music *you* watch or listen to contain language that may be negatively influencing what you model to your kids?

Parent Challenge

Activity:

In the space below, write about your own heart condition. Would you say you work to fill your heart and mind with God’s Word, so that what overflows out of your mouth reflect this? Can you identify situations where you see the overflow of dark places in your heart?

In response to what you wrote, how will you change your own heart condition, and how would this effect what you model to your kids in regards to words?

Take Away:

Read these verses with your kids:

Proverbs 13:3 “Those who control their tongue will have a long life; opening your mouth can ruin everything.

Exodus 20:12 “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

Proverbs 17:28 “Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent.

Proverbs 18:1 “Unfriendly people care only about themselves; they lash out at common sense.”

Proverbs 12:18 “Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Proverbs 15:4 “Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”

Proverbs 16:24 “Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”

Next, choose a television show that is appropriate for the age of your child where the characters speak rudely towards others or towards parents. Discuss some of the character’s attitudes and language, and compare this with what God’s Word says about gentle and kind words verses lashing out with “cutting remarks.” For example, if you have teenagers you might choose to discuss “The Simpsons.” Engage your child in a conversation about how the kids on the show speak, how they talk to adults, and how they talk to each other. Ask your child how they think the show affects, even subliminally, people who watch it. Ask: “Do you think watching these kind of shows has any impact on how kids talk to each other, or their parents?”

15 Minutes of Fame:

Children learn quickly what words are “good” and what words are “bad.” Discuss the topic of obscene language with your child/children. Explain that foul language is offensive to others and does not honor God. Ephesians 5:4 commands, “And coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable.”

Ask your child if they hear words on television, on video games or at school that they know are “bad.” Pay close attention to their response. You will likely be surprised at what words they are familiar with and how often they hear them. Ask if it’s hard to avoid using those words too.

Help your child understand that the words he or she uses are a reflection of what is in her heart; their words should be pleasing to God.

* If necessary, explain the meanings of obscene words or phrases they may have heard in an age-appropriate way. For example you might say something such as: "That word is offensive and describes in a bad way a good thing that God made especially for husbands and wives."

Leader's Guide

Lesson 3: Character Matters

Parent Take Away: This lesson will help equip parents to mold their child's character. It will also help them teach their children why being a person of good character is so important as a Christian.

Scripture Focus: *"People with integrity walk safely, but those who follow crooked paths will be exposed."* Proverbs 4:23

Overview of Lesson: Character is a spiritual Fruit that is sown and grown from the child's relationship with God. It is not just a feeling or a personality! It is the moral fiber of the Christian, and ultimately should permeate their entire being—it should characterize them. This affects how parents *parent*. For example, their goal should not be to raise children who *sometimes* tell the truth, but to raise *truthful* children. They should shepherd kids not to be kind when they feel like it, but to be *characterized* by their kindness.

Zechariah 7:9 says, "Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another," and Paul writes in Colossians 3:12 that God's people should "clothe [themselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." God's desire for His children is to possess these and more than seventy other character traits that actually are the very character traits of God, woven throughout the entirety of Scripture.

We've spent some time looking at how a child's words flow out of the attitude of their heart; now, it's time to address character, what a person of integrity looks like, and how parents can look to God and His very nature as the perfect example.

Main Idea:

Instilling godly character in children is a difficult task, without the help of God. His character—His very nature—is perfect, and the Word of God makes it clear, as we shall see, that our goal as parents should be to train up our children to be like Him. In Lesson 1, we looked at how important it is for parents to instill a proper and healthy fear of the Lord. In Lesson 2, we studied the attitude of the heart, and how everything flows from this deep center of the child's whole being; changing heart attitude is far more important than changing external behavior.

In this week's lesson, we will look at godly character. We will consider some of the trends influencing children, and how these trends might be making certain things seem normal or accepted. We will discuss why it is so important to instill good character in children – ultimately their character is a reflection of the very nature of God.

Lesson Goals:

This lesson contains three elements of discussion: *the Set Up* section brings in the main idea of the lesson. *Going Deeper* digs into the bulk of the lesson, with a Bible Study component. *The Take*

Away section offers actions items for parents to do on their own and with their children based on the topic of the week.

In this lesson we will explore these ideas:

- What godly character is
- What sometimes has to happen in order for godly character to begin forming in a child
- The character of God
- How bad character gives God a bad reputation
- The benefits and blessings that come from good character

The Set Up

- **Goal:** To reveal to parents to some staggering information about trends in cheating, to bring awareness to parents of how peers and society are influencing children.
- **Set Up:** None

First, say something like:

We are on Lesson 3 of our study on Proverbs Parenting: Bringing the Wisdom of Proverbs into Your Home. So far we've looked at how important it is to instill a healthy fear of God in your child, and how a child's heart directly influences what they say (and how they say it). What you are studying is so important for the world your child is growing up in. Many of these topics are never addressed in a typical household. If they are, it is not from a biblical perspective; "truth" whatever the parents deem true, not what God says is true. The result is a culture that says lying is ok in some circumstances, disrespect for authority is normal, bullying is acceptable.

Then ask the following question, to open discussion:

Did anyone complete one of the home activities last week? If so, share how the discussion went with your child/children.

Take a few minutes to allow parents to share their experiences.

Now, say something like:

Things that used to be black and white sure seem to be becoming gray. Things that used to be unacceptable are acceptable. Up is down, and wrong is right. This is true for us as adults, and for kids as well. Let's read about some statistics regarding cheating.

Have someone volunteer to read the following two paragraphs:

Samuel Eshaghoff, a 19-year-old sophomore at Emory University, recently was arrested for taking SAT tests for six New York high schoolers. The college student allegedly charged as much as \$2,500 every time he masqueraded as a test-taking high schooler. While Eshaghoff claimed he's not guilty and SAT officials say he's an isolated wrongdoer, many education experts worry that other teens may be hiring folks to take the test for them. "As tests have become higher-stakes tests, as the

competition between kids for scholarships and college entrance has increased, the likelihood of kids looking for ways to beat the system—to cheat—has increased,” says Henry Grisham, superintendent of Jericho Public Schools in Long Island.

The SAT scandal is perhaps just a natural extension of some national trends. In the past several years, an increasing number of high school and college students have admitted to cheating in school. According to a 2010 study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, nearly 60 percent of high school students say they cheated on a test in the past year, and more than a third admitted to cheating at least twice—and it might be worse.

Discussion Questions

Generate a discussion based on the following two questions:

- Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?
- Do these statistics surprise you?
- How is this different from the generation you grew up in? How will this trend in cheating affect children growing up in this generation?

Going Deeper

- **Goal:** To show parents that teaching their children to strive to be a person of character will result in blessing
- **Set Up:** None

Say something like:

Instilling good character in your child is not something that happens overnight! In fact, sometimes there are natural consequences to making choices that reflect poor character that have to occur first. This isn't always the case, but God uses difficulties and trials to mold and transform His people. Let's read the below:

Character can be described as “strength of moral fiber.” Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics and charity; persons who lack character behave dishonestly, unethically and uncharitably. A person’s character is the sum of his or her disposition.

God wants to develop character in your children, but it takes work and it sometimes involves pain or hurt. Read the following verse from the book of Proverbs:

“Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but the Lord tests the heart.” – Proverbs 17:3

“Remove the impurities from silver, and the sterling will be ready for the silversmith.”
– Proverbs 25:14

The ancient Hebrews used silver to make all kinds of beautiful objects, but silver had to be purified before it could be useful. The process of separating the ore from the extraneous matters mixed with it involved putting the silver into a furnace to burn the dross away. God uses this purification process to describe how he purifies His people, transforming them into men and women of

character: “He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD” (Mal. 3:3). God will refine you and your children so that they might be useful vessels for His purposes – just as silver has to be refined before it can be made into a beautiful cup or bowl.

Let’s talk about this:

If it takes heat to burn away dross in precious metals, what do you think helps form character in God’s people? In your children? (examples might include difficult circumstances, discipline, natural consequences)

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Read the following out loud to the group:

Moses desperately wanted to know and understand his God. After Moses chiseled out the commandments of God on two tablets of stone (for the second time) he climbed Mount Sinai as God had instructed him with the two stone tablets in his hands.

It was then that the Lord revealed to Moses His very name; amazingly, it was not one word but a list of character traits:

Have a volunteer read the following verses:

“Yahweh! The Lord!
The God of compassion and mercy!
I am slow to anger
and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.
But I do not excuse the guilty.
I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren.
the entire family is affected—
even children in the third and fourth generations. ” – Exodus 34:6b-7

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- Describe God’s name, according to Exodus 34:6b-7
- What do these verses tell you about God’s nature?
- If this is who God says He is, how important do you think those character traits should be to us?

Now, read the following paragraphs out loud to the group:

God didn't choose to show a physical representation of who He is to Moses. Instead, he made Himself known by His grace and goodness, and his all sufficiency. He is full of compassion, meaning He is tenderly pitiful. He is gracious, meaning he "bends or stoops in kindness" to His inferior created beings. He is not easily angered; our God does not have a short fuse, but is patient to a thousand generations! He abounds in goodness and truth. He extends mercy, and His very nature is forgiving.

Now here is what is so amazing! God made *us* in His image (Gen. 1:26). In the New Testament, Paul writes that as Christians we are made in the image of Christ, our Creator:

Next, ask for a volunteer to read the verses below:

"But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image."—Proverbs 3:1-6, emphasis added

"Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." – Colossians 3:10

"For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." – Romans 8:29

Next, say something like this:

Our goal as parents isn't to raise good kids so that we look good as parents. God wants to transform your child's character to be more like His, so they will reflect Him to a lost world. This is hard! Again, it doesn't happen overnight. It takes commitment, constant modeling and taking hold of teaching opportunities when they arise.

Let's Talk About This:

- What does it mean to you personally to "become like" Jesus, and to "become like his Son"?
- Share with the group if you are "putting on the new man" to possess more of the likeness of Christ. Would others say the same? *Would your children?*

Let's Think About This:

The Bible tells us we grow in character when we practice Christian virtues: "Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone."

PROVERBS PARENTING: BRINGING THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS INTO YOUR HOME

The book of Galatians lists out specific virtues in 5:22-23: “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Now, have someone read the following verses from the book of Proverbs. Say something like:

Let’s read these verses from the book of Proverbs about the benefits of being a person of integrity, and what God thinks about a person’s good (or bad!) character:

Proverbs 3:3-4 “Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation.”

Proverbs 11:17 “Your kindness will reward you, but your cruelty will destroy you.”

Proverbs 19:11 “Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

Proverbs 19:22 “Loyalty makes a person attractive. It is better to be poor than dishonest.”

Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love makes up for all offenses.

Proverbs 21:21 “Whoever pursues righteousness and unfailing love will find life, righteousness, and honor.”

Proverbs 17:19 “Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.”

Let’s Talk About This:

Read the following paragraph, and then discuss the questions as a group:

The Bible lists virtues God wants to develop in you, and your children: Love, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Read the following questions and discuss them with the group:

- Are their character traits in the list above that are not present (or weak) in your child? Are there any that are strongly present in your child?
- Discuss some of the benefits to possessing godly character from the above verses.
- Why would building up these traits in your children be a blessing to others?

Parent Challenge:

Wrap up the group time by pointing participants toward the “Parent Challenge” for the following week. Say something like:

We've spent the evening talking about how important it is to work towards character development in your child. The following are a couple of activities to do yourself and with your kids this week, to begin this process.

Answer the following question in the space provided below:

- As a parent, can you say you are setting a good example for your children in this area of character?

Take Away

Activity

Open a conversation with your child about cheating. Ask them if they know anyone who has ever cheated. Ask if they think there is a difference in cheating on an ordinary homework assignment compared to a major exam. Discuss how big a deal it is to cheat. If cheating on just one test would make enough of a difference in their grade point average, and maybe affect the college they want to attend, would it be ok to cheat? Why or why not?

After your discussion, read the following verse together with your child:

Romans 12:17 "Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable."

Then, discuss with your child how God made them in His image, for the purpose of reflecting Him and His character to people in the world who don't believe in Him. Discuss the high responsibility we have as Christians to uphold God's reputation. When we call ourselves a Christian and do things like lie, cheat or steal, or even act in anger or without joy, we don't give God a good reputation!

15 Minutes of Fame:

Help your child understand his or own character by doing a character inventory. Have them write down strengths and weaknesses in their character. For example, one positive trait might be that the child is kind to a student at school in a wheelchair, when others make fun of them. A weakness is they might not respond to being asked to do a chore with a joyful heart. Focus on the positive and strong aspects of his or her character. If they aren't able to come up with strengths, suggest some that you see in your child and then praise hi or her for those characteristics.

Another idea is to give your teen or tween certain scenarios in which they would have to make a difficult or complicated decision, and have them talk through the situation through with you. For example, one hypothetical situation could be something such as your child sees a friend stealing and has to decide whether to tell. Telling could rectify the wrong, but could also destroy the friendship. *What should you do?*

Parent Guide

Lesson 3: Character Matters

What You Will Take Away From This Lesson: This lesson will help equip you to mold your child's character. It will also help you teach your children why being a person of good character is so important as a Christian.

Scripture Focus: *"People with integrity walk safely, but those who follow crooked paths will be exposed." Proverbs 4:23*

Overview of Lesson: Character is a spiritual Fruit that is sown and grown from the child's relationship with God. It is not just a feeling or a personality! It is the moral fiber of the Christian, and ultimately should permeate their entire being—it should characterize them. As parents, your goal should not be to raise children who sometimes tell the truth, but to raise *truthful* children. We don't want our kids to be kind when they feel like it, but to be *characterized* by their kindness.

Zechariah 7:9 says, "Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another," and Paul writes in Colossians 3:12 that God's people should "clothe [themselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." God's desire for His children is to possess these and more than seventy other character traits that actually are the very character traits of God, woven throughout the entirety of Scripture.

We've spent some time looking at how a child's words flow out of the attitude of their heart; now, it's time to address character, what a person of integrity looks like, and how parents can look to God and His very nature as the perfect example.

The Set Up:

Samuel Eshaghoff, a 19-year-old sophomore at Emory University, recently was arrested for taking SAT tests for six New York high schoolers. The college student allegedly charged as much as \$2,500 every time he masqueraded as a test-taking high schooler. While Eshaghoff claimed he's not guilty and SAT officials say he's an isolated wrongdoer, many education experts worry that other teens may be hiring folks to take the test for them. "As tests have become higher-stakes tests, as the competition between kids for scholarships and college entrance has increased, the likelihood of kids looking for ways to beat the system—to cheat—has increased," says Henry Grisham, superintendent of Jericho Public Schools in Long Island.

The SAT scandal is perhaps just a natural extension of some national trends. In the past several years, an increasing number of high school and college students have admitted to cheating in school. According to a 2010 study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, nearly 60 percent of high school students say they cheated on a test in the past year, and more than a third admitted to cheating at least twice—and it might be worse.

Discussion Questions:

- Do you see this trend among your own children and their friends?
- Do these statistics surprise you?
- How is this different from the generation you grew up in? How could this trend in cheating affect children growing up in this generation?

Going Deeper:

Character can be described as “strength of moral fiber.” Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics and charity; persons who lack character behave dishonestly, unethically and uncharitably. A person’s character is the sum of his or her disposition.

God wants to develop character in your children, but it takes work and it sometimes involves pain or hurt. Read the following verse from the book of Proverbs:

“Fire tests the purity of silver and gold, but the Lord tests the heart.” – Proverbs 17:3

“Remove the impurities from silver, and the sterling will be ready for the silversmith.” – Proverbs 25:14

The ancient Hebrews used silver to make all kinds of beautiful objects, but silver had to be purified before it could be useful. The process of separating the ore from the extraneous matters mixed with it involved putting the silver into a furnace to burn the dross away. God uses this purification process to describe how he purifies His people, transforming them into men and women of character: “He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD” (Mal. 3:3). God will refine you and your children so that they might be useful vessels for His purposes – just as silver has to be refined before it can be made into a beautiful cup or bowl.

Let’s Talk about This:

- If it takes heat to burn away dross in precious metals, what do you think helps form character in God’s children? In *your* children?

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Moses desperately wanted to know and understand his God. After Moses chiseled out the commandments of God on two tablets of stone (for the second time) he climbed Mount Sinai as God had instructed him with the two stone tablets in his hands.

It was then that the Lord revealed to Moses His very name; amazingly, it was not one word but a list of character traits:

Read the following verses:

“Yahweh! The Lord!
The God of compassion and mercy!
I am slow to anger
and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.

I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.
But I do not excuse the guilty.
I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren.
the entire family is affected—
even children in the third and fourth generations.” – Exodus 34:6b-7

Discussion Questions:

- Describe God’s name, according to Exodus 34:6b-7.
- What do these verses tell you about God’s nature?
- If this is who God says He is, how important do you think those character traits should be to us?

God didn’t choose to show a physical representation of who He is to Moses. Instead, he made Himself known by His grace and goodness, and his all sufficiency. He is full of compassion, meaning He is tenderly pitiful. He is gracious, meaning he “bends or stoops in kindness” to His inferior created beings. He is not easily angered; our God does not have a short fuse, but is patient to a thousand generations! He abounds in goodness and truth. He extends mercy, and His very nature is forgiving.

Now here is what is so amazing! God made *us* in His image (Gen. 1:26). In the New Testament, Paul writes that as Christians we are made in the image of Christ, our Creator:

“But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.”—Proverbs 3:1-6, emphasis added

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.”
– Colossians 3:10

“For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” – Romans 8:29

Let’s Talk About This:

- What does it mean to you personally to “become like” Jesus, and to “become like his Son”?

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- Share with the group if you are “putting on the new man” to possess more of the likeness of Christ. Would others say the same? *Would your children?*

Let’s Think About This:

The Bible tells us we grow in character when we practice Christian virtues: “Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.” The book of Galatians lists out specific virtues in 5:22-23: “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Read the following verses from the book of Proverbs and consider what they communicate about a person’s character:

Proverbs 3:3-4 “Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation.”

Proverbs 11:17 “Your kindness will reward you, but your cruelty will destroy you.”

Proverbs 19:11 “Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

Proverbs 19:22 “Loyalty makes a person attractive. It is better to be poor than dishonest.”

Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love makes up for all offenses.

Proverbs 21:21 “Whoever pursues righteousness and unfailing love will find life, righteousness, and honor.”

Proverbs 17:19 “Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.”

Let’s Talk About This:

The Bible lists virtues God wants to develop in you, and your children: Love, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Read the following questions and discuss them with the group:

- Are their character traits in the list above that are not present (or weak) in your child? Are there any that are strongly present in your child?
- Discuss some of the benefits to possessing godly character from the above verses.
- Why would building up these traits in your children be a blessing to others?

Parent Challenge

Answer the following question in the space provided:

- As a parent, can you say you are setting a good example for your children in this area of character?

Take Away:

Activity:

Open a conversation with your child about cheating. Ask them if they know anyone who has ever cheated. Ask if they think there is a difference in cheating on an ordinary homework assignment compared to a major exam. Discuss how big a deal it is to cheat. If cheating on just one test would make enough of a difference in their grade point average, and maybe affect the college they want to attend, would it be ok to cheat? Why or why not?

After your discussion, read the following verse together with your child:

Romans 12:17 “Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.”

Then, discuss with your child how God made them in His image, for the purpose of reflecting Him and His character to people in the world who don’t believe in Him. Discuss the high responsibility we have as Christians to uphold God’s reputation. When we call ourselves a Christian and do things like lie, cheat or steal, or even act in anger or without joy, we don’t give God a good reputation!

15 Minutes of Fame:

Help your child understand his or own character by doing a character inventory. Have them write down strengths and weaknesses in their character. For example, one positive trait might be that the child is kind to a student at school in a wheelchair, when others make fun of them. A weakness is they might not respond to being asked to do a chore with a joyful heart. Focus on the positive and strong aspects of his or her character. If they aren’t able to come up with strengths, suggest some that you see in your child and then praise him or her for those characteristics.

Another idea is to give your teen or tween certain scenarios in which they would have to make a difficult or complicated decision, and have them talk through the situation through with you. For example, one hypothetical situation could be something such as your child sees a friend stealing and has to decide whether to tell. Telling could rectify the wrong, but could also destroy the friendship. *What should you do?*

Leader's Guide

Lesson 4: Right and Wise Friendships

Parent Take Away: This lesson will help equip parents to guide their children towards healthy, wise friendships according to God's view of relationships.

Scripture Focus: *"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble."*
Proverbs 13:20

Overview of Lesson: The secular world has constructed an idea of love that is moving further and further away from true love that is found only in God. Worldly love is self-focused and selfish, while godly love is others-focused and selfless. This difference in what it means to love others as God loves us directly impacts every relationship, whether family, friends, spouses, or those in authority over us.

As with many things, the enemy will try to attempt to create false imitations of true, godly relationships. Though they might appear good on the outside, they are often destructive. Parenting your children to be able to learn to discern wise, healthy and godly relationships from unwise, destructive and ungodly relationships takes much attention. But it is the ultimate result of everything we have been learning in Lessons 1-3. When a child fears God, has a heart that is filled with God's truth and responds out of the overflow of that truth, and is of good character, he or she will look different to the world around them.

This lesson will help parents guide their children towards choosing their closest relationships wisely, for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "bad company corrupts good character." It will also help parents be able to parent their children in how to relate to others – teachers, family members, siblings and even enemies in a godly, biblical way.

Main Idea:

Friendships are one of the most wonderful but also sometimes one of the most heartbreaking experiences for kids to navigate through. We have been learning these past three weeks how important it is to help children understand their responsibility to imitate Christ in word and deed. This is no different in the world of friendships. As the child's heart is molded to become more like the heart of God, they will face difficult decisions in the world of relationships: will they succumb to wrong things their friends are doing? Or will they stand firm to what they believe according to what God says, and be a true friend?

In this week's lesson we will be looking at how to form godly friendships, and examine the blessings that come from choosing friends wisely. A child's friendships have a huge influence on decisions they make. We will discuss what God's word says about relationships, look at how Jesus treated His friends, and consider how to shepherd our children to do the same.

Lesson Goals:

This lesson contains three elements of discussion: the *Set Up* section brings in the main idea of the lesson. *Going Deeper* digs into the bulk of the lesson, with a Bible Study component. The *Take Away* section offers actions items for parents to do on their own and with their children based on the topic of the week.

In this lesson we will explore these ideas:

- What makes a good friend
- The benefits to godly relationships
- Jesus' view of friendships
- How to handle friends who let you down or betray you

The Set Up:

- **Goal:** To consider what worldly friendships look like, compared to godly friendships.
- **Set Up:** None

First say something like:

We've made it to the last week of our study on Proverbs Parenting: Bringing the Wisdom of Proverbs into Your Home! The previous three weeks have all lead to this last discussion on friendships. Recall that we learned how important it is to instill a healthy fear of God in your children's hearts. We also learned about the necessity of heart change, verses behavioral change and how this affects what comes out of a child's mouth. Then last week we learned about character development. This week, we will look at the impact friends with bad character can have on your children and why it's so important to choose friends wisely. We'll also look at teaching your children how to be a good friend to others.

Then, ask the following question, to open up discussion:

What do you personally consider to be the number one quality of being a good friend?

Take a few minutes to allow parents to share their thoughts.

Then, say something like:

Tweens and teens want so much to be accepted and loved. Often, they will compromise things they firmly believe in just to fit in. Though they might end up with a group of friends, our job as parents is to teach them what true friendship really looks like according to God.

Have someone volunteer to read the following paragraphs:

During World War II, an enemy submarine approached a fleet of ships in the North Atlantic. The captain of one vessel spotted the white mark of a torpedo coming directly at his ship. His transport was loaded with literally hundreds and hundreds of young soldiers on the way to the European front. He realized they would not have time to maneuver to avoid the torpedo. He grabbed the loudspeakers and cried out, "Boys, this is it!"

Nearby, though, a little escorting destroyer also observed the torpedo. The captain ordered, "Full speed ahead." His ship steamed into the path of the torpedo. The destroyer was blown up; it sank very quickly. Every man on it was lost.

The captain of the troop transport ship sadly commented, "The skipper of that destroyer was my best friend." Now one verse in the Bible has an even deeper meaning for that captain: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13)

Discussion Questions

Generate a discussion based on the following two questions:

- *How is this kind of selfless love for others different than the kind of love the world portrays?*
- *In your opinion, is this kind of love for others prevalent in young children, teens and tweens? What trends do you see young people's friendships today?*

Going Deeper:

- **Goal:** To challenge parents to look at their own relationships and consider which ones are healthy or not healthy; then, to help their children make wise choices in friends.
- **Set Up:** None

Read the paragraphs below to the group:

To understand what it means to have a godly relationship, let's break down the two words. *Godly* means, "of relating to, or proceeding directly from God, divine." For a relationship to be godly, God must be involved! The word relationship means "the state or character of being related or interrelated, connection between two or more things."

Therefore, a godly relationship is a connection between two persons proceeding directly from God. Or to put it another way, a godly relationship occurs when two people relate to each other divinely – submitting to one another in the fear of God. "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

It is important for children to learn to understand that in every relationship of life, there are more than two people present...there are three. It's not just a parent and child, the friend and her buddy, or the brother and the sister. The Lord Jesus Christ is right there in their midst. Because of

this, we should teach our children to always ask the question, *“What does Jesus, living in me, expect of this relationship?”* If children don’t recognize God’s presence in their lives, it will be impossible to submit themselves to others (including parents!) They will let their own selfish, prideful motives get the way, and thus possibly damage the relationship. However, teaching children to obey what Christ would have them in their relationships shows God they revere Him over all other relationships.

GODLY FRIENDSHIPS

Read the following verses on wise friendships:

Proverbs 27:9 “The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.”

Proverbs 17:17 “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”

Proverbs 24:29 “And don’t say, ‘Now I can pay them back for what they’ve done to me! I’ll get even with them!’”

Proverbs 22:24 “Don’t befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people...”

Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.”

Proverbs 18:1 “Unfriendly people care only about themselves; they lash out at common sense.”

Proverbs 18:24 “There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 14:7 “Stay away from fools, for you won’t find knowledge on their lips.”

Discussion Questions:

Use the following questions to generate a discussion on what the book of Proverbs says makes a good friend:

- According to the above verses, what makes a good friend?
- According to the above verses, what are some things teach our children when guiding them in choosing friends?
- What are some of the beautiful benefits of godly relationships?

Let’s Talk About This:

One of the more difficult parts of parenting is mentoring children toward relationships that are safe. Even harder is teaching children how to choose those types of relationships for themselves. Good, godly friendships build the other person up, rather than tear them down. The parent’s job is to teach their child to “walk with the wise and become wise” and not to “associate with fools and get in trouble” (Prov. 13:20)

One of the most beautiful examples of friendship in the Bible is between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20). These two men truly cared for and trusted each other. David was fleeing from Jonathan's father, Saul, who wanted to kill him. Jonathan recognized that David was innocent. Because of the true friendship they shared, and Jonathan's loyalty, David survived Saul's assassination attempts and went on to become one of Israel's greatest kings.

Real and true friendship involves freedom of choice, accountability, truth, and forgiveness. Jesus, the perfect example of a godly friend, modeled this with Peter. Peter, afraid for his life after Jesus was led away from the Garden of Gethsemane to be tried and crucified, denied knowing Jesus (John 18). Though He was betrayed, Jesus forgave Peter continued to use him to further His kingdom on earth (John 21).

Real friendship looks at the heart, not just the "packaging." It overlooks faults, and loves unconditionally. But it also involves being truthful, even though it may hurt. Genuine friendships are grounded in the Lord.

Then, say something like:

Real friendship goes so much deeper than most of the friendships our kids have, or even we have! Kids today get caught up on external things—what clothes they have, the activities they are involved in, even what neighborhoods they live in. Sadly these things sometimes drive friendships. Kids who do not fit in to a particular group are excluded or even bullied. Parent your kids to be different! Parent them to be like Christ in all relationships. But what does this look like?

JESUS, THE ULTIMATE FRIEND

Choose a volunteer to read the following verses out loud to the group:

Galatians 5:13 "For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love."

Hebrews 10:24 "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works."

Matthew 6:14–15 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."

John 15:12-17 "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other."

Discussion Questions:

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- According to these verses, what kinds of actions or attitudes are godly?
- What are some of these blessings?
- According to Jesus in John 15: 12-17, what is the greatest thing a friend can do to show they truly care about the other person?

Let's Talk About This:

Read the following out loud to the group:

Everyone needs relationships, but there is a right way to have relationship. Jesus said that the two most important commandments are to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. The Bible clearly tells us what makes a good friend – and how to develop and maintain meaningful friendships: loyalty, honesty, faithfulness, selflessness and love. Our best example of what makes a good friend comes from Jesus. How did Jesus treat us?

He laid down his life for us.

It is important for parents to teach their children that the best way to be a friend is to love the other person's life more than we love our own. This means we consider others better than ourselves and look to their interests before our own (Phil. 2).

Parent Challenge:

Wrap up the group time by pointing participants toward the “Parent Challenge” for the following week.

Say something like:

We've spent last four weeks talking about revering God, heart change and speech, and character development. Tonight we wrapped up our time by looking at the importance of godly relationships. The following are a couple of activities to do to do with your kids this week, to begin helping your child make wise friend choices.

Activity:

Take time to consider which characteristic of a friend you tend to overlook. Has that ever been harmful to you or your friendships? Use the space provided to write out your answer; when meditating on this, consider how you might help your child to avoid this in their friendships.

