

Your Words Have Power

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: God has given you a unique voice as part of His purpose for your life.

Head Change: To know that the legacy you'll leave is impacted by the words you speak.

Heart Change: To celebrate that lies are temporary, but truth is eternal.

Life Change: To intentionally choose words that help, heal, and never harm.

OPEN

What's the most embarrassing thing you've ever said?

Our words can be hilarious. Our words can blow wind in someone's sails. Our words can cause untold damage. In the opening session of the series, Stephen Foster reminds us to take seriously the immense power of what comes out of our mouths.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Stephen answers these questions.

In what ways did God the Father and Jesus display the power of words?

What's the difference between our tongues and the ox's tongue in Stephen mentioned in his illustration?

How might our words encourage, comfort, and heal?

According to Stephen, what's the truth about truth?

Show SESSION #1: *Your Words Have Power* (11 minutes)

REVIEW

Stephen opens the session by pointing out our desperate need for guidance and wisdom as we navigate the challenges of relationships, decisions, and life in general.

Are you currently facing any decisions for which there isn't an obvious right or wrong path to pick? What do you typically do in situations like this?

Stephen says, 'People can be complex. How do we know who to trust, how to build friendships, how to lead well? It's so easy to misunderstand human interactions and to miss emotional dynamics at play. We can mess up relationships, sometimes without even trying!' **Can you relate? Share from your experiences, if you feel comfortable to do so.**

Thankfully, God didn't leave us without the tools to cope with the challenges and complexities of life. The book of Proverbs offers us priceless wisdom that we can apply to everyday life, shining a light on how to live life well and coaching us through common mistakes and challenging seasons. **Have you read Proverbs? If so, would you recommend it to a friend? Why, or why not?**

Stephen explains that the book of Proverbs also helps us to see Jesus – full of wisdom – more clearly. **Do you tend to think of Jesus as wise – or do you think of Him more as loving, or forgiving, or something else? Do you agree that it's impossible for us to live a wise life without the help of the Holy Spirit? Why, or why not?**

Our words have power, so we need to use them wisely. **What would change in your life, this week, if you were far more aware of the utter uniqueness of your voice: your vocal fingerprint given to you by God for a purpose? Would it change what you say, how you say it, and who you say it to? Why, or why not?**

Stephen says, 'The power of speech is an extraordinary gift from God laced with divine potential. God spoke a word and the universe was formed. Jesus spoke a word and people were healed, forgiven, transformed.' **Can you think of any famous speeches in more recent history that have literally changed the world? Whose words have hurt you most? Whose words have brought you hope and healing? Has God convicted you of ways your words have hurt others? Who may have been helped, encouraged, or inspired by your words?**

Speaking the right words at the right time with the right tone of voice requires wisdom and has the potential to bring tremendous blessing. **If you're ok to talk about it, share about a time when you had the right words to say, but you picked the wrong time or tone – or when the time was right to speak up but you didn't know what to say or how to say it. What did you learn? How would you do things differently if you could re-live those moments?**

Proverbs 12:18 says, 'The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.' Stephen illustrates this scripture by asking us to picture an actual ox's tongue. **Has an ox's tongue ever lied, sworn, bragged, gossiped, slandered, or spoken a cruel word? Has yours? Has an ox's tongue ever encouraged someone, or called out someone's passion or potential, or spoken kindly to someone going through a tough time? Has yours? Do you tend to underestimate the significance of the words you speak? Who is impacted daily by what you say (or don't say)?**

Stephen tells the amusing story of a time he thought no one was listening to his words – when in fact he was backstage in a recording studio, mic'd up and being broadcast for all to hear. 'If we don't realise that people are listening to our words,' Stephen says, 'we will be careless or reckless with the words we speak.' **Have you ever overheard something you wish you hadn't? How did you deal with the situation? Do you**

need to ask someone's forgiveness for something you've blurted out without thinking? Who do you need to forgive for damaging you with their words?

