

How to Use This Bible Study

“Inner Venture” is a one-hour group session created to help students ramp up the role of God’s Word in their lives—both in quality and quantity of time.

Ideas for use:

- as an intro session to launch a new small-group Bible study
- as a free-standing session to encourage students to maximize God’s Word in their daily lives
- as a follow-up session after an event or workcamp, designed to take students to the next level with any new commitments they’ve made
- as a retreat session on the subject of God’s Word

One Week Out

A few days before your group session, glance at the “One Week Out” section on p. 7 of the Group Guide to make sure you have all the bases covered.

Leader Section

Personal Prep 2

This is a guided personal study for the leader. You’ll want to do this a few days before your session.

Group Guide 7

This is a guide for leading the session, including discussion questions, application ideas, prompts for moving from one exercise to the next and more. Read over the Group Guide just after doing the Personal Prep and again just before the session.

Student Section

Student Journal Pages 13

These pages are reproducible. Each student in your group will need a copy.

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Setting the Heart

Of all the things God talked about in His Word, what do you think revs Him up most? What subject is closest to His heart? Is it love? Salvation? Morality perhaps? David drops a hint in Psalm 138:2: "...for you have exalted above all things your name and your word."

David identifies two things: God's name, which encompasses *all* of His character—and His Word, without which we'd know zip about His love, His salvation and the life He wants for us. *That's* what revs God up the most.

God's people, Israel, reached a critical point in history when they were about to cross the Jordan River and head into the Promised Land—critical in that they were God's chosen tool to redeem a lost world, and this was where the rubber would meet the road. God had poured into them everything they needed to reflect His character to the surrounding pagan nations. Now it was up to them to *be* His people by obeying His holy laws. And so, after Moses recounted the entire Law to Israel (take our word for it—that was one *long* sermon) he stressed one final point. Read this point in the verses below, and let it speak to you about a critical point in *your* history—this step you're taking to lead teens in a study of God's Word.

45 When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. 47 They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

—Deuteronomy 32:45–47

In today's culture, and often in the church, the Bible is relegated to the status of "idle words." We see it as a formidable book that's too big to read, too old to be relevant, or too confusing to be understood. But in reality, these words are *our life!* The key to unlocking all the power and blessing is simple: "*Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you...*"

Digging In

Did you ever get a love letter from someone you had a serious crush on? Think back to your love-struck days of grade school (or maybe last week), and take a second to jot in the margin two or three phrases that describe how you approached that letter.

Of all the passages in God's Word that are *about* God's Word, one stands out as a plea from God regarding how He wants us to approach His Word—and it rivals love-letter intensity. Proverbs is a collection of wise writings designed to illustrate what obedience to and application of God's Word looks like in daily life. Proverbs 2 is an introductory chapter written by Solomon to elevate the importance of God's Word in his own son's life. (It can do the same in your life, too.) Read Proverbs 2:1–15 from your Scripture sheet, looking for these things:

- 1. Circle any action phrases you see regarding what the "son" should do with the "words."**

2. Draw a lightning bolt over any turning points you find in the passage (words like “then”).
3. Draw a rainbow over any promises that result from the actions.

Now take a minute to list in the left column below all of the action phrases you marked. List in the right column all of the promises you marked.

Action Phrases

Promises

Insight

Marking Scripture and listing the information you find there are two basic tools of inductive Bible study—an approach to Scripture that encourages us to carefully observe and ingest what God’s Word says *before* we make the application. Seeking, marking and writing helps slow us down so that God has greater opportunity to speak to us personally through His Word. These steps will also help you observe key details you might miss if you simply “read” the passage.

As you do this Personal Prep, be aware that you’ll be guiding your students in this same approach. This will infuse their Bible time with purpose and guarantee a greater payoff for their time in the Word! It can also help them experience the Bible as God’s love letter, written personally to them.

Taking It Inward

Remember the “if/then” proofs from high school geometry? By now you’ve learned that life itself is one big “if/then” statement (*if* you do this, *then* this will happen). Maybe you noticed the “if/then” in Proverbs 2—and what an incredible set of *thens*!

It’s striking how the promises of Proverbs 2 paint a picture of the kind of mature believers we work to develop through youth ministry. Meditate on your list of promises above. Then, in the space below, rephrase each promise as a goal for your student ministry.

