

# Lesson 13 | August 27, 2023

## Solomon's Writings

**Study Text:** Proverbs 1:1–7; 3:13–18; Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 2:11; 12:9–14; Song of Solomon 5:2–8; 8:5–7

**Central Truth:** Wisdom from God must be continuously sought.

### Key Verse: Ecclesiastes 12:13

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man (KJV).

That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will identify three books of the Old Testament as sources of wisdom and appreciate the variety of wisdom found in Scripture.
- Students will recognize that the Bible is the Christian's primary and most reliable source of wisdom.
- Students will commit to consistently seek out wisdom for living within the pages of Scripture.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Sometimes people make the mistake of viewing wisdom and knowledge as the same thing. This is far from true. There are many wise people who have accrued relatively little knowledge (at least from an academic perspective). Likewise, some of the smartest, most learned people greatly lack wisdom. While knowledge certainly enhances wisdom, the truth is that wisdom is usually acquired over the course of a lifetime of practical experience, learning from mentors, studying Scripture, and seeking God.

### Opening Activity—Pearls of Wisdom

*Ask.* *What are some of the best bits of wisdom you've received over the course of your life?* Invite students to share examples, noting why these bits of wisdom were so valuable to them.

**Say:** As we learned earlier in this unit, Solomon's reign began with a gift of wisdom from God. This final lesson in our unit about Solomon explores a number of writings from Solomon that provide us with wisdom from God still today. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

This lesson covers a group of writings that make up part of what is called the "wisdom literature" of Scripture. The writings we will cover were specifically written by Solomon, though the wisdom literature of Scripture includes Psalms and Job in most listings. Solomon's three wisdom books are interesting in that each is very distinct. One is a

collection of wise sayings and teachings, another ponders the nature and meaning of life, and the third is a love poem. We will be introduced to each through the course of this lesson.

## Part 1—Defining Wisdom

### Wisdom Teaches Godly Living

Proverbs 1:1–7

**Say:** The value of wisdom literature is sometimes underappreciated. Wisdom teaches deep theological truths about who God is, what He is like, and what He desires for and of His people. Yet it is also among the most easily applied of all Scripture, since it teaches practical principles for life. Written almost entirely by Solomon, the Book of Proverbs is a prime example of wisdom literature in Scripture. v (***Play the video available at RadiantLifeCurriculum.com/Adult.***) (Share your highlights from the following text.)

#### Resource Packet Item 1: Interpreting Proverbs

Distribute the worksheet and discuss it to introduce this main point. Use the principles discussed here to teach and apply the material that follows.

As we begin our look at Proverbs, it is important to keep in mind the purpose of a proverb. A proverb is not intended to serve as some kind of specific guarantee. Rather, a proverb is a saying that provides wise insight into the world, human nature, and what it means to follow God. We need God’s wisdom and discernment to know how to apply particular proverbs in Scripture.

Proverbs 1:1–7 opens the book with wisdom for godly living in a sinful world. Verses 2–6 outline the purpose and value of Solomon’s proverbs, using phrases like “to teach people wisdom and discipline . . . to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair” (verses 2–3, NLT).

Verse 4 is especially telling. It explains the value of proverbs to “give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young” (NLT). The word simple refers to one who is naive and easily persuaded or misled, especially from a moral perspective. In other words, this is a person who will foolishly get involved in improper or sinful situations because he or she lacks wisdom and discernment. The parallel term young in this verse refers to a child or youth, highlighting the fact that young people have not yet matured in their understanding of the world or the perils and challenges it holds.

Verses 5–6 focus on listening, understanding, and exploring. One can learn from the many proverbs that will follow, gaining lessons to walk in the ways of the Lord. This is the fundamental purpose of the Book of Proverbs. Note verse 7: “Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge.” The phrase *fear of the Lord* (or *fear the Lord*), is common to wisdom literature and occurs sixteen times in Proverbs alone.

The word *fear* can cause confusion for believers. On one hand, fear is often regarded as negative, depicting a lack of courage when confronted with a threat. While our feelings and attitudes toward God should not view Him as negative in any way, we also must not dismiss the concept of fear altogether. In general usage throughout Scripture, this term includes concepts like dread (Deuteronomy 1:29, KJV); terror (Jonah 1:10, NLT); awe (1 Kings 3:28, NLT); and respect (Leviticus 19:3, NLT). Applied to the Lord, the word captures the idea of recognizing His power and sovereign authority over us as well as drawing close in awe. The sovereign God is throned in splendor and majesty while simultaneously loving us deeply and extending mercy to us. The believer's reaction is not paralyzing fear, but it is not merely a polite reverence either. This holy fear expresses itself in reverential submission to God and His will, compelling us to worship and obey Him.

### ***Discuss***

? Why does a Christian need to read the wisdom literature of Scripture, particularly the Book of Proverbs?

? In practical terms, what do you think it means to “live in fear of the Lord”?

