Discipleship Groups — Level 8
WEEK 1
Wisdom for Living: Marriage

Welcome to this next round of small groups here at Pathway SFV! Over the next six weeks, we are going to be continuing our journey through Proverbs. As usual, I will be teaching for three weeks, and pastor Evert will be teaching for three.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about the family as God created it, in particular, what sustains a healthy family. Proverbs speaks to men, women, marriage, communication, sexuality, children, finances, and relationships. Over the next weeks, we are going to delve into God's wisdom in how these important relationships are to look.

There are a few things to say as we begin. First, I understand that not everyone experiences the family relationships in the same way, nor is everyone who is watching this at the same time of life. There are those who are not married for a variety of reasons, there are those who are newly married, others who have small children, others who are well-experienced in marriage with older children and grandchildren, others whose marriages may be struggling; maybe you have a blended family due to divorce or widowhood and remarriage. I get it—these topics will hit differently for different people for different reasons.

That said, these things still need to be talked about, and everyone will have something to take away from these classes. Regardless of where you are in life right now, or what your experience has been, let the Holy Spirit speak to you on a personal level regarding your own understanding of God's way of life and your own character. Proverbs helps define a worldview that gives us a way to define life, live it, and pass it on to other generations. Whatever your life consists of at this time, we can all embrace God's worldview and pass it on in the various conversations we have in our daily lives.

The Reasonable Order of Creation

Proverbs has much more to say about wives and the building—or breaking—of a family than it does about husbands and the building of a household. This is not to suggest that husbands play no role in it, they most certainly do as the priest of the home! That is no small task. But the wife has an incredibly powerful role to play in the home. Her influence can literally make or break the family despite anyone else's good intentions or efforts. Her words of affirmation or devastation, her encouragement or her nagging, her helping or her criticizing—all have deep effects on the health of the home. When it speaks about men, however, it will more often talk about their work, their business, their finances, and other such things.

1 Corinthians 11:8,9,11 say, "For the first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man. And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for

man…But among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women."

I find it fascinating that there is very little said about husbands in the book of proverbs. Much is said about men, but the specific mention of husbands is somewhat lacking. What is said about men certainly may be applied to the work and duties of a husband. Proverbs, however, is concerned with wisdom, and Wisdom is personified as a woman.

I think there is something to that! Men and women both may certainly be either wise or foolish. In God's created order, the man was not created first to show some divine preference nor intellectual advantage over the woman. The man was made from the ground in order to work the ground. The woman was made from the rib of the man—she was taken from his side and was literally brought alongside him to work with him in accomplishing God's purposes within the Garden. In Proverbs, the fact that it is a woman that personifies wisdom does not elevate her above a man, nor am I suggesting that she has special wisdom above any that a man can possess, but I believe gives insight into the amazing perception, intuition, and insight the woman brings to the aid of the man. It is as if this is the ideal helper that God made alongside the man in the Garden!

There is no doubt that in general—and I certainly know from my own personal experience—that men need the discernment and the "woman's intuition" and their particular brand of feminine wisdom that women possess.

When Paul said that man was not made for the woman, but the woman made for the man, he is reflecting on **Genesis 2:18–23**. Adam is placed in the garden to "work it and keep it," yet without the woman, the human task is incomplete. God unequivocally says that *"It is not good that the man should be alone."* So, God creates the woman as the ideal helper who completely corresponds to him. She is a fitting counterpart to the strength and acuity he provides. The idea is not that she is a lesser assistant, but that she is created in relation to his calling, alongside him, ***making their shared dominion and fruitfulness possible***. The full realization of Adam's work was not going to be possible without her! What an amazing plan God has for the man-and-wife team! Equal partners, each with their own distinct role to play in the work God had given them.

The Broken Order of Sin

When sin entered into the world, man and woman were no longer working together, they were at war—and not only with each other. When the couple transgressed God's law not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they did not simply eat of a forbidden fruit, they actively participated in the knowledge of evil. They no longer just knew that sin existed, their active participation had made them sinners, and sin only knows how to destroy life.

Now, each one faced a new reality of life. Each has a contention with the thing from which they were created and for which they were created. Since Adam was created from the ground to work it and produce its fruit, his new reality was in relationship to

the ground—it is now painful, hard, and resistant instead of readily yielding its fruit. Since Eve was taken from Adam's side and created to physically produce the fruit of the marriage, her relationship to childbearing becomes painful, and her relationship to her husband becomes chaotic by disorderly conflict and struggle for control where there should have been equal partnership.

So, in Genesis 2, each is connected to a God-given role and vocation: Adam to the ground and the garden; the woman to Adam as his corresponding helper in the shared calling and work. In Genesis 3, sin turns both roles into places of painful resistance—the ground resists the man, and the wife has pain with her children and resistance to her husband.

The Redemptive Order of Christ

The story of Jesus' redemption of humanity, dealing with the sin that now dwells within us, and transforming our hearts to bear His character, moves things back into the direction of God's original intention. Ephesians 5:21 says, *"submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."* There is a mutual honoring of the role God has given to each person, where wives are to stop resisting their husbands' authority, and husbands are to use their authority not to dominate, but to serve their wives interests, which ultimately serve their shared purpose together—even as Ephesians 5:28 says, *"For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself."*

Now, back to the book of Proverbs. Though it is only Jesus' death and resurrection that provides us entrance into God's presence by dealing with our sin, the Proverbs are the wisdom of God that moves us back into a worldview that regains the art of living the life that was lost in the Garden of Eden. It gives insight into the role of a woman and the role of a man in the world we live in by which it will be possible to recover the marital, sexual, family, and work relationships that God intended for us to have.

The wisdom, insight, persuasion, grace and godliness with which the woman is depicted in the Scriptures, and the high regard in which the Bible holds her, speaks to the power of the spirit God has put inside her. The higher the beauty and the greater the wisdom, the more bitter the creation when twisted by sin. It is no accident that both Wisdom and Foolishness are personified as women, nor is it an accident that the Bible personifies the Bride of Christ, with unsurpassed beauty, and the Prostitute of Babylon with unparalleled wickedness, as women. Such comparisons both elevate the wonder and glory of women, and lays before each person the option of which we will choose to be and to which we will join ourselves. At the end, Jesus will join Himself to the virtuous Bride of those who are faithful to Him. He will never join Himself to those who prostitute themselves to the things of this world.

The Foolish Woman

Just as tasting the forbidden fruit was transgressing the Word of God, so the book of Proverbs tells us that eating with the woman of "foolishness" and tasting of the

“seductress” or the “immoral” woman—the forbidden woman—is contrasted with the Word of God.

As eating food goes into the body and becomes part of us, so does God’s Word enter into the soul of a person. God fed His people in the desert with Manna, with bread from heaven, so they would learn to live not by bread alone, but by the Words that come from God’s mouth. Words from God’s mouth are symbolized by bread in our mouths.

It is interesting that Exodus 16:31 says that Manna “tasted like wafers made with honey,” and Numbers 11:8 says that Manna “tasted like pastries baked with olive oil.” God’s Word is honey and oil. We are to taste of God’s Word and His wisdom. We are not to listen to the words, nor taste of the immoral woman. Proverbs 5:3-4 says, *“For the lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But in the end, she is as bitter as poison, as dangerous as a double-edged sword.”*

The option of choosing what kind of person, (in the case of this teaching—what kind of spouse), we will be and join ourselves to, the Proverbs define both what is the kind of wife who builds her house or destroys it. **Proverbs 14:1** says definitively, *“A wise woman builds her home, but a foolish woman tears it down with her own hands.”* Wise or foolish, in her hands is the power of building or destruction—just as elsewhere Proverbs says that *“the power of life and death is in the tongue.”*

The tongue of praise and cheering your husband and children on will keep them going and growing for a lifetime. The tongue of nagging, complaining, insulting, and never being pleased will eventually defeat and drive off the people whom you love the most.

In this discussion, let me also clarify that this is not assigning the health of a marriage solely to the wife; a husband’s sin can wound or destroy a home just as profoundly. Though Proverbs does explicitly warn about quarrelsome wives, it also confronts men’s anger, harsh speech, sexual unfaithfulness, laziness, greed, violence, and failure of self-control throughout this book of wisdom. But specifically in the wife-husband relationship, **Proverbs 27:15–16** says “*A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping on a rainy day. Stopping her complaints is like trying to stop the wind or trying to hold something with greased hands.”* **Proverbs 21:9** also says, ***“****It’s better to live alone in the corner of an attic than with a quarrelsome wife in a lovely home.”*

Without overstating the point, the power of life and death is in everyone’s tongue—both men and women alike—wisdom or foolishness, building or destruction can be found in either gender. Without sounding misogynistic, women speak more than men, and their words carry profound impact in the life of the family. Wives respond to their husbands’ care, protection, and security, and husbands respond to their wives’ loving encouragement and gentle wisdom. For either to do otherwise is to jeopardize the functionality of the relationship, even as **Proverbs 12:4** instructs us: ***“****A worthy wife is a crown for her husband, but a disgraceful woman is like cancer in his bones.”*

The Wise Wife

Since the wife is spoken of so much in proverbs, it is only fitting that Proverbs ends with the ideal woman—a capable wife of prudence and virtue; the woman of wisdom and discretion. Listen to this amazing comparison:

Proverbs 8:35 says, "*For whoever finds me [meaning wisdom] finds life and receives favor from the Lord."* Finding wisdom is finding favor from God, but **Proverbs 18:22** also says, *"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."* It is fascinating that this parallel phrase is used for finding wisdom and a wife! Both are the favor of God, and, once again, we have wisdom and a virtuous wife equated one with the other. What gifts from God!

This kind of a woman does not destroy her house, nor is she cancer in the bones of her husband. **Proverbs 24:3–4** says that *"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."* A wife is a wonderous treasure, and she is the heart of the home. Her graceful wisdom, her virtuous hands, her capable understanding and hard work will build, not the house, but the home. It is the husband's job to create the space where his wife can make the home into a place of strength, comfort, wealth, goodness, virtue, and honor.

Proverbs 31:10-12, 25-26, 28-30 describes such a woman, *"…her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life… Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness… Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.' Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."*