



08

SESSION 8

The Wisdom of Proverbs

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we look at the Proverbs to see that God has given us His Word to instruct us in how to walk in wisdom. We will see how wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord, how it leads us to trust in God, and how it offers us practical guidance in everyday matters of life. We'll also see that wisdom points us to Jesus Christ, and wisdom in the lives of believers will lead us to point others to Him as well.

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:1-8; 22:1-10

THE POINT

Wisdom isn't merely information, but transformation of one's character intended to be lived out.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

What is wisdom? Some people point to knowledge and information. Others may think of wisdom as life experience. A few might recall pithy one-liners similar to what you find in fortune cookies.

But how does the Bible talk about wisdom? We need look no further than the ant. Yes, the ant! Now, I know ants are rarely chosen as the epitome of ... well, anything. But that is the point Solomon wanted to make when he used the ant as the example of wisdom: “Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. ... Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer” (Prov. 6:6-8; 30:24-25).

The focus here is not the ant’s knowledge, experience, or intellect. The point is, the ant knows how to live. The ant knows what it should do. It knows how to navigate the seasons of life. What an amazing, but unlikely, place to look for wisdom, insight, and discernment!

Wisdom is not less than knowledge, but it is certainly more than knowledge. Wisdom isn’t so much about knowing *that*; it’s more about knowing *how*. Wise people know how to live faithfully in the world.

- **What comes to mind when you hear the word wisdom?**
- **What are some situations you are facing right now where wisdom is needed?**

Option 2

Ask students to discuss what they know about building a house. Students may suggest materials, the types of people involved, what kind of house they want to build. Talk about a blueprint—the plan and instructions for building the house. Then say: “You know what you need to build the house and who you need to call. You even know what the house is supposed to look like. But if you do not know how to build the house, you’ll only have an empty lot.” God gives us the blueprint for living in His Word, but living out wisdom requires more than knowing what His Word says. Living out wisdom requires God transforming our character from the inside out. God’s Word provides us with the information that we need to follow Him, but only trusting in Jesus brings salvation. Then, He gives us the wisdom to live out God’s blueprint for our lives.

- **Share about a time when the Bible has helped you navigate a situation in your life with wisdom.**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Wisdom isn't merely information, but transformation of one's character intended to be lived out.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Solomon** - son of David who succeeded him as king over Israel. Solomon is known for his God-given wisdom—having authored many books in the Old Testament wisdom literature—and his building of the temple

PLOT

As we continue digging into Solomon's life story, it is important we take a session to do a little exploring into the depths of his God-given wisdom expressed in the Book of Proverbs. Unlike the stories and narratives we have covered thus far, the Book of Proverbs falls into the category of wisdom literature. Proverbs is composed of various literary elements, all intended to convey the value of wisdom and the importance of living that wisdom out day to day. With that in mind, let's take a look into the wisdom that is Proverbs.

TIMELINE

THE WISDOM OF PROVERBS

Solomon instructs on how to walk in wisdom.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Solomon constructs the temple, and God fills it with His presence.

SOLOMON'S FALL INTO IDOLATRY

Foolish decisions ultimately lead to idolatry.

WISDOM IS ROOTED IN THE FEAR OF GOD

Wisdom starts with a relationship with God. He is the fountain of all wisdom, insight, and knowledge. Thus, only the fool attempts to live without God. That is the argument that Solomon makes in the opening verses of Proverbs.

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:1-7)

First, notice how being wise is related to receiving information. Wisdom involves understanding, insightful sayings, instruction, learning, and knowledge. However, wisdom is more than information, though it is certainly not less. Knowing how to live is dependent upon ideas, sayings, and teachings.

Wisdom involves information. But we must never believe that because we have lots of information we are wise. Solomon goes on to say that wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord (v. 7). We must start with God, who alone possesses all wisdom and knowledge.