## **Wisdom Guides Us toward Life**

### **Proverbs 3:13–18**

**Say:** Proverbs 3:13–18 begins in a way that might remind us a bit of the familiar words of Psalm 1. The word blessed (Psalm 1:1, KJV) is overflowing with significance and promise. Why? Because it refers to God's favor. Those who pursue godly wisdom will surely find God's promises at work in their lives. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Proverbs 3:13 is an introductory statement, a declaration of the blessed state that will follow the way of wisdom. Verses 14–18 tell us why the person in this state is considered blessed.

The blessing of gaining wisdom is validated through a series of declarations that allude to physical blessings that represent spiritual blessings. Wisdom is personified as a righteous woman, a poetic feature of wisdom literature that we find elsewhere in Proverbs as well (see 1:20–22).

In 3:14–15, we note that wisdom is better than riches—which is described using precious metals and gems—because godly wisdom yields power, influence, and long life (verses 16–17). At this point, we must remember again that the proverbs found in this book are not specific guarantees but principles. We see quite often how foolish living can bring about poverty, loss of reputation, and even a shortened life.

The key conclusion to this passage carries with it allusions to the spiritual realm. Verse 17 says the way of godly wisdom is the right path for those who would follow the Lord, while verse 18 compares wisdom to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis

2–3). Among many other tragic consequences, the Fall brought about the loss of wisdom, causing men and women to follow the path of sin rather than the way of the Lord. A return to wisdom, then, marks a return to the way that leads to spiritual healing and everlasting life. Some scholars view the Book of Proverbs as symbolic of the tree of life, leading us to begin the walk toward regaining what was lost in the Garden.

As Christians walking in the way of the Lord today, we must also grasp the immense value of wisdom and seek it with the same diligence we see in Proverbs. Until we reach the tree of life in heaven (see Revelation 2:7), let us hold fast to the way of wisdom, revealed to us in both the Old and New Testaments.

### ***Discuss***

? What blessings of wisdom have you found?

? Keeping in mind that the Book of Proverbs repeatedly declares that the fear of the Lord is at the heart of wisdom, how much attention should a Christian give to wisdom literature? How much attention do we normally give it?

## **Part 2—Finding Love**

### **A Committed Love**

Song of Solomon 5:2–8

**Say:** How often have you read Song of Solomon? More than a few Christians might answer that they've never read it or only read it once. It is certainly true that Song of Solomon can be difficult to understand. But let's look at some basics together. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

#### **Resource Packet Item 2: Song of Solomon**

Distribute the information sheet and discuss its content as an introduction to this part of the lesson.

The Song of Solomon has created much debate over the centuries, mainly concerning its subject matter and how it applies to life as a follower of God. Throughout Church history many have taken the book to be an allegory of the relationship between Christ and the Church. However, the actual content of the book does not match that interpretation well. Let's look at this book as a love poem between a husband and wife. As such, it portrays a very different view of intimacy than our fallen world and reminds us that marital intimacy between one husband and one wife is God's plan.

Solomon is identified as the writer, and he certainly wrote the book early in his life, before his spiritual decline led to hundreds of marriages. (Most scholars date the book at around 960 BC.) Solomon is also the main character, the bridegroom, and is conversing with his beloved bride.

A fine example of the power of this love poem is found in 5:2–8. The bride is speaking of her bridegroom, and clearly, her thoughts are only of him. She seems to hear the voice of the one she loves and proceeds to share her intense emotions. The author includes specific details regarding the bride's thoughts, actions, and feelings, particularly anticipation, exhilaration, and longing.

The bride is overcome with disappointment as she finally, after much preparation, opens the door to find her bridegroom is gone. She is frantic. He has left her physically and emotionally alone. Suddenly, the guards of the city appear and begin to brutalize her (verses 7–8). Scholars note that this odd scene is not intended to be read literally. Rather, the bride is lovesick and suffering the pains of being alone, separated from the one she loves.

This intense poetic expression certainly resonates with human experience both then and now. Romantic love causes people to long for one another. This is not a casual relationship; rather, the bride feels incomplete without her bridegroom. In many ways, this dramatic picture reflects certain qualities of a committed Christian marriage. What a contrast from the message of casual sex and love prevailing in our world. Surely God's way provides an understanding of what true love can be.

### ***Discuss***

? What value might the Church find in a study of Song of Solomon?

? What does this passage teach us about the commitment of marriage?

## **True Love Is Strong and Steadfast**

Song of Solomon 8:5–7

**Say:** How would you describe the qualities of love—the kind of love that leads to a lifelong commitment in marriage? Song of Solomon 8:5–7 is an intense, poetic reflection upon the power and passion of this kind of committed love. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Song of Solomon 8:5–7 compares romantic love to two of the most powerful and consequential realities of our world: death and the grave. This passage is often seen as the capstone of Solomon's love poem, and it introduces the reader to a new dimension of emotion. Here, love is depicted as a raging fire that cannot be quenched. The imagery continues as the bride describes love as strong as death, which is both inevitable and all-encompassing. In short, the love between bride and bridegroom is more powerful than the individuals themselves.