You might be tempted to vow never to speak again, for fear of the mess your reckless words might make. **Why is this *not* a good idea? Can you think of a time when you were so grateful someone decided not to shut up? Who needs your words of comfort or encouragement today? Who needs you to say *sorry* or *I love you*?**

Proverbs 15:1 says, 'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.' **In which situations do your words tend to stir up – or defuse – anger? Describe a time when you used a gentle answer to take the tension out of a volatile situation.**

Proverbs 12:19 tells us that, 'Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.' Stephen says, 'Lies are temporary, but truth is eternal. When people build their lives on lies, it's like building on sand. Things built on lies might look impressive – might appear powerful – but they will crumble and disappear.' **Considering the combined social media presence of your group, how quickly do you think you could spread a lie around the world? In your experience, does truth really outlive lies? How would you explain to a friend who has bought into the thinking of our post-truth culture that truth is absolute? Do you value truth in your personal relationships? Why, or why not? Why do you think truthfulness is integral to the mark you'll leave on this world?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read Psalm 19:14. **If our thoughts affect our feelings, and our feelings affect our words and actions, why is it so important that the meditations of our hearts are pleasing to God?**

Proverbs 16:24 reads, 'Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.' **Describe a time when someone's words of encouragement affected you both emotionally and physically.**

Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:36–37. **Do they freak you out? Why, or why not?**

Paul writes to the Ephesians, 'Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.' (Ephesians 4:29) He also writes to the Colossian believers, 'But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behaviour, slander, and dirty language.' (Colossians 3:8) **Think about the series you stream, the films you watch, the social media accounts you follow, and the people you hang out with. What's your next step towards eradicating dirty language from your life?**

LAST WORD

May you be mindful that your words have power and that the legacy you'll leave is closely connected to your honesty and integrity. May you be unwavering in your commitment to speaking the truth in love, even when it's hard, and when it costs you. May you offer the world only words that build others up, and may you build all the most important things in your life on God's truth.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Meditate on Colossians 3:17. Run through your plans for the week ahead. What will it look like for you to say and do everything with gratitude to God and in the name of Jesus?

Write: If you've been lying to God or yourself, come clean. Of course, God knows already. Still, write out your honest confession, bringing what's hidden into the light of His truth and love.

Pray: Text a couple of friends and arrange a time and place to meet for prayer. Pray for one another, that God would give you a deepening awareness of the influence your words wield, and that He would give you words of extraordinary wisdom and kindness.

Using Words Wisely

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: Our words have the power to transform people's lives.

Head Change: To know that we need the Holy Spirit's help to speak the right word to the right person at the right time in the right way.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that we can grow in wisdom and discernment regarding when and how to speak.

Life Change: To refuse to gossip and to exercise the superpower of gentleness.

OPEN

Have the words of a character in a book, in a film, or on a stage, ever reduced you to tears? If so, why were you so moved by what they said? Have your words ever made someone else cry (in a good way)?

Our words have the power to charm, and disarm, and bring about wondrous change. Of course, as we've already seen, our words also have the power to devastate. In this session, Stephen explores more of the wisdom Proverbs offers us for using our words well.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Stephen answers these questions.

Why might we feel flattered if someone gossips to us?

How does Stephen define gossip?

When it comes to words, Stephen says less is more. Why?

What does Stephen mean when he says we should 'play the long game' when it comes to using words wisely in relationships?

Show SESSION #2: *Using Words Wisely* (9 minutes)

REVIEW

Stephen opens the session with the adage, 'Nothing is often a good thing to do, and always a wise thing to say'. **Have you ever wished you'd taken this advice? Do you agree that the right words spoken at the right time to the right person in the right way are powerful enough to transform someone's life? Why, or why not?**

Proverbs 26:20 says, 'Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.' **Have you ever set a relationship on fire through gossip? If so, how did you put the fire out?**

Stephen says, 'Gossip is addictive. It's so tempting to listen to people speaking negatively about someone who isn't present! We can feel flattered when people are gossiping to us about another person because it implies that we're trusted, we're special, and we're in the inner circle!' **Can you relate? Share (without gossiping!) how someone else gossiping to you makes you feel. Do you agree that how someone talks to you about others is how they talk to others about you? How might remembering this change your interactions with certain people at work, at church, or in your social spaces?**

Stephen explains that gossip is when you're discussing someone and you're not part of the problem or the solution. Gossip can make us feel a sense of superiority in being able to identify other people's failings so clearly or a sense of camaraderie in winning other people to our cause. **Does gossip ever make you feel better about yourself? If so, does that feeling last long? Do you agree that how you speak about people who are not present will either build or erode trust with those who are present? Why, or why not? If you're comfortable to do so, share about a time when your side of the story definitely didn't represent the whole truth. Would you have told the story differently if the person you were talking about had been present?**