Think about that for a moment. God literally knows all things about all things. He never learns. He never has a new thought. He is never surprised by new information. He knows all information exhaustively. He is an expert on everything. For this reason, it is foolish not to fear Him (v. 7). God is not one option among many avenues to true wisdom. He the only option!

Wisdom in the biblical sense is not available to someone who does not fear the Lord or walk in His ways. Fearing the Lord doesn't mean we cower in fear before Him, but that we learn to revere Him and regard Him above all things. No one is more valuable, no possession is more precious to us, than the Lord.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

God is Omniscient

Scripture teaches that God is all knowing. He is the One who "is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.

WISDOM LEADS US TO FAITH IN GOD

It's popular in our day to hear people say, "You just have to believe in yourself!" In one sense, a measure of self-confidence is good and healthy. But "just believing in yourself" as a way of life is the way of foolishness. True wisdom does not lead us to faith in ourselves, but in God.

We saw earlier that the fool despises wisdom and discipline, which is another way of saying that the fool despises the Lord since he does not fear the Lord. In this section we will see how wisdom leads us to not only fear the Lord, but also to trust Him, rely on Him, and keep Him at the center of our lives.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. (Prov. 3:1-8)

If we had to summarize Solomon's main point in this passage we might say: put your faith in the Lord, not in yourself. Wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord, and our fear of God must translate into a rock solid faith in God. So what does faith in God look like?

For starters, it is a faith that runs away from self-reliance and toward dependence upon God. It is the type of faith opposite of the fool. Only fools think they have arrived when it comes to their knowledge when, in fact, the truth is that they can go no further than their worldly wisdom can take them. This is why Solomon pleads with his son to trust in the Lord with all his might. This, in turn, means he is never to trust his own wisdom and understanding or consider himself wise by his own standards.

We are not the standard of wisdom. We are not to trust in ourselves and think that we have mastered life. In fact, it is impossible to trust in ourselves and at the same time trust in the Lord. One will inevitably drive out the other. Leaning on our experience and insight naturally tempers our ability and urgency to trust in the Lord. On the other hand, the more we trust in the Lord, the less we will trust in ourselves. We will discover that as we trust in the Lord, He directs our paths and leads us into joy and peace.

- **Jot down a few areas of life in which you are tempted to rely on yourself. What would it look like if you relied on the Lord instead of yourself in these cases?** (*p. 55, PSG*)

WISDOM SHOWS US HOW TO LIVE IN THE WORLD GOD HAS MADE

Proverbs is a practical book. And that should come as no surprise since wisdom is about life. Wisdom is truth in action. God wants us not only to know things, but to do things. Solomon intended for his hearers to actually live out the truths and sayings he put forth. Here are some examples:

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all. The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail. Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor. Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.(Prov. 22:1-10)

It is tempting to read God's word and talk about it, but never actually live it out. James warned us of the dangers of merely hearing the word when he said, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22).

Reading these words without applying their wisdom is self-deception. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). He wants us to do what He said, not simply learn what He said. We often fall into the mindset that information automatically results in transformation. To be sure, we need information, but Jesus wants us to obey the information we've been given.

- **At this point in the session, walk students through each verse in this section and summarize what Solomon is calling them to do. Potential answers are provided for you below. (p. 56, PSG)**
 - V. 1: **Build your character, not just your bank account.**
 - V. 2: **Don't think your worth is based on what you have or don't have.**
 - V. 3: **Know your limitations.**
 - V. 4: **Be humble!**
 - V. 5: **Guard yourself.**
 - V. 6: **Parents are to teach their children wisdom.**
 - V. 7: **Be careful and wise with debt.**
 - V. 8: **Live justly.**
 - V. 9: **Be generous.**
 - V. 10: **Don't be afraid to confront difficult people.**

TIMELINE

MEANING OF LIFE IN ECCLESIASTES

Solomon reflects on the purpose and meaning of life.

THE SUFFERING OF JOB

The suffering of Job and the mercy of God.

