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DISCIPLESHIP TRACK, YEAR 3
OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY
GENESIS - MALACHI

An Old Testament Survey
Presented to Fireside Reformed Baptist Church
in Elizabethtown, Kentucky

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
THE WISDOM OF GOD	3
What is Wisdom Literature?	3
Wisdom in the Proverbs	3
Jesus is the Wisdom in Proverbs.....	5
Discussion Questions	6

JOB-SONG OF SONGS

THE WISDOM OF GOD

What is Wisdom Literature?

The books of the Bible that comprise wisdom literature are Job, Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. When taken together, these five books are referred to as “the heart of the Bible.” They are distinguished from other Old Testament books in that they are not narratives. In other words, they don’t center on specific acts of God such as the Fall, the Exodus, or the Exile. We can be sure these five books belong in this category because of the lack of references to covenants, the Mosaic Law, the Temple, and Promised Land which greatly occupy the other authors of the Old Testament books.¹ Therefore, wisdom literature distinguishes itself from the rest of the canon in that it “does not deal with the mighty acts of God.”² Rather, the focus is on how to act mightily as ambassadors of God.

Wisdom in the Proverbs

The Bible never promises us a life that is free from problems, rather it the Bible promises the opposite. Just take Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians that Christians share “abundantly” in Christ’s sufferings (1 Cor 1:5). In this life, there are many guarantees, such as death and taxes. Suffering and pain can be added to that list – especially as a Christian. So, what are we to do when we face difficult situations, pain, suffering, and evil? The Bible prescribes one word: *wisdom*.

¹ Eric Ortlund, *Ecclesiastes* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2024), 5.

² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010), 3.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is not simply intelligence. Consider the creatures the Proverbs regards as wise: ants, badgers, locusts, and lizards (Prov 30:24-28). These animals don't have degrees, high I.Q. scores, and they don't engineer modern technology. Yet they are wise because they live in such a way that preserves their lives and their flourishing. People can display wise ways of living such as self-control, zeal, persistence, self-motivation, persistence, sympathy, hope, and the awareness to think under stress. The Hebrew word for wisdom – *hokma* – carries a range of meaning far beyond simply being head smart, or having a high I.Q. Wisdom is more of an ability to “know how” to navigate a circumstance, rather than sheer knowledge of facts, or a “knowing that.” This is what the Proverbs teaches – a “knowing how” to navigate life that leads to the preservation of life, flourishing of people, and success.

Where do we find wisdom? Proverbs 1:2-7 tells us the exact purpose of the book: to give wisdom, instruction, insight, prudence, discretion, guidance, all of which are grounded in the fear of the Lord. The book of Proverbs is where we find wisdom, informs us how to live with these qualities. However, it is crucial to know where to start when we are seeking to gain wisdom and apply it to life: the fear of the Lord (Prov 1:7). Without a faith in God that leads to obedience, wisdom will be unattainable. In this sense, education not simply acquiring knowledge, because a fool can be highly educated. So, the difference is between knowledge and believing and obeying God.

Proverbs 1-9. Proverbs is divided into two main parts. The first nine chapters are loving and wise parents addressing their son. The direct addressing of their son occurs nineteen different times in the first nine chapters.³ The first nine chapters of Proverbs are dominated by the theme of instruction and education. However, no one can be education in a vacuum. Intents and purposes of education come from an assumed worldview, and it is plain that the Proverbs imply a prior faith commitment to

³ Prov 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32

the one, the only, the true, and the living God of the Bible. This world view not only tells us how to see the world as is really is – it also tells us how to see the world for what it ought to be. So, the Proverbs tells us not only how to recognize the fool, it tells us how not to be one.

Proverbs 10-31. The second division of Proverbs consist of wise sayings to the general circumstances in life. This way is the Hebrew word *derek*. It is often translated as “the way,” the “path,” or the “road.” It gives a comprehensive, practical guide to living a righteous life by contrasting wisdom with folly through daily life, speech, and relationships. It has a consistent emphasis on fearing the Lord and honesty while warning that a life of wickedness brings ruin.

In other words, the rest of Proverbs is like a lamp to our feet that desires to walk on the narrow road to life (Ps 119:105). The path deals with wise ways in seeking purity, handling anger, work ethic, speech, and a myriad of others way in which we are to exercise the wisdom of God. The section ends with the words of Agur, king Lemuel, and the famous wife of noble character.

Jesus is Wisdom

Wisdom can be tough to think clearly about. When we think of wisdom, we tend to think of a way of dealing with a situation that results in good results. Certainly, that is what wisdom looks like to people watching. But what exactly is wisdom? When we read the Proverbs, we see that before wisdom is observable action, wisdom is a person. We see that wisdom “calls out,” and that wisdom expects to be “called upon” in return (Prov 1:20, 28). Take a minute and read through all of Proverbs 8 and then read Colossians 1:15-19. In the same way that Jesus is wisdom; Jesus is truth (Jn 18:37). Therefore, wisdom is not simply a way of living, wisdom is Jesus himself. This is why Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” We must trust and obey Jesus if we desire to have wisdom.

Discussion Questions

There are two sections of questions: group and personal. Both sets of questions can be covered while at Discipleship Track. However, you are also encouraged to take the personal questions home and think about in your personal life from day to day and discuss with your parents. This way, you can have your parents encourage you, pray for you, and help walk with you as you seek to grow in Christ.

Group Questions and Discussion

1. **Wisdom.** Who is wisdom? What is wisdom? Where is wisdom? How can you get wisdom?
2. **Hear, my Son.** Who has God placed in your life to learn wisdom from? These can be either individuals or groups of people.

Personal Questions and Application

3. **Reading wisdom.** How often do you read the Proverbs? What are some practices in life that you can establish to read more about Jesus and his wisdom?
4. **Hear, my Son.** At this point in your life, what are some themes in the Proverbs that you should be learning to be ready for the next stage in life?