



LESSON:
WISDOM

PROBLEM STATEMENT

I don't know what makes wisdom books more wise than the rest of the Bible.

TAKEAWAY

Wisdom writings are an ancient form of literature that grapples with questions of human living.

ADDITIONAL BIBLE PASSAGES

Proverbs 2:1-15

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

KEY VERSE**Proverbs 2:6**

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Handbooks
- Bibles
- DVD
- Markers or pencils
- Butcher paper
- Small pieces of paper
- Tape

Background Information

There are five books of the Bible that are traditionally labeled “wisdom literature”: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. While this lesson focuses on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, much of what is presented is true of all five books—you can make the call about introducing your class to Song of Solomon for yourself. The designation “wisdom literature” is not meant to imply that the other books of the Bible are not wise, but rather to indicate that the goal of these books is slightly different than other genres of biblical writing. Wisdom books aren't meant to teach us history or to relay prophetic observations or religious laws. Rather, wisdom literature is designed to help us think more deeply about what it means to be human and how we ought to live our lives.

Proverbs is perhaps the most easily recognized wisdom book because it contains many pithy sayings that mirror wise words we hear in our own families and culture. While the book of Proverbs is a mixed bag (some of it is readily relevant, some is humorous, some is dry and boring, some is confusing, and some we might no longer agree with), it contains a number of important truths about life as people of faith. Moreover, the very fact that this book of collected human wisdom is included in our Bible helps us to recognize that living faithfully is not only about how we interact with God, but also about how we interact with others and how we make sense of our lives.

The book of Ecclesiastes can be a challenging read. Sometimes it sounds like philosophy, recounting the ideas of someone who is experimenting with different life values (pleasure, profit, wisdom). Because of this, it can be easily misread as hopeless or even faithless. However, despite its frequently cynical tone and pessimistic outlook, the book ultimately affirms that faith in God involves trusting God enough to live and enjoy life, even when we can't answer all of life's questions.

What Students Need to Know . . .

- The word *wisdom* might be deceptive for students. They will likely think “intelligence,” but the wisdom literature in the Bible isn't about making us smarter. Wisdom is more about how we use the knowledge we have (and how we handle what we don't know) than about how much we know. The inclusion of the wisdom books in the biblical canon indicates that living faithfully involves asking hard questions and living into ambiguity. This ambiguity will be comfortable for some students, and challenging for others.
- Wisdom literature looks to human experience to identify truths and, at the same time, questions many assumed truths. In this way, the tone of these books can be cynical and questioning, as well as hopeful and insightful. While this might be confusing to students, it ultimately means that students are also a part of this process. Where do they see truth? Helping them name—and then affirm—the nature of truth is a helpful and ongoing process.
- We often picture wise people as elderly (think of the iconic image of the sage), but young people can be wise as well (and not all old people are wise). Help students name characteristics of wise people they know, and push them to think of any young people who might fit that description.
- Wisdom is personified as a woman throughout these books. Point that out to your group and watch the fun begin! Seriously, this is another chance to show your students that the Bible isn't always as male-centered as we sometimes assume it to be. The use of the female pronoun isn't meant to be exclusive—it's a function of translation and convention, not gender—so don't let students get too caught up in gender politics. But still, go ahead and give the girls a minute to revel in seeing the feminine spirit of Wisdom celebrated in the Bible.

Where They Might Struggle . . .

- Because Proverbs can be obscure, it's easy to dismiss this book as no longer relevant. So help students see the big picture of Proverbs. Ask them why it might be important that this book was included in the Bible. Ask them what distinguishes this book from other books in the Bible. Get them thinking about the role of wisdom in their lives now.
- Some proverbs will fly in the face of what we consider appropriate gender roles in modern society. For example, Proverbs 31 has been held up as a blueprint for how Christian women should behave and live, but some of it might feel out of touch with how students view women now. If students ask about these issues, help them think about the reasons gender and marriage and relationships make fertile ground for wisdom to cover. How might they rework some of these proverbs to reflect their experiences with gender roles?
- If we only read part of Ecclesiastes, it is possible to come away with the sense that the writer thinks the whole of life is futile. On the one hand, this might be something your students can relate to, but push them to look further at the book and ask why the author ultimately argues that we should trust God and live into ambiguity.
- Some theologians have connected wisdom to discipleship. If students get stuck on whether or not wisdom is something that can be learned, you might share this connection. Ask them if they agree that there's a link between the two.
- While it is true that wisdom is often located in community, it's also true that students this age are surrounded by peers well-known for their lack of wisdom. Help students think about how they can distinguish between the communal wisdom that comes from a community of people using their experiences to work toward a common goal and blindly following the collective urgings of a group.

About the Video . . .

If these wisdom books are so smart, why don't they include any of the sayings of Jesus? Well, historical issues aside, the wisdom books have that name not because they are the only part of the Bible considered wise, but because they contain a particular kind of wisdom. In order to get your students thinking about the ways we develop and pass on wisdom, the video sets up a straw man argument, inviting students to gain some wisdom about their own assumptions about the Bible.

Lesson Notes . . .

Icebreaker

TELEPHONE Pictionary

Supplies: paper, pens/pencils

If your group is larger than ten, split into groups of five or seven.

1. Have each student take as many pieces of paper as there are people in their group and stack them together.
2. Have each group sit in a circle with room between students so they cannot easily see their neighbor's papers.
3. Have each student write the wisest saying they can think of on the top sheet of paper.
4. With that page on top of the stack, have everyone pass their whole stack of papers to the person on their right.
5. Once the stacks of paper have been passed, have students read the wise saying silently, move that sheet to the bottom of the stack, and draw an illustration of the saying on the next sheet of paper in the stack (they're converting the saying to a drawing).
6. Once everyone is done drawing, pass the stacks to the right again and repeat the process, this time looking at the drawing, moving it to the bottom of the stack, and then writing down words to match the drawing they just looked at. Keep passing and alternating between drawing and writing—no peeking!—until the stacks return to their original owners.
7. Look over the stacks of paper and talk about the transformations that occurred during the process. How does what we think of as wisdom morph over time?

Into the Story

Turn to Proverbs 2 and have a volunteer read verses 1-15 aloud. Discuss:

- These verses reference knowledge, understanding, righteousness, justice, and equity. What do each of these have to do with wisdom?
- What senses show up in these verses? How might your sense relate to the ways in which you develop wisdom?
- Are people born wise or is wisdom something you develop? Explain your answer.

Turn to Ecclesiastes 3 and have a volunteer read verses 1-15 aloud. Discuss:

- Why would the Bible say that there is a time for killing (v. 3) and a time for hate and war (v. 8)?
- Verse 10 says that God has given all of us “business” to “be busy with.” What do you think this business is? Is it the same for everyone?

Turn to Ecclesiastes 4 and have a volunteer read verses 9-16 aloud. Discuss:

- Based on your experience, is this passage right about the power of two people? What are some ways your friends and family have “lifted you up” in hard times?
- What's more important, wisdom or wealth?

Questions to Get the Conversation Going

- What kind of wisdom can you find in books, movies, and music?
- What makes a person wise?
- If you had to choose one person to ask for advice, who would it be?

The whole Bible could be called the Book of Wisdom, but there are actually a few books within it that are commonly referred to as “the Wisdom Books.” And while they are often thought of as the most accessible books in the Old Testament because they don’t deal with wild history or include a bunch of unfamiliar names, they still offer profound, and sometimes challenging, ideas about what it means to follow God with our hearts and minds.

How do you determine if something is true or valuable?

Add another person to this list and tell the rest of the group why you chose him or her.

Wisdom
What do you know?

The whole Bible could be called the Book of Wisdom, but there are actually a few books within it that are commonly referred to as “the Wisdom Books.” And while they are often thought of as the most accessible books in the Old Testament because they don’t deal with wild history or include a bunch of unfamiliar names, they still offer profound and sometimes challenging ideas about what it means to follow God with our hearts and minds.

Proverbs 2:6
“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

Today’s Strange Proverb: “Whoever blesses a neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursed.” Proverbs 17:14.

Complete this Proverb: “Like a cat that returns to its hole is a fool who reverts to his folly.” (Proverbs 26:11).

University of Know-It-Alls
Degree in Wisdom
Longtower City, WI

THE GREAT BOOKS

- A Talk of Two Mid-Sized Towns by Our Modern Pastors
- PRIDE AND PRE-JUDGMENT

Geography: Find where stuff goes
Science: How stuff works
Algebra: Still just numbers
Religion: Stuff people believe
Philosophy: I think therefore I am?