Stephen's amusing story about his friend unwittingly voice-noting him is actually very sobering... **How would your conversations change this week if, every time you spoke about someone who wasn't present, your phone recorded your words and sent that person a voice note of what you said?**

Gossip is fuel for the fire of quarrels. Without it, relationships have space to recover and be restored. **Which of your relationships need recovery and restoration? Has gossip played a role in causing the damage? What's your next step?**

Proverbs 10:19 says, 'Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues,' and Proverbs 15:28 says, 'The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.' When it comes to words, less is more. **Do you agree? Why, or why not? Why is it so easy for us, in this cultural moment, to use too many words in any given situation on any given day?**

Stephen says, 'We have more things to speak about, and more ways of speaking... Wisdom reminds us that it's very easy to speak the wrong word to the right person; very easy to speak the right word to the wrong person; very easy to speak the right word to the right person at the wrong time; very easy to speak the right word to the right person at the right time in the wrong way; but it is very hard to speak the right word to the right person at the right time in the right way. To do that we will need the help of the Holy Spirit.' **In which situations do you tend to lose your temper – and your word filter? Have you ever invited the Holy Spirit to be part of a conversation? If so, what**

difference did He make? What does Stephen mean when he says, ‘It’s very easy to win the argument and lose the person’? Who is the most self-controlled person you know? What have you learned from watching them in conversation?

Proverbs 25:15 says, ‘Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.’ **Can you think of any world leaders who have shaped their nations, for better or worse, with their words? What do you think Stephen means when he says that gentleness is a superpower? Where would those who know you best place your speech, on a scale of harsh to gentle?**

Stephen encourages us to exercise patience and play the long game when it comes to persuading those in our circles of influence. **Has impatience ever worked out well for you? When you’ve been persuaded to see a particular situation from someone else’s point of view, how did they win you over to their perspective?**

Stephen points out, ‘We can think that persuasion comes by superior arguments, or imposing manner, or by sheer power. But actually... we know that it’s often the gentle word which helps us to see a situation differently, realise where we have been in the wrong, been unfair, acted hastily or harshly. In a world of aggression and corrosive speech, gentleness is a superpower.’ **Who needs your superpower today?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

The following verses also deal with the destructiveness of gossip, slander, and lies: Proverbs 6:16–19, 10:18, 11:13, 16:28, 18:8, 20:19. **How would you explain to a five-year-old the power of their words and how important it is to use their words wisely?**

Read Psalm 34. **What kinds of words come out of the mouths of the godly? Explain the life hack offered by the psalmist in verses 12–13.**

Paul reminds Titus to remind his fellow believers: ‘They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarrelling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.’ (Titus 3:2) **Talk about a time when you were undone by someone’s humility and gentleness of speech. How did the experience change you?**

LAST WORD

Before moving on to the next session, repent, if God has convicted you of gossip or harsh speech. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you gentle words of great power and see what He will do. Your words can change the world!

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Read James 1:26 – slowly, aloud – from a different Bible translation from the one you normally use. What is God saying to you about bridling your tongue? What’s your next step?

Write: Think about the situations that typically infuriate you and tempt you to spew words you end up regretting. Write yourself a script of calm, gentle responses you could rehearse to use in those moments.

Pray: Set a phone reminder to go off during your lunch break every day this week. Use the prompt to repent of any gossip you’ve indulged in, and pray for wisdom, strength, and gentleness as you choose your words for the rest of the day.

Forging Great Friendships

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: The most significant thing about your life may not be an achievement you attain but a friendship you forge.

Head Change: To know that you become who you befriend.

Heart Change: To celebrate that spending time with wise people will make you wiser too.

Life Change: To forge great friendships by being the friend you long for others to be for you.

OPEN

Who was the first friend you made at school? Are you still friends?

In this session, Stephen walks us through the wisdom of Proverbs as it relates to our friendships, which are never neutral but influence the direction and the quality of our lives. Thus, how we navigate friendship is crucial to how live for God in this world.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Stephen answers these questions.

What happens to us if we hang around with unwise people?

How does friendship affect us, emotionally and physically?

According to Stephen, why do friendship circles these days tend to be ‘a mile wide and an inch deep’?

Why is feedback from our friends vital for our growth?

What makes Jesus the greatest friend?

Show SESSION #3: *Forging Great Friendships* (10 minutes)

REVIEW

Stephen opens the session by asking, ‘What if the most significant thing you did with your life wasn’t an achievement you attained, but a friendship you forged?’ **Does this seem farfetched to you? Why, or why not?**

Finding and keeping great friends is an indispensable life skill too often taken for granted. In a world which feels evermore transitory, dislocated, and in need of deeper connection, we need to build friendships which will help us to become more like Jesus.

When it comes to your ability to make friends, where would you place yourself on the sliding scale of rubbish to excellent? Do you have friends who encourage you to be more like Jesus? Do you think the world is more or less connected than it was, say, fifty years ago, and how has that affected the ways we form and maintain friendships?

Stephen points out that friends multiply joys and divide sorrows. They are shock absorbers for our difficult days, and they enhance our best days. **Share about a time when a friend helped you regain perspective after failure or cheered you on when you succeeded. Do you agree that friendships give meaning to life? Why, or why not?**

Research reveals that men in particular struggle to form close friendships and many live with perpetual loneliness. The number of people who report having no one in whom to confide has tripled over the past two decades. Stephen says, 'In our polarised, complex, and challenging cultural moment, friendship has never been more needed, and yet it seems it's harder for people to find than ever.' **Is this true, in your experience? Do you agree with Stephen that your friends can shape your destiny?**

Proverbs 13:20 says, 'Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.' That means, friendship isn't neutral, but influential. The quality of your friendships significantly impacts your resilience, coping mechanisms, and ability to absorb the pressures of life. Physiologically, friendship impacts your life on a cellular level such that it should be viewed on a par with smoking or drinking and can even increase your protection against stress and disease. **How have your friends influenced you? How have you influenced them? Have you ever wanted to trade in some of your friends for new ones? If so, why, and did you? Are the elderly people in your life surrounded by friends? If not, what's your next step?**

Stephen says, 'The company you keep crafts your character... Show me your friends and I'll show you your future.' **Who are the five people with whom you spend the most time? Are you becoming more or less like them? What do you admire most about them? Which of their lifestyle choices would you do well to avoid? Who are your wisest friends? How much time are you spending with them? Have you ever realised, as Stephen did, that you were hanging around with the wrong people entirely? What did you do about it? What practical examples could you use to explain to a seven-year-old or a seventeen-year-old that if they want to *have* great friends they need to *be* a great friend?**

Proverbs 18:24 reads, 'A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.' The Dunbar principle suggests our potential for connection is limited at 150 people. Jesus had twelve close friends, and only three very close friends. **Do you agree that social media and global movement make the early stages of friendship easy, but deeper connections more challenging? Why, or why not? Would you say your friendships are 1) wide and deep, 2) wide and shallow, 3) narrow and shallow, or 4) narrow and deep?**

To forge meaningful friendships that sustain and strengthen us, we need to choose our friends wisely and commit to side-by-side time spent, as well as the sharing of passions, interests, or experiences. **What do you have in common with your friends?**

People generally want to be around you when things are going well. Success gives us many companions. When hard times hit, you find out who your true friends are. **If you feel comfortable to talk about it, share about a time when you realised who your real friends were (or weren't).**

Proverbs 27:6 says, 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.' This refers to the power of friendship to call out the gold in people, as well as to offer honest, helpful feedback. **Do you think your friends feel free to point out your blind spots? Have they done so? If so, how did you respond? Were you grateful or offended? Have you ever been willing to risk a friendship to tell someone the truth? How did things turn out? Are there some people in your life who probably just tell you what they think you want to hear?**

Proverbs 17:9 says, 'Whoever would foster love covers over an offence, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.' Even in fantastic friendships, misunderstandings and miscommunications happen, and we need God's grace and wisdom not to pick up an offence but to forgive. **How have your friendships been affected by offence and unforgiveness? Do you think it's wise, in friendships, to pick your battles and only major on the majors? What might that look like in one of your friendships, this week? Share about a time when a friend forgave you.**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read Proverbs 22:24–25 and Proverbs 27:9. **Point out the differences between these two kinds of friends.**

Job 6:14 reads, 'He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.' **Are you withholding kindness from a friend? If so, why? What is God asking you to do?**

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. **List some of the advantages of strong friendships.**

Paul writes to the Thessalonians, 'Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.' (1 Thessalonians 5:11) **Whose encouragement are you most grateful for in this season of your life? Have you thanked them?**

LAST WORD

Jesus says, 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.' (John 15:13) May you move through these days acutely aware of the wondrous truth that Jesus calls you His friend. He treated you as a friend when you were His enemy, even giving up His life for you so that you could be empowered to find and forge

great friendships. You weren't just saved *from* something; you were saved *for* something: friendship with God and others.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul writes, 'Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."' Spend some meditating on this scripture. Are you being deceived? If so, by whom (a friend, or yourself)? Which people in your life would fall into the category of 'bad company'? Are your good morals being in any way ruined, or even subtly compromised? What's your next step?

Write: Write a letter of thanks to the friend who has stood by you through the most difficult moments of your life.

Pray: If you're not part of a regular prayer meeting, start one. Find a time that suits a bunch of your friends and get going. Meet in person or online. Commit to keeping up the momentum of the meetings, to strengthen and encourage your friends the way you would love them to strengthen and encourage you.

Humility Over Pride

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: The way down is actually the way up.

Head Change: To know that pride ultimately leads to disgrace.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that God pours out His grace on the humble.

Life Change: To pursue humility by going low, going last, and going long.

OPEN

Do you look for yourself first in a group photo?

Of course you do. We all do. Not one of us is above the insidious sin of pride. Thankfully, there's hope! The book of Proverbs helps us to recognise pride in ourselves and teaches us to apply the antidote of humility.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Stephen answers these questions.

According to Proverbs, pride results in _____.

What extroverted and introverted forms can pride take?

How does pride hinder our connections with others?

What does Stephen mean when he says we should 'go last'?

Did Jesus spend time with people who could further His agenda?

Show SESSION #4: *Humility Over Pride* (11 minutes)

REVIEW

Stephen points out that, while our culture is all about grasping for success and prominence and pursuing our preferences, Proverbs shows us that the way down is actually the way up. In a world where pride is encouraged, humility is actually a superpower. **Does this seem counterintuitive, in your career space or elsewhere?**

It's the very opposite of wisdom (and the very essence of foolishness) to be opposed by God. We're told in the New Testament that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, and this theme is reflected in the book of Proverbs. Generally, when we're proud, bad things happen to us, whereas humility puts us in a far better place. **How do you think God's opposition and God's favour play out in our lives?**

The first step to pursuing humility is to *go low*. Proverbs 11:2 says, 'When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.' **Does aiming low go against what you're encouraged to do at your sports club, work, school, or university? Are you motivated by pride when it comes to social media? Do you agree that 'every post is a boast'? Why, or why not? Scroll through your own social media posts from the past month or more and identify any humble brags. What's your next step?**

Pride can take extroverted forms (like someone talking incessantly about themselves or their achievements), or introverted forms (like someone silently convinced of their own superiority to those around them). **Which form of pride do you tend towards? If it's hard for you to answer, think about what those who know you best would say about your pride. What makes you feel a little more special than other people?**

Tim Keller said, 'Pride doesn't rejoice in having something; it celebrates having more of it than the next person... Pride is like the carbon monoxide of sin; it kills character silently.' **Can you relate? Are you currently working towards having more of something than someone else? Has pride suffocated any of your friendships or relationships?**

Stephen points out that pride is anti-social. He says, 'Your ability to connect well with people is closely linked to the degree of your humility or the extent of your pride. Pride inhibits the very authentic, selfless connections and friendships you need to become wise.' C. S. Lewis described pride as 'the ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self'. **Why, when it comes to wisdom, is pride your greatest enemy, and humility your greatest friend? Why do you think it's so easy to see pride in others and so hard to detect pride in ourselves?**

The second step to pursuing humility is to *go last*. Proverbs 18:12 says, 'Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour,' and Proverbs 29:23 says, 'Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honour.' **Are you willing to recognise that you're proud? Are you constantly comparing yourself to someone else? If so, why, and is it helping you in any way? What might it look like in your life, this week, to let others go first?**

Stephen explains that pride isolates us and corrodes connections because we filter every comment, experience, or interaction through the question, 'Is this good for my status and image?' **Discuss the idea that pride builds barriers while humility builds bridges. Can you trace the ways you're building one or the other?**

Pride is a kind of cosmic plagiarism. Everything we have is a gift from God, and yet pride has us claiming we're self-made. **Have you ever taken credit for something God did? If you have kids, how would you explain to them that pride comes before destruction because it's the precursor to almost every other sin? What does Stephen mean when he says that pride makes us stupid?**

The third step to pursuing humility is to *go long* – in other words, take the eternal perspective. **What happens to your pride levels when you remember that life in this world is fleeting?**

Stephen reminds us that how we treat people who can do nothing for us says a great deal about our character. **Has someone important or famous or exceptionally busy ever stopped everything to spend time with you? Why is this kind of humility so astonishingly powerful? Who is God calling you to (humbly, self-forgetfully) love this week?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God says, ‘If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.’ **What would change in your community or city or nation, within a month, if every person humbled themselves, prayed, sought God, and turned from their wicked ways?**

Read James 4:10 and 1 Peter 5:6. **What is the direct result of humility?**

Read Paul’s instructions in Romans 12:16 and Philippians 2:3. **How does humility influence our relationships within the church and elsewhere?**

LAST WORD

Before moving on to the final session of the series, take time to contemplate the humility of Jesus, the most important person who has ever lived. He had three years to accomplish His mission (teach and train a team to start and sustain the global church). Jesus’ available time was finite – and yet He never pushed past people or jumped a queue. He spent time with the least, the last, and the lost. He helped the broken hearted. He came to serve not to be served, to give not to get. He fed thousands before feeding Himself. Although angels worship Him, He slipped away from crowds and deflected praise to His Father. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we realise the deep wisdom of these Proverbs. The way up is the way down. God shows favour to the humble. With humility comes wisdom.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Meditate on 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. How does God’s Kingdom turn the world’s perspective on greatness and wisdom upside down? What is the world’s wisdom for the situation you’re facing? What is God’s wisdom for the situation you’re facing?

Write: Read Micah 6:8 and paraphrase it into a personal humility manifesto.

Pray: Craft a prayer that you can come back to again and again to pray and re-pray, in which you relinquish your self-importance and independence and declare your total reliance on God.

Turning Fear into Awe

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: If you fear God, you need fear nothing and no one else.

Head Change: To know that the fear of the Lord makes you wise because it reorientates your priorities and perspectives.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that being filled with the fear of God leaves no room for other fears to take up space in your life.

Life Change: To defeat unhealthy fear in your life by getting to know God better and better, and so living in greater and greater awe of Him.

OPEN

What's your biggest fear? Why? Has fear ever saved your life? Has fear ever robbed you of life?

The Bible really only talks about two categories of fear: the fear of God, and the fear of everything else. In the final session of the series, Stephen explores what it means for us to fear God, and how fearing God defeats the power of toxic fear in our lives.

VIEW

As you watch, write down how Stephen answers these questions.

List some of the negative repercussions of unhealthy fear.

Is the fear of the Lord described positively or negatively in the Bible?

What is the antidote to our debilitating fears?

How does fear of God lead to wisdom?

Show SESSION #5: *Turning Fear into Awe* (10 minutes)

REVIEW

Stephen says, 'If you fear God, you need fear nothing and no one else.' **Does this seem farfetched, or too good to be true, or right on? Does Stephen's phrase 'a hopeful fear of God' sound counterintuitive or contradictory to you?**

To 'fear the Lord' means to be so captivated by His majesty and so in awe of who He is that other fears find no traction in our lives. **How would you explain to a friend who has recently put their faith in Jesus that the fear of God induces courage?**

Stephen explains that the first thing we need to do is *focus our fears*, in other words, figure out what kind of fear we're dealing with and how we'll respond to it. **Do you agree that fear is inevitable? Why, or why not? If you feel comfortable to do so, talk about how fear has stripped you of confidence, or incapacitated you in some way, or driven you to do something regrettable. In which area of your life does fear tend to take up real estate – relationships, work, finances, or something else? Why do think your fear is triggered in this particular area?**

Stephen says, 'It's one thing when fears fly around your heart; it's another thing when fears take up home in your heart, and they get on the inside of you so that wherever you go, whatever you are doing, whoever you are with – the fear is there.' **Can you relate to this kind of all-consuming, under-your-skin fear? If so, how have you dealt with it in the past?**

The Bible talks about two categories of fear: 1) the fear of God, which is described in a surprisingly positive way throughout scripture, and 2) the fear of everything else, which is described negatively. **What bonus biproducts of fearing the Lord does Stephen mention? Have you experienced any or all of these? Do you think it's possible that, if you fear the Lord, you need never fear bad news? Why, or why not?**

Stephen points out that, in our cultural moment, the incidence of fear has greatly increased. On the whole, people are more fearful, and the rising generation describes a significant struggle with fear. The media have even dubbed Gen Z as 'Generation Fear'. **Where in your spheres of influence and engagement have you seen a rise in fear over the past year, or ten years? What do you think has caused it? Do you agreed that as the fear of God decreases in our culture, all other types of fear seem to increase? What happened to your fear levels when you became a Christian?**

To develop a healthy fear of the Lord, Stephen explains that the second thing we need to do is *find our awe*, because that enables us to face and overcome all other fears. Proverbs 9:10 says, 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.' Proverbs 14:26 says, 'Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.' **Roleplay a conversation in which you explain to a colleague who is curious about your faith that fearing the Lord doesn't mean being scared of Him, but rather leads to wisdom and safety.**

Proverbs 19:23 reads, 'The fear of the LORD leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.' This proverb isn't promising we won't face trouble. Rather, we can 'rest content' in the midst of trouble. **Share about a time when you found yourself in trouble, and yet the trouble – the shock, grief, trauma, or fear – didn't overthrow your contentment, because you leaned on the Lord.**

The antidote to every other type of fear is to fear God: to have reverence, awe, and wonder for who God is and what He has done. **Have you ever been so captivated and overwhelmed by who Jesus is and what He has done for you that it filled your heart entirely, leaving no space for any other fear? How would it change your**

response to the fears you're facing this week if you were to recapture that sense of wonder?

Proverbs 9:10 says, 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...' The fear of the Lord makes you wise because it reorders your world and reorients your perspective. **How did your fear of God influence a decision you made over the past year? How might fearing God take away your fear of decision making?**

Proverbs 16:6 says, 'Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the LORD evil is avoided.' **List some of the ways fearing the Lord protects you and keeps you safe (physically, socially, relationally, financially, and so on).**

Proverbs 14:27 says, 'The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.' **How would you explain to one of your kids or a Sunday school class of six-year-olds that fearing God is the most liberating and life-giving way to live?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

The psalmist writes, 'But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared. (Psalm 130:4) **When you first repented of your sins, how did it change your view of God?**

Read Isaiah 41:10–13. **What kind of fear is being spoken about in these verses (the good kind – fear of the Lord – or the toxic kind)? What reason does God give us for living fearlessly, joyfully, and confidently?**

Read Matthew 10:28, Luke 12:32, and John 14:27. **Discuss how Jesus differentiates between worldly fear and godly fear.**

Paul writes to Timothy, 'For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.' (2 Timothy 1:7) **Do you think fearing God increases your power, love, and self-control? If so, how?**

LAST WORD

The more we understand and appreciate what it cost Jesus to buy our forgiveness and freedom, the more we're flooded with amazement, and the more we begin to experience the holy fear of the Lord – which makes us fearless in the face of every other fear. May you be filled with reverence and awe for God's glory, beauty, majesty, power, and compassion, and may the wonder of all that crowd out every other fear.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before moving on to another series.

Read: Read Psalm 27:1 in a few different Bible translations. Meditate on God's awe-inspiring attributes and allow your fears to dissipate in light of His splendour.

Write: Write out all your fears, enormous and miniscule. Then counter each fear with a biblical truth about God's love, power, and wisdom.

Pray: If someone you love is weighed down with worry, offer to pray for them. Ask God to overwhelm them instead with a sense of His presence and peace, so much so that their awe of Him eliminates all their fears.