

# **Making Life Work** **Putting God's Wisdom into Action**

By Bill Hybels

## **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

### **Introduction and Chapter 1: Pursue Wisdom**

1. How would you define wisdom?
2. Bill Hybels suggests that Proverbs is not a collection of promises or rigid rules about life but rather a group of comments about how life usually works. What difference will this make in how we read Proverbs?
3. How can having a wise parent, a wise child, a wise employer or a wise employee make a difference to someone?
4. The opposite of a wise person, says Proverbs, is a fool. What examples of foolish decisions or behaviour have you observed in the news lately?
5. One element of wisdom is understanding that actions have consequences. Why does that sometimes seem so hard for people to live by?
6. The book of Proverbs begins with the famous summary statement, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7). What is meant by that?
7. Review how Proverbs guided Hybels through a difficult relationship and through the wise use of his money early in his marriage. What strikes you most from these examples and why?
8. What do you hope to learn from the book of Proverbs?

### **Chapter 2: Take Initiative**

1. Jesus' parable about the money manager in Luke 16 is rather startling. Do you think his point is to commend taking initiative? Explain
2. Why do people often not take initiative to solve their problems? Why do they get stuck in ruts?
3. Bill Hybels says one symptom of "sluggardliness" is to put things off till later. In what ways or areas do you tend to procrastinate and why?
4. Why do we sometimes engage in "selective sluggardliness"?
5. If we do identify an area that needs some diligence and initiative, it can sometimes mean we'll have to eliminate something else in order to give time and attention to our area of "selective sluggardliness." How can we go about deciding what we should eliminate so we can give our efforts to something else that is more important

6. One area the author suggests we consider is that of relationships that are troubled or tense. What have you found that helps you to take steps in making peace in such situations?
7. Regarding work, Colossians 3:23 is quoted: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." What do you think it means to work for the Lord?
8. The third area considered is that of our physical well-being. What does to mean to honor God with our bodies?
9. Hybels suggests that we can be careless with money whether we've got a little or a lot. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
10. Finally, what does it mean to be rich toward God?
11. What step or steps do you think God has been leading you to take as a result of having considered the ideas in this chapter?

### **Chapter 3: Do Good**

1. When have you felt good about helping someone in need? What was the experience like?
2. Proverbs 3:27 says we should not withhold good from those who deserve it. How can we tell if someone deserves help or not?
3. When might helping someone actually do more harm than good?
4. How can you tell ahead of time if that might be the case?
5. Bill Hybels says that people involved in a "favor exchange program" are not really doing good in the sense Proverbs has in mind? Do you agree or disagree, and if so, why?
6. How does the parable of the good Samaritan indicate that there are boundaries to the amount we should help people?
7. How can doing good in a community context also help keep us from burning out?
8. Why is spiritual refreshment such an important part of giving us the energy we need to do good?
9. How have you found that to be true for you?
10. What do you need to do either to create boundaries for yourself in the ways you do good or to engage in acts of goodness that are in your power to do?

### **Chapter 4: Develop Discipline**

1. How have you see the beneficial effects of discipline in your life – or in the lives of those near you?
2. Do you think discipline is usually needed to achieve high goals? Explain.

3. How can a high goal increase our motivation to be disciplined in order to achieve it?
4. “No Pain, No Gain,” the saying goes. Do you agree or disagree with this?
5. When has employing delayed gratification helped you achieve a goal (in school, at work, in a relationship, with God)?
6. The third component of discipline mentioned is that of advance decision-making. In what kinds of situations do you think this would be helpful?
7. Why is advance decision-making so often helpful to us?
8. Several times in the chapter the author suggests that discipline can be an effective way to build relationships (with God or with others). Yet discipline can seem so cold and calculated. Do you think discipline is an effective way to build a relationship or not? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 5: Speak Truth**

1. Why do we feel so irritated or hurt when friends or coworkers or politicians don't tell the truth?
2. How does a failure to speak truth undermine the very foundation of a relationship?
3. Hybels suggests that “harmless” half-truths, exaggerations or white lies are really not harmless at all and may be just as problematic as big lies. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
4. Proverbs' first suggestion for lying less is talking less (10:19). Is this a worthwhile and realistic solution? Please explain.
5. How would you go about trying to talk less? In what kinds of situations would you try not to talk as much, or what kinds of topics would you stay away from?
6. The other side of truth telling is being willing to speak a hard but important truth. Why are we sometimes so unwilling to do this?
7. Have you ever tried to talk to someone about an issue that was difficult but significant? What were the results?
8. What did you learn from what went right or what went wrong in this conversation?
9. When you have seen someone combine truth and love effectively?
10. Do you think you are the kind of person who needs to work more on adding love and grace to your works, or are you the type who needs to put more emphasis on truth telling rather than peacekeeping?
11. What steps can you take to grow in this area?

### **Chapter 6: Choose Friends Wisely**

1. Describe one of the best friendships you've ever had.

2. How did your friend affect you and change you?
3. Bill Hybels says that there are certain kinds of people we should not make part of our “personal development team”. Do you agree or disagree with this strategy? Why or why not?
4. Seven characteristics are identified in Proverbs 16:116-19 that mark people we should not allow into our circle of close friends – people who are arrogant, who lie, who take advantage of the weak, who craft immoral or unethical plans, who slander, and who create conflict. How can such people have a negative effect on us?
5. In theory most of us would probably say that we want to avoid such people, but often we are attracted to them anyway. Why do you think this is so?
6. Do you think these seven traits are easy to identify in others or are they sometimes exhibited in more subtle ways? Explain.
7. The first question asked you to describe one of your best friends. How did that friendship get started?
8. Think about the kind of person you want to become, the character traits you’d like to develop. Who do you know who exhibits those traits?
9. What steps could you take to get to know that person or persons better?

### **Chapter 7: Marry Well**

1. Think of some couples who have been happily married for a number of years. What are some of the ingredients you see that have made their marriages strong?
2. What are some of the advantages the author mentions in going slow before deciding to marry?
3. Whether you are married or not, have you ever had people make comments or give subtle hints about their expectations for you regarding marriage? How did this affect you?
4. What do you think are some of the best ways to get to know someone before you marry him or her?
5. If you are married, how did married life turn out to be different than you expected?
6. Why is spiritual compatibility such an important factor in deciding who to marry and in married life?
7. Do you think Christians should turn down the possibility of marrying someone who is not a Christian even if all the other factors mentioned in this chapter are positive? Why or why not?
8. The author says that wounds from our background and brokenness can have serious effects on our marriages. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your response.

9. If an engaged or married couple have not worked through such issues from their past, what steps should they take?
10. If you were thinking about getting married, what people could you gather around you to help you work through this decision.
11. If you are married, who can be your Christian community and how can they support and help you strengthen your life together.

### **Chapter 8: Forge Strong Families – Part One**

1. What kind of marriage did your parents have?
2. What did you learn from your parents' marriage?
3. How would you like your marriage to be similar, and how would like it to be different?
4. Hybels suggests that marriage is often quite a lot of work. Why do you think this might be so?
5. What do you believe are the most helpful ways to improve a marriage and why?
6. Why is a lifelong commitment in marriage so essential to its stability?
7. The author says couples can move beyond stability to joy by building on every possible positive connection between a husband and wife. What good examples of this have you seen in your marriage or other marriages?
8. Why do opposites so often both attract and repel each other?
9. If you are married, in what ways can your spouse help you grow toward wholeness?
10. Why is adultery never a solution to pain in a marriage?
11. What strategies and tactics can be employed to keep from succumbing to sexual temptation?
12. How does a secure marriage translate into secure children?

### **Chapter 9: Forge Strong Families – Part Two**

1. How were you parented?
2. What did you parents do well and not so well?
3. It is not uncommon for children to disrespect their parents. How respectful were you of your parents and why?
4. Sometimes parents should be respected because of their position. But the author also suggests that parents should earn the respect of their children. How can this be done?
5. What are ways that a parent can love a child "irrationally"?
6. Proverbs 22:15 says that people are born with a predisposition toward rebellion or causing trouble. Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.

7. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" may be the most famous of the Bible's proverbs (a paraphrase of 13:24). When, if at all, do you think physical discipline is appropriate in parenting?
8. What other types of disciplinary action are effective and why?
9. Hybels writes that children need both love and limits. Why are both needed in combination to be effective?
10. How can parents decide when to intervene in a child's decision-making processes in order to protect him or her from hurtful or destructive decisions, and when should they stand back and let a child learn through the hard lessons of life?
11. Another gift parents can give children is identifying and encouraging their special areas of skill. Who were the people in your life who identified something special in you and how did they encourage your abilities and interests?
12. If you have children, what gifts do you see in them and how can you encourage them? If you do not have children, what gifts do you see in the children in your life (nieces, nephews, neighbors, children of friends), and how can you encourage them.

### **Chapter 10: Cultivate Compassion**

1. When have you experienced being the outcast or the one bullied or picked on?
2. Did anyone come to help you? What was that experience like?
3. In many places Proverbs suggests that God has a special concern for the poor. Why do you think this is so?
4. What are some of the ways the author says we can open our eyes to the poor?
5. What contact have you had with those who are poor or who are disabled or who live on the edges of society for one reason or another?
6. What other ways could you have your eyes opened to the poor?
7. A second way to develop compassion is to actually get involved in helping need people. How have you done this and what opportunities are there for you in this regard?
8. Sometimes our minds go to helping existing programs and organizations. What small individual acts (like the woman mentioned who paid for someone else's groceries) can you think of?
9. Money is often the hardest for us to give. Why is this often so?
10. Bill Hybels says tithing (giving a tenth of our income) to a local body of believers is a minimum. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
11. Building relationships is the last major suggestion offered for cultivating compassion. What relationships have you developed or could you develop?

## **Chapter 11: Manage Anger**

1. Ephesians 4:26 says we can be angry without sinning. What do you think this means?
2. When and how can good things come from our being angry?
3. Why is controlling our anger often so difficult?
4. Would you describe yourself as a “bottler” (someone who holds anger in) or as a “spewer” (someone who lets anger out)?
5. Why is being a “bottler” not a solution to anger? What problems arise from bottling our anger?
6. Why is being a “spewer” an inadequate solution to anger that actually leads to other problems?
7. Why is it sometimes hard to acknowledge that we are angry?
8. The author says we should look beneath the surface of the immediate event that triggered our anger to identify the underlying issue or attitude that is at the root of our anger. How can this help us deal constructively with anger?
9. Having identified an underlying issue, what alternatives are then possible besides bottling or spewing our anger?
10. Sometimes our anger, as the story about the lost bag illustrates, is just due to inconvenience or unavoidable circumstances. Why do these often bother us so much?
11. What are some good strategies for handling anger in these types of situations?

## **Chapter 12: Trust God in Everything**

1. The author considers learning to trust someone you might be dating. In what ways does this comparison help you understand what it means to trust God?
2. What does it mean to trust God?
3. Why is trusting God in this way difficult?
4. Why is it tempting to trust our own judgement instead of God's?
5. What experiences have you had in trusting God?
6. What kinds of items have you put in your “Very Smart File” or “Very Stupid File” that you have learned as a result of your experiences with God?
7. What risks are there in trusting God's leadership in life?
8. What benefits can come from making a decision to trust God in this way?
9. Hybels writes that trusting God is like a parachute jump in that it always involves an element of faith. Do you agree or not? Explain.
10. Many steps of faith in God are possible, from a first step, to a reaffirmation of an earlier commitment, to a decision to turn over one area of life to God that you have earlier labeled as “No Trespassing.” What step of faith might God be asking from you now?