Now the hard part. Often we want to enjoy the promises of Proverbs 2, but fall short on the actions that are guaranteed to release those promises. Think about your personal time in God’s Word over the last ten days. How would your approach compare with the actions in Proverbs 2? Rate yourself on the scale below:

Casual/haphazard

0

1

2

3

4

5

Intense/hidden-treasure searching

6

7

8

9

10

Now think about your student ministry. Is there a time in your regular student programming that encourages this kind of interaction with God's Word?

Cross Checking

The passages below represent several different eras in God's revelation to us. As you read these verses from your Bible, run each passage through the questions below, and jot down the answers you find.

What are you asked to do with God's Word?

How is God's Word described?

What is it capable of doing?

What promises are connected with it?

Deuteronomy 4:1–9

Matthew 7:24–27

Psalms 19:7–14

Matthew 13:23

Psalms 119 (Grab any block of 10 verses.)

John 14:21

Ezra 7:8–10

Colossians 3:16–17

Taking It Inward

Take a minute to pray over the notes you just made, and jot down your thoughts on the questions below.

What is God saying to you about His Word?

What personal adjustments do you need to make to enjoy the promises that come from knowing and heeding God's Word?

What adjustments should you make in your student ministry—steps that can encourage your students to ramp up their relationship with Scripture?

Wrapping It Up

The purpose of this session is to help you and your students consider ways to jump-start the Bible study aspect of your student ministry, as well as in each person's daily life. In the group session, students will be brainstorming ways their group can grow a deeper, more consistent relationship with the Word. But before the group meets, take a few minutes to think about how you could freshen up your discipleship efforts and become more purposeful in providing invigorating study experiences.

IDEAS

1. Small Groups

One of the best ways to help students experience Scripture in a fresh way is by providing a time for hungry students to meet voluntarily to study the Word together. Consider meeting in a home where students can linger with Scripture, ask tough questions and pray deep prayers. You may want to try a small-group study from InWord; our studies intentionally incorporate the level of intensity Solomon described in Proverbs 2.

2. Provide “Bite-sized” Bible Study Plans

A common obstacle to good Bible study is simply not having a plan. Help your students avoid the default plan of “point and shoot” by suggesting practical ideas that can give them a sense of accomplishment and some immediate payoff. Some suggestions:

- *Own* a short book of the Bible like Philemon or Jude. Find the key themes, instructions, and promises. What does this book say about God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit? Learn as much as you can about the writer and first readers of the book (if it's a letter). Become your family's authority on one of these books!
- Spend a month in a power-packed chapter like Romans 12, Ephesians 5 or Colossians 1.
- Follow one person through Scripture, like Joshua, Peter or John the Baptist.

3. Walk Thru the Bible Retreat

Use a Walk Thru the Bible seminar as a launch pad for a new emphasis on Bible study in your ministry and your students' lives. Find a seminar (www.walkthru.org) that's in reasonable road-trip distance, and make it a weekend retreat.

Before you close this Personal Prep, take a minute to read through the Group Guide so that you're confident with the flow of the session and familiar with the exercises. Be sure to check out “Materials Needed,” and allow time to reproduce the student pages.

Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–15

- ¹ My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
² turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,
³ and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴ and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
⁷ He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
⁸ for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.
⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.
¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
¹¹ Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.
¹² Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse,
¹³ who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways,
¹⁴ who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,
¹⁵ whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

One Week Out

Prompt

You may want to send notes or e-mails to your students about the first session, reminding them when and where the group will meet.

Pray

Ask the prayer warriors in your life to pray for this session. Pass along the names of students, as well as the date and time you plan to meet, so that your prayer warriors can pray in detail.

Prep

We know you know that the best discipling comes from the leader's heart—and that's what the Personal Prep (p. 2) is all about. Allow about an hour to personally prepare for your session and a few extra minutes for reproducing student pages.

Materials Needed

For this session each student will need student journal pages (pp. 13–14), a Bible and a pen. You'll need to supply a dry-erase board for the room and a pack of colored pencils (enough for each student to have two colors).

Session Intro

Goals

As students experience this session, they will...

- compare God's Word with a love letter, written to them;
- discover the potential payoff for experiencing Scripture with love-letter intensity;
- be challenged to intensify their personal relationship with God's Word.

Prayer

When students have gathered, thank them for being a part of this study. Pray that their hearts will be open to what God wants to say—and that this session will be a jump-start toward making God's Word a vital part of their lifelong pursuit of Christ.

Open

Before you jump in, divide the dry-erase board into three columns. Introduce the subject by asking students to discuss experiences they've had in sending and receiving love letters. Use the following questions to get things rolling:

Who here has ever *received* a love letter?

What do you do with a love letter you get from someone you have a crush on?

List these responses in the left-hand column on the board. Examples might include: You devour it, reread it again and again, pick it apart word by word, really think about what

it might mean, carry it with you, read it until it's almost worn out, share it with friends, practically memorize it!

Who here has ever sent a love letter?

What do you hope is happening on the other end after you've sent the letter?

After discussing these questions, **transition into study mode** by saying something like this:

Have you ever thought about the fact that the Bible is one big love letter to us? Over and over, God tells us in His Word how much He loves us. In the next few minutes we'll discover that He wants us to read the Bible with love-letter intensity (like the actions on the board). He also wants us to respond to it, and He promises great things when we do.

Digging In

Explain that the book of Proverbs is a collection of wise thoughts and sayings that show what obeying God's Word can look like in daily life. Proverbs 2 is an intro chapter written by a king named Solomon, who was trying to help his son make wise decisions in life. (Incidentally, this chapter—if we do what it says—can do the same thing for us.)

Before jumping in, **share** that the group is going to go at Proverbs 2 in a different way than they've approached the Bible before. Introduce them to a love-letter approach to Scripture by sharing these points (in your own words):

- **Rather than simply reading the verses, we're going to be looking for specific things.**
- **When we find those things, we're going to do something to help us notice and remember them.**
- **Remember, the goal—as with any good love letter—is to respond to what we find.**

Ask your students to use their colored pencils to **mark the following things** as they read Proverbs 2:1–15 from their journal pages:

- 1. Look for anything we should do with God's Word. Circle these actions in one color. (A key word to look for is "if.")**
- 2. Look for any promises or results from these actions. In a different color, draw a rainbow over what you find. (A key word to notice is "then." In fact, you may want to put a lightning bolt over the word "then," so you can notice the abrupt change.)**

After a few minutes, **ask the group** what actions they found. List these in the middle column on the board, labeled "If You." (There is space for your students to record this info on their journal pages as well.) Try to capture the important actions in the passage, but don't worry if your list isn't as detailed as ours below.

IF YOU...

- accept my words (2:1)
- store up my commands within you (2:1)
- turn your ear to wisdom (2:2)
- apply your heart to understanding (2:2)
- call out for insight (2:3)
- cry aloud for understanding (2:3)
- look for it as for silver (2:4)
- search for it as for hidden treasure (2:4)

Then **ask the group** what promises they found. List these in the right column, labeled “Then.”

THEN

- you will understand the fear of the LORD (2:5)
- you'll find the knowledge of God (2:5)
- you'll understand what is right, just and fair—every good path (2:9)
- wisdom will enter your heart (2:10)
- knowledge will be pleasant to your soul (2:10)
- discretion will protect you (2:11)
- understanding will guard you (2:11)
- wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men (2:12)

Taking It Inward

Now take a few minutes to **process the info on the board** by discussing these questions:

What are some ways these promises could play out in our daily life?

Elicit that these promises would:

- help us make good choices/decisions
- help us see the deception that leads to temptation
- guard and protect us from trouble or evil influences
- make it very hard to cave to temptation
- help us discover and experience God's will in our lives

Do these promises sound like things you'd like to have?

What is God asking of us (in this passage) before we can experience these promises?

How do the actions in the “if” column compare with the actions in our “love letter” column.

Elicit that the level of intensity is almost identical.

The next set of questions appears on the student journal page. Ask students to write their responses before sharing them with the group.

How does your personal Bible time stack up against the intensity level in Proverbs 2?

I got nothin'

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I'm on it!

To what extent would you like to ramp up your personal Bible time, so that you can experience the promises of Proverbs 2?

I'm fine where I am
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Bring it on!
10

After the students have responded on paper, ask any volunteers to share and expand on their responses.

Cross Checking

Before moving on, you may want to **express the following** to your group:

1. **We're not talking about memorizing information in the Bible, but about getting to know God through His Word.**
2. **We're not talking about a task-oriented reading plan, but about spending quality time with God's actual words—whether it's one chapter, one verse or even one phrase.**
3. **We're not talking about something that happens overnight, but about starting something now that will reap benefits over a long period of time.**

Share that God's Word talks a lot about God's Word. (Funny how that works.) Point out that the passages under "Cross Checking" on their journal pages are from different eras in the Bible, and that each teaches us something unique about God's Word. Invite your students to take their journal pages, Bibles and pens to a place where they can get alone for some "solitude time" with God—perhaps a corner of the room, a hallway or an empty room nearby. The instructions below are printed on their journal pages, but before the group disperses, make sure everyone understands what to do.

Each of the passages below checks in at a different time in God's Word. As you read these verses from your Bible, let God pour His heart out to you as you pour yourself into His Word. Keep an eye out for answers to the questions below, and jot down what comes to mind.

- What are you asked to do with God's Word? (His decrees, statutes, laws)
- How is Scripture described?
- What is it capable of doing?
- What promises are connected with it?

Deuteronomy 4:1–9

Matthew 7:24–27

Psalms 19:7–14

Matthew 13:23

Psalms 119 (Grab any block of ten verses.)

John 14:21

Ezra 7:8–10

Colossians 3:16–17

What do you think God is saying to you about His Word?

What personal adjustments would you have to make to enjoy the promises that come from knowing and doing God's Word?

Taking It Inward

After 10–15 minutes, **call the group back together**. Assure your students that it's okay if they're not finished. Help them process the solitude exercise by discussing these questions:

What struck you as new, convicting or challenging as you read the passages about God's Word?

What personal adjustments did you find yourself needing to make?

There's obviously an incredible payoff for spending quality time with God in His Word. Why do we find it so hard to do?

Draw out some common obstacles to good Bible study.

What are some things we could do—personally and in our student ministry—that would help us intensify the quality time we spend in God's Word?

Let this question launch a brainstorm discussion. Erase the love-letter column on the board, and list everything the students suggest. Keep the ideas flowing, and save specific steps for the "Wrapping It Up" exercise (below).

Wrapping It Up

Now select one or two brainstorm ideas, and **flesh out some specific steps** to take. In other words, don't leave this session without a plan in place! If the group is stumped for practical steps, suggest a few from your Personal Prep. Here's an idea you can use as an example.

Brainstorm Idea: Use the web and e-mail to study something together.

Specific Steps:

1. Choose a small book of the Bible, like Colossians.
2. Designate a study leader (adult or student).
3. Have the study leader e-mail (or post on a website) a few verses each week with some simple guidelines on how to study the verses—suggestions for things to look for, questions to process, applications to consider.
4. Ask everyone to read the passages and journal thoughts and responses to whatever the leader asks. Each person should e-mail (or post on a website) his/her thoughts and convictions about those verses by the end of the week.
5. Repeat the process with the next set of verses.
6. When you've finished the book, compile the e-mails/posts into a journal, and distribute it to the entire student ministry.

Optional Close #1

After you've identified a plan to set in motion, **read the following quote** to your students.

A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles like this:

“Inside of me there are two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time.” When asked which dog wins, the man reflected for a moment and replied, “The one I feed the most.”

Challenge your students to strive for “good dog days,” and pray for the will to make those days happen. **Close the session** by praying for a hunger for God's Word, in your students' lives and in your church or ministry.

Optional Close #2

After you've identified a plan to set in motion, **share the following points** with your group:

- Great movements of God in Scripture and throughout history (revivals, reformations, awakenings) have often been sparked by one person or handful of people deciding to take the Word of God seriously.
- Often the people sparking the movement were young—teens, college students or young adults.
- Think of what could happen if just those of us in this group decided to take the Word of God seriously.

Close the session by praying for a hunger for God's Word, in your students' lives and in your church or ministry.

Digging In

Proverbs 2:1–15

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² turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,
³ and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
⁴ and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
⁷ He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
⁸ for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.
⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path.
¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
¹¹ Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.
¹² Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse,
¹³ who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways,
¹⁴ who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,
¹⁵ whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

IF YOU...

THEN

Taking It Inward

How does your personal Bible time stack up against the intensity level in Proverbs 2?

I got nothin' **I'm on it!**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

To what extent would you like to ramp up your personal Bible time, so that you can experience the promises of Proverbs 2?

I'm fine where I am **Bring it on!**
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Cross Checking

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- **What is it capable of doing?**
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Colossians 3:16–17

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What personal adjustments would you have to make to enjoy the promises that come from knowing and doing God's Word?