WORSHIP IN THE PSALMS

A look into the psalms and their importance in the Christian life.

Now, step back and look at this list. Think of all the areas that we covered and all the life-issues we addressed. And that was in 10 verses! Wisdom comes crashing into every aspect of our lives—our relationships, our attitudes, and our posture toward the world, and so on. Wisdom leaves no stone unturned when it comes to our lives. God has spoken to us. The question is: will we listen and obey? Will we actually do what He tells us to do?

CHRIST CONNECTION

At the beginning of this session we saw that wisdom starts with a relationship with God. We see this even more vividly in the New Testament when Paul tells us “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). In Jesus, we see that wisdom isn’t merely information or insight; wisdom is a Person.

Jesus is God’s wisdom on full display. And this Person did something that looks like foolishness in the eyes of the world—He laid down His life for us. Now, because of His death and resurrection, we can know and follow this Jesus. We can fear Him. We can place all of our faith in Him. As we do, He makes us wise people who reflect His name and announce His gospel in the world.

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Where do people receive information and instruction today?** *Answers may include: pop culture, peers, parents, teachers, etc.*
- **How will a Christian's receiving of instruction differ from an unbeliever?** *The primary difference is that for the Christian, the Bible is the primary source of authority and instruction, whereas for the unbeliever, instruction will be found in earthly sources. That isn't to say that a Christian won't be able to glean truth where truth is found (all truth is God's truth), but it will mean that the Christian tests everything against the backdrop of Scripture and the wisdom it contains.*
- **Who are some people in your life who display biblical wisdom consistently in their actions? What are some characteristics you admire about them?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **How has this session challenged you when it comes to pursuing biblical wisdom in your own life?** *Answers to this will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

There's a difference between worldly wisdom and biblical wisdom. Although people in our society may have some level of wisdom according to the world, Solomon would make a distinction between the world's wisdom and true God-given wisdom. Biblical wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (a central theme not only in Proverbs, but also throughout the Bible). "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10; cf. Ps. 111:110). Wisdom is rooted in fear of the Lord.

- **Why is fearing the Lord the essential to becoming wise?** *With a healthy fear of God comes intellectual humility, the sort that helps us realize we are completely dependent upon God for all things, including wisdom and insight.*
- **Do you consider yourself wise? If not, where should you begin your pursuit of wisdom?** *One way would be to follow Solomon's lead and humble yourself before God, acknowledge your dependence upon Him, and ask Him to equip you with wisdom.*



HEART

It is important to realize that wisdom isn't merely about information, but transformation. While it will certainly involve information, wisdom isn't intended to sit idly in the confines of one's head, but meant to be lived out as a result of a transformed heart and character. It begins on a personal level—an internal fear and love for God—and is continually expressed on a personal level as it influences and shapes one's actions from day to day.

- **Why do you think people often equate wisdom with knowing lots of information?** *Answers to this will vary.*
- **What are some ways your life demonstrates God's wisdom working through you?** *Answers to this will vary.*



HANDS

The danger for many of us is to memorize these words, study them more in-depth, discuss them with one another, but never actually get around to doing them. These words, and all that God has said, must take root in our hearts and result in actual obedience to God. Only then can we really call others to embrace them and obey what God has said. Unless His truth pierces our hearts and brings about obedience, we will be ineffective and unfruitful as we call others to follow God.

- **How can you seek to grow in wisdom this week?** *When it comes to wisdom we can see a clear connection between the Head, Heart, and Hands—it involves knowledge and understanding, but includes a change of heart and living out what is learned. So, one answer would be to study. Study God's Word. Read through the book of Proverbs for the month and practice living it out.*
- **What are some ways you can seek to share God's wisdom with others?** *Answers to this will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #8—an informational chart of the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon). The purpose of this chart is to highlight the different styles among them, their purpose, and overall, how each one points to Jesus.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPKingsSUM16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject