

.: Wisdom Literature

Each growth group will study one of these passages over the next week:

- Ecclesiastes 4
- Proverbs 12:1-16
- Proverbs 9

A Few Guidelines for Reading Proverbs

- Proverbs must be read as a collection.
- Proverbs are often parabolic (i.e., figurative, pointing beyond themselves.)
- Proverbs are intensely practical, not technically theological.
- Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.
- Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior-just the opposite.
- Proverbs strongly reflecting ancient culture may need sensible “translation” so as not to lose their meaning.
- Proverbs are not guarantees from God but poetic guidelines for good behavior.
- Proverbs may use highly specific language, exaggeration, or any of a variety of literary techniques to make their point.
- Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life but are not exhaustive in their coverage.
- Wrongly used, proverbs may justify a crass, materialistic lifestyle. Rightly used, proverbs will provide practical advice for daily living.



A Few Guidelines for Reading Job

Most of Job is a carefully structured wisdom dialogue between Job and a group of his friends. It presents the wisdom of the world and culminates in the wisdom of God. There are two main questions being asked throughout Job: “Is life fair?” and “why me?” As you search for the answers provided to each questions remember this one key point:

Read all of Job before you decide who is speaking the truth and who is wrong. In fact, God enters the conversation at the end and clears a lot of the questions up.

A Few Guidelines for Reading Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a speculative wisdom monologue. It is full of observations about the state of the world and life itself. The main question that we must answer to understand it is this: Is the speaker’s point that life is fleeting and ephemeral or is his point that life is meaningless and useless? Or is it maybe a little bit of both? Some people believe that Ecclesiastes is an expression of cynical wisdom with

the whole book showing the uselessness of worldly wisdom compared to the wisdom that can be learned from God. If you hold this view Ecclesiastes works as a contrast to everything else the Bible teaches. Others believe that it is an expression of how to enjoy life under God in a world where all die in the end. Each view is held by prominent biblical scholars. Read it for yourself comparing what it says to the rest of Biblical revelation and make your own decision.

A Few Guidelines for Reading Song of Songs (Solomon)

Song of Songs is a lengthy love song/lyrical poem about human romance. It can be called lyrical wisdom. It fits into the wisdom genre as a whole as it focuses on the “wise choice” of marital joy and sexual fidelity.

A few notes as you read this:

- Try to avoid allegorizing the text. Song of Songs has been interpreted as an allegory for Christ’s love for the church. This, to say the least, is a huge stretch. It is about exactly what it appears to be about – the joy and passion of God’s good gift of sex to a married couple.
- Try to appreciate the overall ethical context of the book. The beauty of God’s design for man and woman in a deep, intimate marriage relationship with each other.
- Remember that the book is a song. It’s a love song like others that would have been sung at a wedding banquet in the ancient world celebrating attraction, love, faithfulness, joy and pleasure as well as the temptation to be unfaithful and the consequences that unfaithfulness brings.
- Much like Proverbs, Song of Songs carries truth as suggestions and general guidelines. It suggests rather than describes godly choices.
- Song of Songs presents a world that has very different values than our own. It describes how a person can respond faithfully to the attractiveness of another and fulfill the needs of this person. Instead of romance preceding marriage it speaks of romance defining marriage. Instead of sexual techniques it tells us about virtuous romance.

Notes: