

LESSON 1: WHY MY CHOICES MATTER

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Young teenagers often have a lofty opinion of their wisdom and decision-making ability. Because their brains are developing at a crazy rate, they are able to think for themselves—pushing back on the ideas held by adults in their lives and attempting to make decisions on their own. Those of us who are “more mature” know that Jesus is eager to provide wisdom and understanding as we seek him. This lesson will guide your students toward that same valuable source of knowledge so they can make wise choices.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. **WHAT:** When we pursue Jesus and center our lives on him, he offers us wisdom that allows us to make wise decisions.
2. **WHY:** Teenagers learn a lifelong spiritual truth when they recognize that true wisdom and the ability to make wise choices come from God.
3. **HOW:** Students will discuss the importance of gaining wisdom, and they’ll consider practical ways to seek and receive that wisdom.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 3:5-8

SECONDARY SCRIPTURES

Proverbs 4:4-9; 12:1

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you’ll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Proverbs 3:5-8.

Most of the book of Proverbs is credited to Solomon—King David’s son, a great king, and the wisest man to walk the earth, second only to Jesus. As with our wisdom, Solomon’s wisdom came directly from God. According to 1 Kings 4:29, “God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore” because he humbly asked God for wisdom.

Despite this supernatural wisdom from God, Solomon still made some unwise choices. Like many modern-day teenagers, he was often consumed by romantic and physical attraction. Unfortunately, he was attracted to women who were not good for him—women who worshipped other gods and were a sinful distraction to him. Solomon decided to set aside his God-given wisdom and follow his own understanding. Solomon also had a son, Rehoboam, who succeeded him as king but rejected the wise counsel of those around him, and much of his power was taken away from him because of that decision.

Throughout Proverbs, you can almost hear Solomon's heart-felt cry. He knows what it's like to follow God's ways and to follow his own understanding. It's as if he's saying, "Learn from my mistakes! I've tried it both ways and God's way is the best!"

Our primary passage for this lesson presents a beautiful, concise summary of the wisdom-packed book of Proverbs and speaks directly to a prominent temptation of the teenager. The wisest man says, "Don't be impressed with your own wisdom." It's a reality check. It's a humility check. What's the better option? "Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil."

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Made a bad choice? Too much Taco Bell? Didn't study? Talked back? We can help with that. See you tonight!
- Life is all about choices. Make a wise choice and hang out with the group this week!

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've launched a two-lesson series titled "Wise Choices." Each week, teenagers are examining Scripture to discover truths about making wise decisions, even in a world that seems to encourage poor choices.

In this first lesson, we explored Proverbs 3:5-8, where we are challenged to trust God rather than our own understanding. This is a tough concept for all of us, but it's especially difficult for young teenagers, who are rapidly growing in their ability to think for themselves! We were reminded that when we do seek wisdom from God, he shows us the path to take.

This week, I encourage you to spend a few minutes talking with your junior higher about our lesson. Consider building your conversation around these questions:

- What's one choice you make because of your relationship with Jesus—a choice that your peers who don't follow Jesus don't make?
- Based on what you know about Jesus, how did he choose to treat people differently than what others expected, and why?
- How have you seen people in our family depending on God's wisdom?

Thanks for all your prayers and support for our ministry. Have an incredible week!

LESSON 1: WHY MY CHOICES MATTER**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

For the opening activity, you'll need one or two sets of dominoes and a table or hard surface to place them on. For later in the lesson, you'll also need a medium-sized garbage can or basket, small slips of paper, and pens or pencils for each junior high. Additionally, we recommend a trial run of the domino effect before kids arrive, to ensure that you'll have the right distance between each domino.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Ask teenagers to gather around the table or floor area where you will set up the dominoes. Explain that as you prepare to discuss the importance of making wise choices today, it's important to see how one decision directly affects other decisions. Have the students help you line up the dominoes in a close line. Make sure the dominoes are close enough to each other that they will create the desired effect.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's say this first domino represents your choice to hang out with friends who are known for making suspect choices. "What's the big deal," you might think. "So what if I do something, just once, that's not exactly honoring Jesus in my life?" What will happen to the rest of the dominoes when we tip this first one? [Tip the first domino and watch the whole line fall.] That's what it's like with choices in our lives—one bad choice doesn't live in isolation. It usually leads to others. You do something you wished you hadn't done, then you lie to your parents to keep them from finding out, then you start to ignore the old friends who "wouldn't understand" your choices. It's the domino effect—it all begins with one bad choice.*

ASK:

- What are some negative "domino effect" choices you've seen others make at school?
- What can stop a negative domino effect, if at all?
- Let's put a twist on this: How could the domino effect be a positive thing? What would that look like?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *The best way to avoid a pattern of negative choices is to seek wisdom from God to make good choices from the start. That's the ultimate way to live as a follower of Jesus—fueling our daily decisions with God's wisdom! That can lead to a positive domino effect, where one good choice leads to another good choice—and on and on it goes. And thankfully, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be forgiven and set back upright again even when we do make a poor choice.*

TEACHING POINTS



Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Proverbs 3:5-8 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *You're all smart kids, obviously! But are you wise? Let's dig into this passage to figure out that question for all of us—including me.*

1. JESUS CARES ABOUT YOUR DECISIONS

ASK:

- *What are five choices you've made today that you feel good about?*
- *If you could go back and change one other choice you've made today, what would it be, and why?*
- *In the passage we read, we're warned to not rely on our own understanding. What does that mean, and why is that so hard to do?*
- *What's one choice you make because of your relationship with Jesus—a choice that your peers who don't follow Jesus don't make?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *It's easy to assume that Jesus has bigger issues on his mind than what music we listen to, which shows we watch, or what team we try out for. It's true that God is in charge of everything, but he cares deeply about us and about all the little choices we make in everyday life. Jesus has the wisdom we need to make solid choices, and he wants to give that wisdom to us!*

2. YOUR CHOICES AFFECT OTHER PEOPLE

ASK:

- *You don't have to use the person's name, but talk about a recent choice someone else made that affected you, either positively or negatively.*
- *God designed us to live life together, not alone. How does that make life both easier and harder?*
- *What's one wise choice you've made that's improved your relationships with other people?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Most of us know that relationships—with friends, family, classmates, teammates—are really important. But sometimes we forget how much better those relationships could be if we sought wisdom from Jesus. The next time you're about to make a choice that you know will affect someone else, ask Jesus to help you make the right decision. This Scripture says he'll show you the right path to take.*

3. YOUR CHOICES EITHER BUILD UP OR TEAR DOWN YOUR REPUTATION

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Think about this: You can quickly gain a bad reputation because of one bad choice, and then it can take a long time to get rid of that bad reputation. Like it or not, our choices cause people to see us in a certain way. As Christians, we bear the name of Jesus Christ. We can make choices that honor him and reflect him.*

ASK:

- *Let me read a statement: “It can take five minutes to gain a bad reputation and a year to lose that bad reputation.” Don’t mention any specific names, but do you know anyone in your life that has proven this statement to be true? If so, what can you learn from that person’s situation?*
- *Obviously, all of us make bad choices in our life—what has been the path back from those choices for you?*
- *Based on what you know about Jesus, how did he choose to treat people differently than what others expected, and why?*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three for these questions.



ASK:

- *Read Proverbs 4:4-9. Why do you think the writer describes wisdom as a person?*
- *Name and describe one person from each of these categories who you consider to be a wise person: a teenager you know, someone you know who’s in their 20s, an adult family member, and an adult outside your family.*
- *Read Proverbs 12:1. (Wow—the Bible uses the word stupid!) What do wise people do to gain more of God’s wisdom?*

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- *What wisdom from Jesus do you need for an upcoming decision?*
- *During a typical day, what’s something you can do to remind yourself to pause and ask Jesus for wisdom?*
- *What’s one decision you’ve made that you know is honoring to Jesus?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *If you’ve been “depending on your own understanding” lately, you don’t have to keep doing life that way! Right now, you can commit to Jesus that you are going to trust in him and allow him to influence your choices.*

Give each teenager a small piece of paper and with a pen or pencil. Ask everyone to find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Challenge kids to prayerfully consider an area or relationship in their lives where they are making choices on their own—they haven't been asking for wisdom from Jesus. Have them write down a word or symbol that represents that area or relationship.

Place a medium-sized garbage or basket in the middle of your meeting area. After leading a brief prayer, ask students to crumple up their paper and shoot it into garbage from where they're sitting. (The guys, especially, will appreciate this!) Remind them that as they walk away from that tossed paper, they are releasing control and giving it to Jesus.

SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).



WISE CHOICES
Lesson 1: Why My Choices Matter

READ IT!

(VERSE OF THE DAY)

"Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble" (Proverbs 13:20).

DO IT!

(SERVING)

Pause for a moment and think of another teenager you know who consistently makes wise choices. Send that person a short, two-sentence text or email letting them know that you notice their good choices and want to have that same kind of wisdom yourself.

PRAY IT!

(PRAY FOR...)

Think about a decision you need to make, then pray this: "Please help me make a wise choice, Jesus. I want to follow the path that honors you."

LOVE IT!

(GETTING CLOSER TO JESUS)

Here's something Jesus said to a woman who had made bad choices sexually, in John 8:10-11: "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?... Neither do I. Go and sin no more." Today, confess a bad choice to Jesus, and ask for his forgiveness. Then receive his "Neither do I" for yourself.

LIVE IT!

(WORSHIP)

Older people are often really wise! All throughout the Bible, older people are encouraged to share their wisdom with young people. Who's an older adult you know? This week ask that person: "What are two pieces of advice you would give me as I move through my teenage years?" As a way to honor God's wisdom, do something today that puts into practice the advice you heard.

PIC IT!

