

STAYING SOBER

God expects believers to be good stewards of the bodies He has given them.

PROVERBS 23:17-21,29-35

MEMORY VERSE: PROVERBS 23:19

- **READ** Proverbs 22:17–24:22, First Thoughts (p. 94), and Understand the Context (p. 94). Note the rapid change of topics throughout the passage. Highlight how often the word *listen* is used. Look specifically for verses that relate to the use or abuse of alcohol.
- **STUDY** Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35, using Explore the Text (pp. 95–99). Consider how the fear of the Lord is a recurring theme throughout Proverbs. Review Proverbs 1–9 to support this session. Develop a list of the descriptors used by Solomon that characterize the use or abuse of alcohol. Memorize Proverbs 23:19.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 100–101) and More Ideas (p. 102). Choose and prepare for one of the study enhancements under Explore the Text on page 102. Consult *QuickSource* or goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderHelps for additional ideas. Look for new ways to incorporate the memory verse (Prov. 23:19) in the session.
- **GAIN** insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible) or on iTunes.
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; A board or chart paper and markers; and Paper and pen for group assignments. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*). Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 7** (*Handout: Solomon Time Line*); and **PACK ITEM 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*).



KEY DOCTRINE

God the Father

God the Father is fatherly in His attitude toward all men (Deut. 32:6).

FIRST THOUGHTS

Alcoholism and drug abuse have become a prominent feature of our cultural landscape. Lives have been destroyed, marriages ruined, families wounded, and communities disrupted because of its destructive influence. Some of us worry that our children or grandchildren will be caught in its grip. Others of us worry that someone we love will never be set free from his or her addiction.

(In PSG, p. 82) **What factors contribute most to alcohol and drug abuse? Can someone be a social or recreational user and not be an abuser? Explain.**

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize a verse and apply it in a real-life situation.

Memorize Proverbs 23:19. Reflect on how this verse can guide you in giving your body to the Lord. Write out a prayer to God. Ask Him to show you any pattern of behavior in your life that needs to be brought under His control, to strengthen you so you can be released from its grip, and He alone can have complete control over you.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 22:17–24:22

The verses in this section of the Book of Proverbs have been arranged to provide God's people with thirty pearls of His wisdom. In the introduction to this extended portion of Scripture, Solomon underscored the need to pay close attention to the wisdom in each of the thirty proverbs. Giving attention to them would enable God's people to trust Him and to follow His leadership as they live in a way that pleased Him (22:17-21).

The first ten proverbs offered God's wisdom about wealth and power (22:22–23:11). The eagerness to acquire wealth may tempt some to rob from the poor or to take advantage of the helpless. God would hold people accountable when they gave into such a temptation. Moving an ancient property line would have been foolish because the Lord knew the original boundaries.

The instruction that parents give to their children comes into view in the next seven proverbs (23:12-28). Parents who teach their children to live according to God's wisdom can count on gaining the distinct satisfaction that comes from watching them strive to do what's right.

The final thirteen proverbs of this section do not appear to be organized around one central theme in particular but offer God's wisdom on an assortment of issues (23:29–24:22). The issue of alcoholism gets serious consideration. The description of a person enslaved by alcohol gives God's people a sad example of what can happen to a person who loses control of his or her body. Another issue involves the eagerness to be in the company of evil people. The issue is addressed with a warning about being foolish and an appeal to be wise. A wise person builds a life that endures difficulties. By contrast, foolish people plot schemes with evil intent, but they will not endure.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE PROMISE (PROV. 23:17-18)

VERSE 17

The fear that paralyzes most parents may have swept over Solomon when he thought about the decisions in life that his son would have to make. Even though Solomon and his wife may have worked consistently to influence him so he would walk in God's wisdom, they registered their concern about the influences beyond their control. One day their son may find his **heart** turned to temptations that would lead him away from the path of godly wisdom. **Sinners** would be recognized by their decision to reject the Lord's wisdom and to choose a foolish path that they thought promised fulfillment. Indeed, the path they chose might have looked appealing. The heart of Solomon's son might be filled with envy toward them and the path they had taken.

When we see people who have rejected the Lord living in a way that appears to be fulfilling, we might begin to wish we could exchange our lives for theirs, at least for a little while. In an effort to scratch the itch of our envy, we may choose to take some secret steps toward experiencing what they seem to enjoy. Such a temptation can wreak havoc on a young Christian, but its powerful influence can also erode a mature believer's perspective too. For that reason, we're wise when we call attention to the disastrous effect that the secret envy of sinful behavior can have on us.

Hope is much more than wishful thinking; it is extreme confidence in God. Hope in Him will never be dashed.

VERSE 18

Aware of the potential temptation of a sinful lifestyle, Solomon reminded his son of the promise associated with living in the fear of the Lord. Fearing the Lord would prompt him to follow Him, to take His path of wisdom, and to trust God with his future. Solomon assured his son that a promising **future** rested in his willingness to entrust his life to the Lord. Therefore, instead of wandering away from the Lord and drifting into a lifestyle dominated by foolishness, his son would be better served if he placed his **hope** in the Lord. Hope is much more than wishful thinking; it is extreme confidence in God. Hope in Him will never be dashed.

When we place our trust in the Lord, we can count on Him to give us the security that comes with the gift of eternal life through Christ. We will not be disappointed with what the future holds for us.

What's the source of your security? How do you demonstrate your confidence in the Lord?

VERSE 17

¹⁷ Don't let your heart envy sinners; instead, always fear the LORD.

VERSE 18

¹⁸ For then you will have a future, and your hope will not be dashed.

THE PETITION (PROV. 23:19-21)

VERSES 19-21

¹⁹ Listen, my son, and be wise; keep your mind on the right course.

²⁰ Don't associate with those who drink too much wine or with those who gorge themselves on meat.

²¹ For the drunkard and the glutton will become poor, and grogginess will clothe them in rags.

VERSES 19-21

Pay close attention to the challenge to **listen**. The challenge comes on the heels of a severe warning about envying sinful behavior (v. 17). It's a stern challenge. It certainly needs to be firm when we consider what's at stake. Shifting our priority away from walking with the Lord will take a huge toll on us. For that reason, resisting the temptation to shift our focus away from Him has to be taken seriously. By controlling our thoughts, we follow the Lord's wisdom because we're certain it's **the right course** for us to take. Staying on course shows that we're devoted to Him and His direction for our lives. It also means we trust Him to take us through troubling situations. That kind of devotion mandates that we don't allow competing influences to take the reins of our minds.

Solomon brought two of those competing influences to the attention of his son. He pointed to people in his son's circle of relationships who would indulge in them. He knew that some of those people would give themselves over to drunkenness. They would keep on drinking until they drank **too much**. Neither would they control themselves when it came to food. They would be completely out of control as they stuffed themselves with whatever they could get their hands on to eat. Unable to stop, they would demonstrate their loss of control by the way they would **gorge themselves**.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT GLUTTONY AND ALCOHOL

- Warnings against gluttony: Proverbs 23:1-3,20-21; 28:7
- Warnings against alcohol: Proverbs 23:29-35; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18
- The physical effects of alcohol: Job 12:25; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35
- The mental effects of alcohol: Hosea 4:11
- The spiritual effects of alcohol (deadens one's self to God): Isaiah 5:11-12
- Cases of drunkenness in the Bible: Noah (Gen. 9:21); Lot (Gen. 19:33); Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36); Uriah the Hethite (2 Sam. 11:13); Elah, king of Israel (1 Kings 16:9); Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:16)
- The alternative to drunkenness: Be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18)
- God gave us our bodies and wants us to honor Him with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Solomon warned that the future of a glutton as well as a drunkard looks grim. Consider his foreboding forecast for people who allow these indulgences to control them. They will end up in poverty. The need for alcohol makes a person spend money on it that should be set aside for food and shelter. Furthermore, a drunkard will keep on buying it until all the money is gone. By the same token, gluttons indulge in food. Shoving food into our mouths generally leaves us groggy. The **grogginess** leaves

us unable to be productive when we work. It also leads to laziness. When we're too lazy to work and earn enough money to buy proper clothes, we're going to pay a high price for our foolish loss of control over our bodies. As a result of our lack of control, we'll end up wearing **rags**. In our culture, we tend to abhor drunkenness but don't usually have the same attitude about gluttony. However, God's wisdom prompts us to treat both of them in the same way. Instead of giving in to them, we handle our difficult trials by trusting the Lord to help us to get through them.