CHOOSE THE WISE PERSON

PASTOR	<i>Teacher</i>	Grandparents	BEST FRIEND
EVERY WEEK YOU HEAR THEM SPEAK AND TALK ABOUT GOD. THEY TRUST THEM TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND GOD AND LIFE.	THEY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING YOU LEARN READING, WRITING, AND ARITHMETIC FOR MUCH OF YOUR LIFE. THEY GRADE ALL YOUR WORK AND HAVE STUDIED MORE THAN MOST.	THEY CAN BE QUIRKY AND SOMETIMES SEEM clueless ABOUT WHAT LIFE IS LIKE FOR YOU, BUT THEY LOVE YOU A TON AND HAVE YEARS OF LIFE EXPERIENCE.	THEY ARE THERE FOR YOU WHEN NO ONE ELSE IS. THEY UNDERSTAND YOU AND SEE YOUR SITUATION MUCH LIKE YOU DO. THEY HELP GUIDE YOU, AND YOU HELP GUIDE THEM.

Being wise isn't the same thing as being smart or studious or clever. So...

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If you could have the answer to one question, what would it be?

Wisdom comes in many different forms, but what does it mean to be wise? How is it the same as being smart? How is it different?

Have a student read the pivot statement located at the bottom of the page, and gauge the group’s thoughts on where the lesson might go. Remember: You want tension! Allow your students to live with the questions posed on the first page until after the video has played and you begin exploring the infographic.

EXPLORING THE INFOGRAPHIC

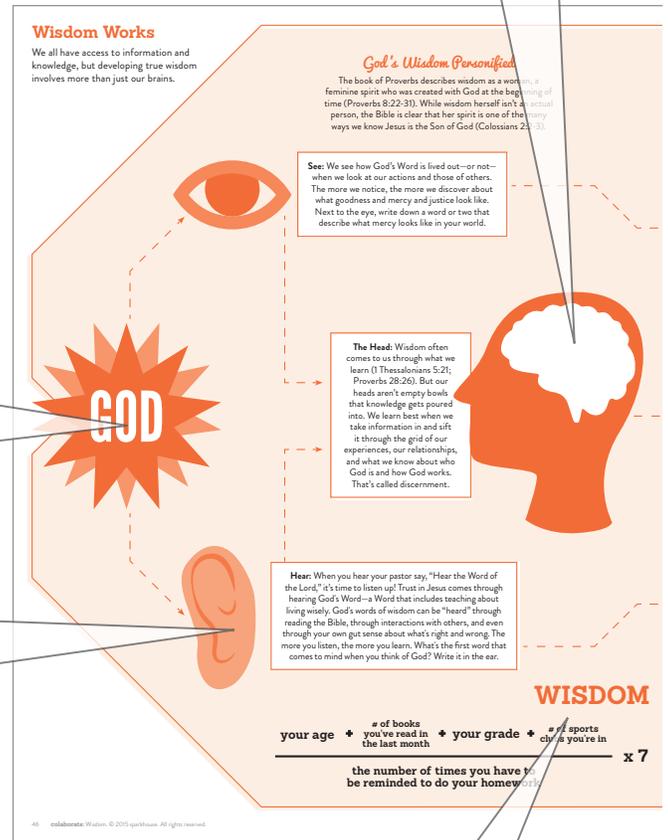


Your students are likely familiar with flowcharts, so they'll know how to navigate this infographic. If you want to get them going, start with God, the origin of all truth and wisdom. From there, let the students determine a path. Do they think wisdom is most often heard or seen? At each text box, stop and discuss. There are a few potential paths to take, but wisdom always comes from God and then goes to our heads, our hearts, and our hands.

Is there any truth or wisdom that doesn't come from God? What does it mean that wisdom begins and ends with God?

When is the last time you heard something wise? Share it with the group.

How do you best learn about God? Through hearing? Doing? Thinking? Draw a picture in the brain that best represents your learning style.



Who is the wisest person you know? What makes that person so wise? Is this also the smartest person you know? The most educated?



Want More?

- The once-popular song "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the Byrds uses the verses from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 almost verbatim. Play it for students and see if they can pick out the verses.
- As a group, create a book of collective wisdom. What do you know to be true? Bonus points if you can phrase your wisdom in the style of a proverb or make it sound very old.
- Flip through the book of Proverbs and find sayings that still ring true today. Pick four or five and write them on a piece of posterboard or butcher paper. Decorate them and put them up around your church.
- Create a wisdom collage either individually or as a group. Use magazines and newspapers to look for images or words that represent, convey, or are a source of wisdom. When you're done, add the caption "Where do you find wisdom?" and put the collage someplace public in your church to get the adults thinking.

Can the wisdom books help us to read the other books of the Bible differently? If so, how? What about the reverse?

Wisdom 101
 The books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Psalms, and the Song of Solomon are a kind of writing known as Wisdom Literature. They're kind of like those little sayings your quirky Uncle Al has about the weather or why you should always wear a hat on Thursdays. We don't know for sure who wrote these books—King Solomon often gets the credit for most of them—but we know that these sayings were a way of passing on the wisdom of one generation to the next (Proverbs 1:1-8). Tell a partner a weird or funny saying you've heard in your family.

Hands: Wisdom helps us understand the effects of our actions and motivates us to keep finding ways to be God's hands in the world (Ecclesiastes 9:17-18).

Feet: Wisdom helps us step into what God has for us next. It helps us trust that even when we don't know what the future holds, we know God will be with us as we move forward (Proverbs 16:9). If you could stop and anywhere in the world, where would it be? Write the name of the place by the feet.

The Heart: Ultimately, our wisdom shows in the way we live with God, ourselves, and everyone else. We can have the right answers and information, but if that doesn't turn into love and service, then it's not worth much (1 Corinthians 13:2). True wisdom takes root and grows when we live out God's call to love as we've been loved.

Neighbor: Wisdom allows us to see everyone we meet as someone God loves. It guides us as we find ways to love and care for others (Matthew 22:36-40). Write down the name of someone you know who could use a little love and kindness.

Community: Wisdom is always shared. When people of faith come together, we encourage and strengthen one another, giving and getting more wisdom than we could ever have on our own (Proverbs 15:22).

World: Wisdom isn't something we keep to ourselves. God wants us to be in the world, loving and serving and learning (Acts 1:8).

CALCULATOR
 = I am _____ % wiser than others.
 Compare your answer with that of another smart person in the group.

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What does this question tell you about the connection between wisdom and love? If you could only have one, which would you choose? Is it even possible to have one without the other?

Who is your neighbor? How are we responsible for using our wisdom to help our neighbor? The world?

- If you have a book of proverbs or wise sayings, use it to see if students can distinguish between biblical proverbs and nonbiblical proverbs. Either print out or read off proverbs from your book and the biblical book of Proverbs and have students guess the source.

LEADER TIP

Wiz Lib. Make sure the person administering the “Wiz Lib” activity puts his or her handbook away. If you have time, have each pair read their new proverb aloud to the group.

While many of these will likely end up being funny, but that doesn't mean they won't have a nugget of wisdom. Let your students discern where the wisdom is and isn't, but help out if they get too off track.

LEADER TIP

Get It, Share It. If no one else is in the building when your class meets, have students bring their notebooks home and ask the same question. Or if you have time in advance, ask some church members to write down their advice and have students read these during class and discuss what they discover.

Hopefully your students already see and benefit from the wisdom of your church community. Either way, this activity will highlight the people in your congregation and how they can be a part of your students' faith formation.

Wisdom or Wisdumb?
 Not everything that sounds wise is wise. We need to know how to identify good and bad "words of wisdom."

Option 1: Wiz Lib!
 Write your own proverb! Work with a partner and see if you come up with wisdom worth holding on to.

My _____, if you accept my _____
 [member of family] [noun]

and treasure up my _____, within you,
 [noun]

making your _____ attentive to wisdom
 [noun]

and inclining your _____ to _____;
 [noun] [verb]

if you _____ out for insight
 [verb]

and raise your _____ for _____;
 [noun] [verb]

if you seek it like _____
 [precious item]

and search for it as for _____ treasures,
 [adjective]

then you will understand the _____ of the
 [adjective]

Lord and find the _____ of God.
 [noun]

Option 2: Get It, Share It
 Supplies: butcher paper, small pieces of paper, pencil, tape

- With a partner, take a small sheet of paper and a pencil, then go find someone else at the church and ask them to share their wisest words of advice. Write down what they say, then find two more people to ask.
- Head back to your group and take turns sharing the wisdom you gathered.
- As a group, talk about which words of advice feel the most helpful or meaningful to you. Write down your favorites on a big sheet of paper and hang it up as a reminder of the wisdom in your community.

1. Think 2. Share 3. Discuss

What do you do with wisdom when you find it?

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What do you do with wisdom when you find it?

Into the World

How might you show the people in your life that you are trying to develop godly wisdom?