Take Away

Discuss the following scenarios with your teen or tween:

- 1) A girl saw her friend doing something that was self-destructive (like driving under the influence of alcohol). What would a friend do? If she confronted her or told her parents, it would certainly ruin their friendship.
- 2) A man saw a friend acting in a way that would probably destroy his family. What would a friend do? He said that he did nothing because he didn't want to lose the friendship.

True friends put the needs of a friend before their own needs to keep the friendship. If there is something the friend is doing that will bring them further hurt or destruction, it's a true friend's duty to do what is necessary to stop them. Help your child to understand this, but also remind them that it may cause a wedge in the relationship. Make sure they know that even if they lose a friendship, it's more important for them to respond in a godly way than to avoid the issue just to keep the friendship.

We all need someone who will tell us the truth in a loving way. It is hard to grow without the help of our friends. It's never easy, but when you must tell someone the truth, use this approach: speak calmly, clearly, directly, honestly and respectfully. This is how Jesus would confront someone.

15 Minutes of Fame:

Generate a discussion on friendship with your child. Ask them if they have ever had a friend let them down. How did they feel?

Share an example of when a friend let you, the parent, down. How did you respond? Did you respond in a loving godly way? Or did you get angry and let the issue drive a wedge between the friendship?

Then, read the following verse with your child:

Colossians 3:13 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

Discuss how important it is to extend grace in friendships. Humans will always make mistakes. Remind your child that just as their friends have faults, they do too. How your child reacts may determine the future strength of the friendship. However, there are times when it is wise to separate from a friend, especially if the friendship is influencing you negatively or continually hurting you.

Use the following questions below to discuss friendship issues further:

- Do you think it is easier or harder to forgive a friend who hurts you badly as opposed to when someone who is not your friend does it? Why/why not?
- What do you think it means to "make allowances" for your friends' faults?

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- What do you think “true forgiveness” really looks like? What is one step you could take in order to be a better friend?
- When is it appropriate to separate from a friend?

Parent Guide

Lesson 4: Right and Wise Friendships

What You Will Take Away From This Lesson: This lesson will help equip you to guide your children towards healthy, wise friendships according to God's view of relationships.

Scripture Focus: *"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble." Proverbs 13:20*

Overview of Lesson: The secular world has constructed an idea of love that is moving further and further away from true love that is found only in God. Worldly love is self-focused and selfish, while godly love is others-focused and selfless. This difference in what it means to love others as God loves us directly impacts every relationship, whether family, friends, spouses, or those in authority over us.

As with many things, the enemy will try to attempt to create false imitations of true, godly relationships. Though they might appear good on the outside, they are often destructive. Parenting your children to be able to learn to discern wise, healthy and godly relationships from unwise, destructive and ungodly relationships takes much attention. But it is the ultimate result of everything we have been learning in Lessons 1-3. When a child fears God, has a heart that is filled with God's truth and responds out of the overflow of that truth, and is of good character, he or she will look different to the world around them.

This lesson will help you guide your children towards choosing their closest relationships wisely, for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "bad company corrupts good character." It will also help you be able to parent your children in how to relate to others – teachers, family members, siblings and even enemies in a godly, biblical way.

The Set Up:

During World War II, an enemy submarine approached a fleet of ships in the North Atlantic. The captain of one vessel spotted the white mark of a torpedo coming directly at his ship. His transport was loaded with literally hundreds and hundreds of young soldiers on the way to the European front. He realized they would not have time to maneuver to avoid the torpedo. He grabbed the loudspeakers and cried out, "Boys, this is it!"

Nearby, though, a little escorting destroyer also observed the torpedo. The captain ordered, "Full speed ahead." His ship steamed into the path of the torpedo. The destroyer was blown up; it sank very quickly. Every man on it was lost.

The captain of the troop transport ship sadly commented, "The skipper of that destroyer was my best friend." Now one verse in the Bible has an even deeper meaning for that captain: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13)

Discussion Questions:

- How is this kind of selfless love for others different than the kind of love the world portrays?
- In your opinion, is this kind of love for others prevalent in young children, teens and tweens? What trends do you see young people's friendships today?

Going Deeper:

To understand what it means to have a godly relationship, let's break down the two words. *Godly* means, "of relating to, or proceeding directly from God, divine." For a relationship to be godly, God must be involved! The word *relationship* means "the state or character of being related or interrelated, connection between two or more things."

Therefore, a godly relationship is a connection between two persons proceeding directly from God. Or to put it another way, a godly relationship occurs when two people relate to each other divinely – submitting to one another in the fear of God. "And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

It is important for children to learn to understand that in every relationship of life, there are more than two people present...there are three. It's not just a parent and child, the friend and her buddy, or the brother and the sister. The Lord Jesus Christ is right there in their midst. Because of this, we should teach our children to always ask the question, "*What does Jesus, living in me, expect of this relationship?*" If children don't recognize God's presence in their lives, it will be impossible to submit themselves to others (including parents!) They will let their own selfish, prideful motives get the way, and thus possibly damage the relationship. However, teaching children to obey what Christ would have them in their relationships shows God they revere Him over all other relationships.

