

One

She Loves and Fears God

Sapphira/The Hebrew Midwives

Seventeen-year-old Charity Allen was offered a role on “Another World,” a successful NBC daytime drama. Stardom, a seven figure salary, and a limousine were dangled in front of her eyes. Her family’s days of living in a trailer could be over! Though the producer assured her she wouldn’t have to compromise her Christian convictions, the script revealed her character would, among other things, have an affair with a married man. Though the producer argued that these are “adolescent issues that all teens struggle with,” Charity responded:

*How many teens do you know who have affairs with married men?
I don’t know any! And I’m not going to portray one, either.*

Despite pressure from producers, and even from her teachers, Charity stood firm. Her foremost desire was to live a life that was pleasing to God and this didn’t fit! “Another World” cast a different girl. Charity gave up being a star. Or did she? Susie Shellenberger, in writing about Charity for *Brio* (Focus on the Family’s May, 1994 magazine for girls), said that Charity, in choosing to live a life that is pleasing to God, shines like a star amidst a “crooked and depraved generation” (Phil. 2:14–15).

WARMUP

Read over the Introduction together and then have each woman share her name, a little about herself, and what she hopes to gain from the group.

A Woman of Wisdom

Read the following passage:

In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and one's children will have a refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death (Prov. 14:26–27, NRSV).

Describe some “snares” you might be saved from by fearing God. Discuss this in terms of the example of Dee’s life or Charity’s life as well.

SCRIPTURE STUDY

The Scripture study is divided into five days, for five personal quiet times with the Lord.

DAY I

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A Woman of Wisdom Fears the Lord

The Book of Proverbs begins and ends with stressing the importance of fearing the Lord.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline (Prov. 1:7).

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised (Prov. 31:30).

Memorize Proverbs 31:30 by taking a word at a time. (Charm; Charm is; Charm is deceptive ...) A list of memory verses can be found at the end of this guide. Tear them out and hang them on your mirror or above your kitchen sink!

1. Read through Proverbs 1.
 - A. What reasons can you find in Proverbs 1:1–6 for studying proverbs?
 - B. What foundational principle is given in Proverbs 1:7? What contrast is given?
 - C. What basic warning does the father give the son, and why, in Proverbs 1:8–19?

D. Who is crying out in Proverbs 1:20–33? What reasons are given for listening to her?

Two voices, personified as women, cry out to us throughout Proverbs: the “woman wisdom” and the “woman folly.” The voice of wisdom is the Lord, the source of all wisdom; and the woman folly has her origin in the evil one, the father of lies. The woman folly appears in various forms throughout Scripture—for example, she is often the “harlot Babylon” who is always seducing, always lying, and often succeeding in bring ruin to men.

2. Why do you think the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? Was that true in your life? If so, explain how.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we are exhorted to fear God. This includes the concept of reverence, but also an awakening to the realization of God’s holiness and wrath at unrighteousness. This fear helps us understand our need for a Savior. Jesus makes this clear when He says:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28).

In my life, it was the fear of hell that drew me, at first, to Him. When I surrendered to Him, trusting in His payment for my sin on the cross, God delivered me from my fear of hell. Now my love for God is stronger than my fear of Him, but I still fear Him, in the way a child who respects her father fears disobeying and displeasing Him. *I am glad* I fear God, for that fear has saved me from many a snare!

3. The “fool” in Proverbs is someone who does not fear God. Why is it foolish not to fear God?

If we would know God, it is vital that we face the truth concerning His wrath, however unfashionable it may be, and however strong our initial prejudices against it. Otherwise, we shall not understand the gospel of salvation from wrath, nor the propitiatory achievement of the cross, nor the wonder of the redeeming love of God. (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity, p. 152.)

DAY 2

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Fear God, and Fear Nothing Else

When I look back over my life, I can see so many snares from which the fear of the Lord delivered me. So often sin seems like the easy way out, but instead, it leads to great pain and regrets. My first pregnancy was unexpected and untimely—and pressure was put on me from my husband’s family to abort. But though I was not yet in a personal relationship with Christ, I did fear God enough to know I couldn’t take a life. Oh my—how I would have regretted that! Likewise, as a young and foolish bride, I played with the idea of divorce, but again, I had a growing fear of the Lord, so I turned from that. Within a year, God turned our marriage around and gave us 38 amazing years—a marriage that became absolutely precious. How foolish I was! I almost destroyed the most precious gifts in my life—but my awareness of God’s holiness protected them.

The fear of the Lord doesn’t preserve you from all trouble, but from many snares. When trouble comes, and Jesus says it will, He will be with you. This year my precious husband Steve died of colon cancer at the age of 59. Though my grief is enormous, the Lord has been there for me, as husband, protector, provider, comforter. I absolutely know that I will see Steve again, for Christ has also conquered our last enemy: death. God *does* take care of those who fear Him. “As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Ps. 103:13, NRSV).

4. Read Proverbs 2.
 - A. What are the ways a person can discern the fear and knowledge of God? (Prov. 2:1–5)
 - B. What are some of the blessings of wisdom according to Proverbs 2:6–11?
 - C. Describe the person wisdom will save you from according to Proverbs 2:12–15.
 - D. Describe the person wisdom will save you from according to Proverbs 2:16–19.
 - E. Look again at the adulteress in the above passage. What did she ignore according to verse 17? Why, do you think?

- F. What contrast do you find in Proverbs 2:20–22? What do you think this means?
5. The woman folly will tell you that the happiest life is one in which you are free of God’s rules. Sleep with whoever you want, watch whatever you please, eat as much as you like—and you will be happy. Yet those choices end, not in freedom, but in bondage. Meditate on Proverbs 2:11 and give some examples of how this has been or could be true in your life.
6. Martin Luther said, “Fear God and do as you please.” Many have painted the fear of God as a negative, when it truly is a positive. What blessing from Proverbs 2 for fearing the Lord stands out to you and why?
7. What fears has the Lord delivered you from? Explain.

DAY 3

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Sapphira, A Woman Who Trifled with God

The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short (Prov. 10:27).

When I am inclined to embellish the truth to receive praise from others, may I remember Ananias and Sapphira! While there’s nothing to indicate that this couple lost their salvation, they certainly lost years on earth and their reputations. Though God usually spares us His wrath, He is still sovereign, and may choose to discipline. It does seem that often believers in leadership who trifle with God are caught and humbled publicly.

Read Acts 4:32–37 as background.

8. Joseph was greatly loved by the body of believers, as evidenced by his nickname. What was it? What act of encouragement is recorded about him in this passage?

Read Acts 5:1–11.

9. Describe the incident in this passage and the effect it had on the church.

In this grace age, we are turning out mediocre saints who feel that since they are in Christ, they can live as they please. But I don't know of anything that will check sin quicker than a deep reverence for God. (Charles Swindoll, "Insight for Living," April 7, 1994.)

10. How did Peter give Sapphira a second chance to tell the truth? What do you think motivated her to lie?

11. Are you ever motivated to enhance your own significance? If possible, give an example. With whose significance should we be concerned?

Describe some ways that you can see a longing in your heart to bring glory to God.

12. Some Christians insist that if your husband asks you to do something immoral, you should submit because God will hold your husband—not you—accountable. How does this passage teach otherwise? Does this mean we should not submit to our husbands? Explain.

Review your memory work.

DAY 4

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The Hebrew Midwives Feared God and Were Blessed

Lori, an unmarried college freshman, discovered she was pregnant. "Because I didn't want to face my parents, I had fleeting thoughts of abortion and even suicide, but my fear of God kept me from either. Today my parents and I cherish my three-year-old daughter and are so thankful God put His fear in me."

13. Read Proverbs 3.
 - A. List the blessings you can find in Proverbs 3:1–8 that come from listening, trusting, and fearing the Lord.

- B. What specific warning and blessing is in Proverbs 3:9–10? Does your checkbook indicate that you truly love and honor God?
- C. Why, according to verses 11–12, shouldn't we resent the Lord's rebuke?
- D. In Proverbs 3:15, we are told "nothing you desire can compare with her" (wisdom). What do you desire? If you listed other things than godly wisdom, why might they not be as valuable?
- E. What blessing will the person who preserves "sound judgment and discernment" experience according to Proverbs 3:21–26?
- F. What warning is given in Proverbs 3:28? Why do you think we often hold back when we have a chance to speak kindly or to help someone?
14. Read Exodus 1:8–22.
- A. Describe the three plans Pharaoh had for reducing the number of the Israelites.
- B. How did the midwives foil plan B?
- C. Why did they refuse to cooperate? How did God respond?
- D. How does their story illustrate Proverbs 3:25–26?

During World War II, Corrie ten Boom showed similar courage when she learned that a Jewish orphanage in Amsterdam was to be raided and the babies slaughtered. Dressed in the uniforms of Nazi soldiers who'd defected, thirty teenage boys drove up to the orphanage in trucks and demanded the babies. They took them from the arms of weeping workers who did not realize the babies were actually being saved. Years later Corrie had the

privilege of meeting some of these children. In emotional greeting scenes, she hugged them and gave thanks to the Lord. (Joan Winmill Brown, *Corrie: The Lives She's Touched*, Revell, p. 31.)

15. Compare Proverbs 3:32b with Psalm 25:14. What amazing blessing is given to those who fear the Lord and do right? (*a* designates the first part of a verse, *b* designates the second part.)

Next week we will look at Mary of Bethany, who, alone among Jesus' followers, seemed to understand what He was saying about going to Jerusalem to die. He blessed her, helping her understand this mystery. What an example she is, therefore, of Proverbs 3:32b.

DAY 5

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God Uses the Woman Who Feels Him

My sister Sally led me to the Lord when I was a young wife and mother. Because Sally knows "what it is to fear the Lord," she tried to persuade me to put my trust in Christ (2 Cor. 5:11). The Holy Spirit worked through my sister, and I was persuaded. When I told Sally that my opening chapter was on fearing the Lord and I was a bit apprehensive of a negative reaction, Sally firmly said: "There's no command in the Scripture with more blessings attached to it. Don't fear what others will think, Dee, fear God." Proverbs 29:25 warns: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare." I have come to see that the woman who loves and fears God is used mightily by Him, and the woman who fears others is paralyzed and fails to bear fruit.

In Proverbs 4 you can sense the emotion of a parent who loves his child dearly, and longs for him to truly hear and embrace what he is saying.

16. Read Proverbs 4.
- A. How early did this father impress on his son the importance of God's wisdom? Support your answer with a reference.

 - B. Find five similar commands in Proverbs 4:14–15.

- C. Is there a path God is longing for you to avoid? If so, what is it? Why, according to what you've learned so far, would it bless you to avoid it?
- D. What admonition is given in verse 23 and why?
- E. What are some specific ways you could apply verse 23?
17. In your life, think about how the fear of the Lord has led to fruitfulness. Can you share one with the group?
18. What do you think you will remember from this lesson? How will you apply it?

PRAYER TIME

Many people are intimidated by the idea of praying out loud. This guide will be gentle, leading you into this gradually. And no one will ever be forced to pray out loud.

Today, have each woman share a personal request. For example, she might ask, "I would like to grow closer to God" or "I need wisdom as a mother." Write these down, and pray for each other at home. Pay particular attention to the woman on your right, for whom you will pray daily.

Teach your group to sing "Father, I Adore You" (p. 114). (See the hints for leading music on the same page.)