What's your approach to overcoming the conflicting influences that attempt to take control of you?

THE PORTRAIT (PROV. 23:29-32)

VERSES 29-32

Solomon continued to warn his son about the danger of drunkenness. He used a series of six questions to identify the problematic behavior of someone who had become addicted to alcohol. By using the series of questions, he painted a pitiful portrait of addiction.

Although Solomon's warning deals with the addition to alcohol, the wisdom of his counsel could also be applied to any substance to which a person could become addicted. He warns us that problems related to emotional fatigue or depression could result from addiction. Emotional fatigue can be marked by **woe** and **sorrow**. Problems with interpersonal relationships can be connected to addiction as well. It could account for someone's **conflicts** with other people or **complaints** about them. Of course, physical clues like **wounds for no reason** and bloodshot eyes may be warning signs of addictive behavior too.

The answer to the series of six questions provides an opportunity to look a little more intently into the lives of people who have lost control of their lives. They live under the control of their addictions. For people addicted to alcohol, the obsession with drinking reigns supreme. The more they drink, the more they need to drink. Craving something to drink compels them to **linger** in the company of liquor. That's where they spend their time. The craving for alcohol doesn't stop with only one form of it. Their addiction drives them to search for more potent products. Along with **wine**, they also crave hard liquor. That's what comes to mind when we think about the reference to **mixed wine**.

The temptation begins with a glance that gives way to another look, and then another.

What's the best way to avoid drug abuse or alcoholism? The answer to that question is given in a straightforward manner. **Don't gaze** into the glass, stare at the bottle of pills, or obsess over the images of other

VERSES 29-32

²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has conflicts? Who has complaints? Who has wounds for no reason? Who has red eyes?

³⁰ Those who linger over wine; those who go looking for mixed wine. ³¹ Don't gaze at wine because it is red, because it gleams in the cup and goes down smoothly. ³² In the end it bites like a snake and stings like a viper.

addictive substances. The temptation begins with a glance that gives way to another look, and then another.

At the beginning of the journey of addiction, alcohol seems to have exactly what a person wants.

Alcohol and drugs may look appealing, but the appearance turns out to be a ruse. At the beginning of the journey of addiction, alcohol seems to have exactly what a person wants. It seems to calm frayed nerves, settle stressed-out minds, and temper emotional outbursts. It promises to give a good night's rest, but not for long. As addictive behavior begins to take shape, the need for more alcohol becomes a mandate that will not be ignored. In the end, addictive substances reveal their true nature. They don't give the help that they claim to provide. Instead of being supportive crutches that help their victims to get through a tough day, they're as venomous as a snake. Their bite leaves nothing but an infected body racked with intense pain and endless misery. The poisonous venom of drugs and alcohol stings.

(In PSG, p. 88) **What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Serpents and Vipers," available digitally in the Summer 2020 *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

VERSES 33-35

³³ Your eyes will see strange things, and you will say absurd things.

³⁴ You'll be like someone sleeping out at sea or lying down on the top of a ship's mast. ³⁵ "They struck me, but I feel no pain! They beat me, but I didn't know it! When will I wake up? I'll look for another drink."

THE PROBLEM (PROV. 23:33-35)

VERSES 33-35

Drug abuse and alcoholism present serious problems for addicts as well as for the people who love them. The seriousness of the problem becomes more obvious when folks suffering with addiction display strange behavior. Their minds begin to play tricks on them, and so do their **eyes**. They see what's not actually there, or they can't see what's really right in front of them. When the visions get violent or frightening and appear to be more like hallucinations, the problem has gotten worse. In turn, the hallucinations get worse as the victim of addiction seeks more drugs or alcohol, and the downward spiral continues.