GODLY FRIENDSHIPS

Read the following verses on wise friendships:

Proverbs 27:9 "The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense."

Proverbs 17:17 "A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need."

Proverbs 24:29 "And don't say, 'Now I can pay them back for what they've done to me! I'll get even with them!'"

Proverbs 22:24 "Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people..."

Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."

Proverbs 18:1 "Unfriendly people care only about themselves; they lash out at common sense."

Proverbs 18:24 “There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.”

Proverbs 14:7 “Stay away from fools, for you won’t find knowledge on their lips.”

Discussion Questions:

- According to the above verses, what makes a good friend?
- According to the above verses, what are some things teach our children when guiding them in choosing friends?
- What are some of the beautiful benefits of godly relationships?

Let’s Talk About This:

One of the more difficult parts of parenting is mentoring children toward relationships that are *safe*. Even harder is teaching children how to choose those types of relationships for themselves. Good, godly friendships build the other person up, rather than tear them down. The parent’s job is to teach their child to “walk with the wise and become wise” and not to “associate with fools and get in trouble” (Prov. 13:20)

One of the most beautiful examples of friendship in the Bible is between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 20). These two men truly cared for and trusted each other. David was fleeing from Jonathan's father, Saul, who wanted to kill him. Jonathan recognized that David was innocent. Because of the true friendship they shared, and Jonathan’s loyalty, David survived Saul's assassination attempts and went on to become one of Israel's greatest kings.

Real and true friendship involves freedom of choice, accountability, truth, and forgiveness. Jesus, the perfect example of a godly friend, modeled this with Peter. Peter, afraid for his life after Jesus was led away from the Garden of Gethsemane to be tried and crucified, denied knowing Jesus (John 18). Though He was betrayed, Jesus forgave Peter continued to use him to further His kingdom on earth (John 21).

Real friendship looks at the heart, not just the "packaging." It overlooks faults, and loves unconditionally. But it also involves being truthful, even though it may hurt. Genuine friendship are grounded in the Lord.

Read the following verses:

Galatians 5:13 “For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.”

Hebrews 10:24 “Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.”

Matthew 6:14–15 “If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

John 15:12-17 "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other."

Discussion Questions:

- According to these verses, what kinds of actions or attitudes are godly?
- What are some of these blessings?
- According to Jesus in John 15: 12-17, what is the greatest thing a friend can do to show they truly care about the other person?

Let's Talk About This:

Everyone needs relationships, but there is a right way to have relationship. Jesus said that the two most important commandments are to love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. The Bible clearly tells us what makes a good friend – and how to develop and maintain meaningful friendships: loyalty, honesty, faithfulness, selflessness and love. Our best example of what makes a good friend comes from Jesus. How did Jesus treat us?

He laid down his life for us.

It is important for parents to teach their children that the best way to be a friend is to love the other person's life more than we love our own. This means we consider others better than ourselves and look to their interests before our own (Phil. 2).

Parent Challenge:

Activity:

Take time to consider which characteristic of a friend you tend to overlook. Has that ever been harmful to you or your friendships? Use the space provided to write out your answer; when meditating on this, consider how you might help your child to avoid this in their friendships.

Take Away:

Discuss the following scenarios with your teen or tween:

- 1) A girl saw her friend doing something that was self-destructive (like driving under the influence of alcohol). What would a friend do? If she confronted her or told her parents, it would certainly ruin their friendship.

2) A man saw a friend acting in a way that would probably destroy his family. What would a friend do? He said that he did nothing because he didn't want to lose the friendship.

True friends put the needs of a friend before their own needs to keep the friendship. If there is something the friend is doing that will bring them further hurt or destruction, it's a true friend's duty to do what is necessary to stop them. Help your child to understand this, but also remind them that it may cause a wedge in the relationship. Make sure they know that even if they lose a friendship, it's more important for them to respond in a godly way than to avoid the issue just to keep the friendship.

We all need someone who will tell us the truth in a loving way. It is hard to grow without the help of our friends. It's never easy, but when you must tell someone the truth, use this approach: speak calmly, clearly, directly, honestly and respectfully. This is how Jesus would confront someone.

15 Minutes of Fame:

Generate a discussion on friendship with your child. Ask them if they have ever had a friend let them down. How did they feel?

Share an example of when a friend let you, the parent, down. How did you respond? Did you respond in a loving godly way? Or did you get angry and let the issue drive a wedge between the friendship?

Then, read the following verse with your child:

Colossians 3:13 "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

Discuss how important it is to extend grace in friendships. Humans will always make mistakes. Remind your child that just as their friends have faults, they do too. How your child reacts may determine the future strength of the friendship. However, there are times when it is wise to separate from a friend, especially if the friendship is influencing you negatively or continually hurting you.

Use the following questions below to discuss friendship issues further:

- Do you think it is easier or harder to forgive a friend who hurts you badly as opposed to when someone who is not your friend does it? Why/why not?
- What do you think it means to "make allowances" for your friends' faults?
- What do you think "true forgiveness" really looks like? What is one step you could take in order to be a better friend?
- When is it appropriate to separate from a friend?