

Session One



Introduction

Information Overload

Experts estimate that we now have more than 1.3 trillion gigabytes of online information at our fingertips. That's the equivalent of a stack of fully loaded iPads 339 miles high. When information is that ubiquitous, it can begin to consume our lives, giving us "paralysis by analysis." Much of this information is disposable and is forgotten within minutes. So, we may possess more information than ever before while never becoming truly wise.

Divine Data Collection

People in biblical times collected information, too, but it was data of a different kind. They received time-tested knowledge, which, when rightly applied, led to a life of wisdom and happiness.

Biblical wisdom is more than tweet-sized aphorisms or biblical "life-hacks" for practical living. For the authors of the Bible, wisdom was a matter of life and death. It was a carefully learned skill. In fact, the Hebrew word used for "wisdom" in the Old Testament, *chokmah*, was also used to describe the creative gifts of a temple artist (see Exodus 35:31), a skilled sailor (see Psalm 107:27), or a master goldsmith (see Jeremiah 10:9). In each case, these experts first had to

apprentice under a master. They had to learn discipline and accept reproof and correction humbly.

If we want true wisdom, the journey is the same for us (see Proverbs 1:2-6). It requires a willingness to learn, an eagerness of spirit, and a humility of heart (see Proverbs 1:23, 15:33). Are you ready? Let's get started!

Sitting at the Feet of Wisdom

Few of us have the advantage of spending time at the feet of a true spiritual master, but Sacred Scripture gives us that opportunity. Ancient authors collected the greatest wisdom of their times, eventually committing it to written form so that we could hear and benefit from those sages today.

In this study, we will draw from many of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, including Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon (commonly called the "book of Wisdom"), Sirach, Ecclesiastes, Job, and even the Wisdom Psalms.

Reading Wisdom Literature

The wisdom literature of the Bible is often in the form of proverbs: short, memorable statements, often with a contrasting parallel line. For example, "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and

is careless" (Proverbs 14:16). This literary design drives the point home and aids in memorization. Other times, the literature offers practical, godly advice: "The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so, you will find favor in the sight of the LORD. For great is the might of the LORD; he is glorified by the humble" (Sirach 3:18-20).

Wisdom literature is based on general principles of living. Individual wisdom sayings do not represent a guarantee or a promise. Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Overall, that is true. It should motivate parents to provide a thorough religious education for their children; however, there is no guarantee that your children will follow that instruction throughout their lives. Every human being has free will to choose his or her own destiny. So, we can see that this literature not only *teaches* wisdom but also *requires* some basic wisdom to navigate it successfully. Throughout this eight-part program, we will endeavor to help you do just that.

In this first session, take a moment to introduce yourself to your small group, review the "Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion" on page xvi, and discuss the following questions:

1. What, if any, experience do you have with Old Testament wisdom literature? Have you read or studied it before?

2. Describe a wise person in your life who has helped you with important decisions or difficult situations.

3. What (or who) have been your sources of wisdom in life?

4. Where do most people look for wisdom today?

5. What do you hope to gain from this *Wisdom* study?

6. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that “to fear the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Sirach 1:14; see also Proverbs 1:7; Wisdom 12:11; Psalm 111:10). This attitude is not a frightened, servile submission to God, but rather a humble trust in his loving providence and protecting power. Read **Sirach 1:11-20** together as a group. What are the characteristics, blessings, and benefits of “the fear of the LORD”?

Wisdom in Your Week

The invitation to fear the Lord reminds us of who should be at the center of our lives—and in control. In the coming week, ask yourself regularly, “Who is in the driver’s seat; who is on the throne?” If you can say God and God alone, that is the beginning of wisdom.

In addition to the Learning Wisdom and Living Wisdom sections included in each session in this journal, talk notes (Listening to Wisdom) are included to help you follow along with the video presentation. A Profiles in Wisdom feature in each session focuses on people from Church history who have exemplified wisdom in their own lives.

Lectio Divina

Four pages in each session are dedicated to the practice of *lectio divina*, which is a way of praying with the Bible. In *lectio divina*, a person chooses a short passage of Scripture and prays with it. The following steps of *lectio divina* are taken from *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*.¹

1. **Read** (*lectio*): Slowly read a Scripture passage several times, paying close attention to the words.
2. **Reflect** (*meditate, meditatio*): Meditate on the Scripture passage, thinking about specific words or ideas that stand out to you.
3. **Relate** (*pray, oratio*): Converse with God about the Scripture passage and its meaning for you.
4. **Rest** (*contemplate, contemplatio*): Sit quietly in God's presence, enjoying just being with him.

¹ Tim Gray, *Praying Scripture for a Change: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2009), 36.

Wisdom from Father to Son

In ancient times, family authority and national leadership were passed on from father to son. This domestic dynamic was also the pattern for teaching wisdom (see Proverbs 1:8; Sirach 2:1). Much of our Old Testament wisdom literature was what a king would pass on to the heir of his throne. However, the use of masculine language should not lead us to believe that women were excluded from receiving or offering wisdom. Young people were taught to obey the instructions of their mothers (see Proverbs 6:20; Sirach 3:2) and to honor and respect the wisdom of both their parents (see Sirach 3:11, 7:27, 23:14). In fact, one of the most quoted sections of the Bible is the instruction given by the queen mother to her son, the king (see Proverbs 31). The wisdom of God is offered to anyone who will receive it, regardless of age or gender.

Listening to Wisdom

- Session One Talk Notes -

I. Introduction

- A. You and the world were created with wisdom (CCC 295); you need wisdom
- B. God's creatures are meant to share his being, wisdom, and goodness (CCC 295)
- C. Jesus is the Truth and the Wisdom (CCC 216)
- D. Wisdom pervades all things and helps us in all aspects of life (Wisdom 7:17-26)

II. Sources of Wisdom

- A. Wisdom defined
 1. The right application of knowledge, resulting in an integrated, fruitful, and holy life

2. The skill of living life from God's perspective
3. Prudence: synonym for wisdom (CCC 1806)

B. The foundation of wisdom

1. "The fear of the Lord" (Proverbs 9:10)
2. Humility
3. Jesus is Wisdom (Colossians 2:3; Mark 6:2; Revelation 5:12, 7:12)

C. Relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding

1. Knowledge is "information gained through experience, reasoning, or acquaintance"

2. Wisdom is “the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting”
 - a. Knowledge can exist without wisdom, but not the other way around
 - b. A person can be knowledgeable without being wise
 - c. Knowledge is the ability to use a gun; wisdom is knowing when to use it
 3. When we walk in wisdom, understanding follows
- D. The value of wisdom (Proverbs 2:3-4, 8:10-11, 23:23)
- E. Worldly wisdom versus godly wisdom
- F. Wisdom books
1. Proverbs – Solomon: Wisdom gave order to chaos and gives order to our lives

2. Sirach (book of Ecclesiasticus) – ethical teachings from approximately 200–175 BC
3. Ecclesiastes – ascribed to Solomon: a search for happiness
4. Wisdom – Wisdom of Solomon: Wisdom is personified
5. Job – typically included in the wisdom literature
6. James – the New Testament proverbs

III. Conclusion

- A. Transform your mind (Romans 11:33–12:2)
- B. The qualities of wisdom (James 3:13-17)