The problem becomes more complicated when the abuse of alcohol or drugs makes its victims lose control of their speech. That's when they have difficulty with what they think as their minds can't seem to hold on to a thought. Likewise, they talk in confusing ways about **absurd** things. They talk around in verbal circles with a convoluted line of reasoning and never make sense as they babble. Also, their words run together as they try to utter them. The abuse has numbed the ability of the mind and mouth to work together so understandable speech can be produced.

Picture yourself trying to sleep through a storm that's raging in the middle of the **sea**. You're in a ship that's being tossed about by the waves. The peaks and valleys of the waves nauseate you. The force of the wind

pushes you one way and then another like you're a feather caught in a gale. No matter how hard you try, you can't seem to get on your feet and stay there for very long. Before you know it, you're thrown down to the floor once more. You make your way to the ship's **mast**, the long pole that holds up the sail, and somehow climb it until you get to the top. The distance from the ship's hull can be terrifying, and the winds whipping the ship in every direction multiplies the terror. You can look down and see the ship's hull. When you look up, you see nothing but ominous clouds and feel the wind trying to strip you away from the mast. For anyone who's drinking heavily or abusing drugs, that's how it feels to them even though they're at home lying safely in their beds.

While terror may have filled the heart of a person who's drunk, Solomon noted that physical **pain** couldn't penetrate his or her body. The victim of addiction didn't react like someone who had been **struck** with a fist. Neither the fist nor the club made an impact. Being beaten would usually be so painful that the victim would be screaming out in anguish. However, a person under the control of alcohol wouldn't be able to know that it happened.

Only one problem would be on the mind of a person suffering from addiction. Being struck or even being beaten would not be a matter of concern. Their pressing problem has to do with getting **another drink**. That need alone would prompt someone who's drunk to wake up from the stupor brought on by the alcohol. Waking up would be difficult because the influence of alcohol would be potent. However, a person in search of another drink would work hard to get out of bed and look for it.

With this description, the problem of alcohol and drug abuse has been underscored for believers. It also challenges us to give the control of our bodies to the Lord alone. "Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

How can you help others around you who seem to be suffering with addiction?

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

PREPARE: Prior to the session write randomly on a board the following: *Designated Driver, MADD®, DUI, Addiction, Abuse, Pleasure, Social, Relationships, and High.*

INTRODUCE: After most have arrived, direct attention to the written words and ask how they are related.

EXPLAIN: *Throughout Proverbs and specifically during the previous session, we focused on the foundation of wisdom as the fear of the Lord. Repeatedly Solomon calls for following God's instructions and staying on the path. In today's session, he moves into the more specific area of the impact of misusing or abusing alcohol on our lives and relationships.*

ASK: *How is the use of alcohol and drugs glamorized in our culture today?*

STATE: *Unfortunately for some, alcohol is like stepping off a cliff into a deep trap that then turns into a tragedy that impacts all areas of life.*

QUERY: *What factors contribute most to alcohol and drug abuse? Can someone be a social or recreational user and not be an abuser? Explain. (PSG, p. 82)*

TRANSITION: *Solomon, in the section of Scriptures called the "thirty wise sayings of Solomon," provides counsel in how to live as God's people.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Today's session is set within the larger context of Proverbs 22:17–24:22. Using *Understand the Context* (p. 94) and **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Proverbs and Song of Songs*), note specifically how the truths shared in this session build on the first nine chapters of Proverbs and connect to the sovereignty of God in the last session.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud Proverbs 23:17-18, as the group listens for the source of hope found in these verses.

EXPLAIN: *In Proverbs 1:7, we learn that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." This admonition is repeated in Proverbs 9:10. In Proverbs 23:17, we're again instructed to always fear the Lord.*

ASK: *How does fearing the Lord provide hope?*

GUIDE: Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and explain their answer. Provide a copy of **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Fear of God*) for each person and review their findings. Discuss how their answers to the questions on page 84 of the PSG have changed as a result of learning more about fearing God.

TRANSITION: *In previous sessions, we confirmed that wisdom comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. In Christ, we find promise for a secure future. Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 1:27 and Hebrews 10:23 to the group. Ask: Describe a time when you found yourself reassured in the hope Christ gives believers.*

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 23:19-21**, while the group identifies the warning provided by Solomon.

HIGHLIGHT: Lead the group to highlight key words in the verses. Identify both positive and negative words.

ASK: *What are the similarities between alcohol abuse and gluttony? In what ways are alcoholism and gluttony two approaches for dealing with the same issues?* (PSG, p. 87)

EXPLAIN: *Solomon wanted God's people to know that the abuse of alcohol and food often leads to a loss of relationships and financial resources as well as spiritual distress.*

READ: Lead the group to read **silently Proverbs 23:29-32**, looking for the characteristics of the person misusing or abusing alcohol. Call for the group to name what they noted in the verses.

ASK: *What actions might a person need to take so they don't find themselves in the picture painted by addiction?* (PSG, p. 88)

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read **Proverbs 23:33-35**, while the group listens for the consequences of abusive drinking.

ASK: *How is Solomon's portrait of addiction seen in real life? Which image in the description makes the greatest impact? Explain.* (PSG, p. 89)

TRANSITION: *Solomon's words are clear that we're to keep focused on the Lord and not on the actions of others. Temptations may abound, but we're warned of the consequences of not avoiding addictive behaviors.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: Reread **Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35**, and lead the group to list on a board principles gained from these verses. Then direct attention to the bulleted points on page 90 of the PSG. Allow the group to compare the lists.

REFLECT: Lead the group to consider the relationships they have that encourage them to pursue a godly lifestyle. Ask: *When you face a challenge or difficulty, to what or whom do you turn to first? What does your answer reveal about what or who you trust in life? What changes do you need to make in light of today's study?* (PSG, p. 90)

CHALLENGE: *Our world frequently glamorizes alcohol and gluttony while minimizing the consequences. Our study in Proverbs reveals that God expects us to be good stewards of the bodies He has given us.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for providing clear direction for godly living. Pray that He will help us to keep our eyes focused on Him and that we would lean on God's strength when we feel weak. Pray that God would lead us to walk in the path of holiness in all our relationships. Pray that the testimony of our relationship with Jesus Christ will encourage others to pursue godly living.



PRACTICE

- Prayerfully consider the people in the group who may be dealing with a challenge related to the use or abuse of alcohol or drugs. Be sensitive to their needs and pray that God's Word would be illuminating and clear.
- Reflect on who you turn to when faced with a challenge or difficulty and whether you know that you can count on that person for godly counsel.
- Study the attendance patterns of the group, and make a special effort to encourage individuals who seem to be withdrawing from the group.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the Focus Attention idea, enlist a person to share a testimony of successfully overcoming an addiction problem. Consider researching alcohol facts and statistics online to provide information as the session begins.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the study of Proverbs 23:17-21,29-35, reread the verses and provide the following assignment choices to teams of two to four: (1) With the provided supplies complete a poster that would summarize the principles from these verses. (2) Prepare a role play illustrating the destructiveness of the misuse and abuse of alcohol. (3) Write a poem or song that would provide insight on these verses. (4) Write a paraphrase of verses 17-21 or verses 29-35 in today's language. Provide time for each team to report on the assignment they selected.
- Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Solomon Time Line*). Lead the group to reflect on the varying voices in culture at the time when Proverbs was written. Guide them to compare modern day voices and how believers must be careful to focus on God's Word when making important decisions.
- For further reflection on Proverbs 23:19, allow time for teams of two or three to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 85). Direct the group to pray for any strongholds or negative patterns discussed and for those that may not have been expressed.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to identify specific Scriptures that are an encouragement to them when facing a challenge or difficulty (ex: Ps. 16:5; Eph. 4:1-2; Phil. 4:13). State that today's study requires us to do soul searching as we examine how the verses practically and personally influence our lives. Lead them to identify one action they need to take as a result of today's study.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session read aloud the lyrics of "Take Time to Be Holy," by William D. Longstaff. Consider enlisting four people prior to the session to read a verse of the hymn.