Love transcends the wealth of this world; it cannot be bought (verse 7). It cannot be forced through human strength or intimidation. Rather, it is a choice and product of the will—a commitment which, when empowered by God, is greater than the forces of this world and the temptations of sin.

What are we to make of this intense poetic expression? One important and unique principle of human love and commitment surfaces when we surrender that commitment to God. Our relationships with one another will face many challenges in this fallen world, but it is God's will and command that our love endures (Mark 10:6–9). By His grace and through the abiding power of the Holy Spirit, Christians can honor their commitments and fulfill their vows. Filled with the love of God, bride and bridegroom can serve Him together for a lifetime.

### ***Discuss***

? What are some challenges a Christian couple might face that threaten to undermine their love for one another?

? How can Christian couples prepare to face these challenges?

## **Part 3—Reflecting on Life In Search of the Meaning of Life**

Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 2:11

**Say:** If you asked one thousand random people on the street, “What is the meaning of life?” you might get one thousand different answers. It is a question that just about everyone ponders at one time or another. Ecclesiastes provides the answer. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Solomon (referring to himself as “the Teacher”) wrote Ecclesiastes near the end of his life, when his spiritual decline, idolatry, and endless search for self-indulgence had left him disillusioned and cynical. He had experienced everything this world had to offer, and in the end he came up empty. Much of Ecclesiastes is summarized by Solomon's words in 1:2 (NLT): “ ‘Everything is meaningless,’ says the Teacher, ‘completely meaningless!’ ” This statement forms the underlying theme of the book.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 2:11 consists of two sections. To grasp the significance of what Solomon wrote, it is helpful to keep his biography in mind—from his desire for wisdom in his youth to his utter rejection of that wisdom in the end. Verses 1–11 liken life to the recurring natural phenomena of the physical world through the passage of time: One generation follows another. The wind blows in various, random directions. Water cycles from rivers to seas. History simply repeats itself over and over, and human beings will eventually be forgotten by future generations. It is a profoundly fatalistic worldview—not unlike what we might hear today.

Then, beginning in verse 12, Solomon proceeded to recount his own life in pursuit of understanding the world around him. Note his observation: “I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. . . . It is all meaningless—like chasing the wind” (verses 13–14, NLT). The more wisdom Solomon gained, the greater grief and sorrow he felt (verse 18).

This conclusion seemed to be rooted in the futility he described in 2:1–11. He sought out pleasure and “tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world” (verse 3, NLT). He had everything a man could enjoy: palaces, servants, wealth, and many beautiful women (verses 4–8). He had become greater than any man who had ever lived in Jerusalem. But in the end, he was just “chasing the wind” (verse 11). The pleasures and possessions he accumulated did not result in a meaningful life; rather, they were reminders of his life’s futility.

### ***Discuss***

? What can we learn about life from Solomon in this passage?

? How do you decide your priorities in life?

## **Life’s Meaning Is Found in God**

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14

**Say:** In many ways, Solomon represents the futility so many experience today as they seek meaning in temporary things. Thankfully, God shows us the real meaning of life. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14 follows ten chapters in which Solomon reflects upon the futility of life. As we read chapters 2–12, however, we also see recognition of who God is and how to approach Him (see 3:1–15, especially verse 14; 5:1–7). All of Solomon’s ponderings come to a conclusion in 12:9–14. He recognizes life does indeed have one purpose: “Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty” (verse 13, NLT).

Once again in his wisdom writings, Solomon makes the point that the fear of the Lord is the beginning and the essence of wisdom. Simply put, the meaning of life is found in a proper relationship with God. Every other life pursuit will lead to disappointment.

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Wisdom**

Distribute the worksheet and complete it as a class, identifying creative ways students can demonstrate the wisdom found in the Word of God.

### ***Discuss***

? Ecclesiastes is often viewed as a bleak book, but 12:9–14 reverses that. In what ways might Ecclesiastes give us joy and hope?

? How does God give meaning to your life?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Wisdom literature is a great example of how the deep truths of God’s Word are incredibly practical. Take some time in coming weeks to read these books more fully, asking God to show you what it means to fear Him and walk in His wisdom every day.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Think of ways your class can be more proactive at encouraging each other's growth in the Lord during the week.
- Encourage someone struggling with discouragement—there is indeed purpose and joy to be found in life through knowing God and resting in His presence.
- Pray that God will lead you by His wisdom to follow the path He lays out before you.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

The Legacy of Fools.  
Proverbs 3:31–35

Tuesday:

Wisdom from Above.  
James 3:13–18

Wednesday:

The Greatest Love.  
John 15:9–13

Thursday:

The Love of the World.  
1 John 2:15–17

Friday:

The Brevity of Life.  
Ecclesiastes 12:1–7

Saturday:

Like a Vapor.  
James 4:13–17