



wise beyond his years

Scripture Story: 1 Kings 3: 4: 10.

Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 1.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

United we stand—but divided we fall.

Around 800 years passed from when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to when Nebuchadnezzar dragged them off to Babylon. We usually think of them as a united people all those years, but the century of monarchy ruled by Saul, David, and Solomon was about as good as it got. Before Saul the Benjamite was anointed and crowned, civil war nearly wiped out his tribe. Even the legendary rule of David was marked by restless dissenters challenging his grip on the throne, first from members of other tribes and Saul loyalists, then within his own family.

Solomon's reign is remarkable not only for Israel's peace with its neighbors, but for its peace within. Before losing his mule and life in battle, big brother Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6, NIV) with his good looks and charisma, but for young Solomon it would take more than looks or luck. Having to get by on wits alone no doubt contributed to his asking for wisdom above everything else.

When Solomon solved a custody dispute by suggesting a baby boy be sliced in two (prompting the true parent to give up the child while the faker spitefully agreed to the split), "all Israel . . . held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice" (1 Kings 3:28, NIV). Perhaps today we should be awed that he held a country together for so long, for at his death it was torn, and no king's horses or men ever put it together again.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- *Know* that God desires to bless their talents if they will give Him their lives.
- *Feel* the call to live for God.
- *Respond* by dedicating themselves to God's work.

III. EXPLORE

- Priorities
- Wisdom/counsel
- Decision-making
- Humility

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.leadoutministries.com.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Everybody lives by one philosophy or another. "He who dies with the most toys wins." "Eat, drink, and be merry." "Greed is good." "All we need is love." "Just trust God." But whether one's personal philosophy is pessimistic or optimistic, rooted in guilt or in gratitude, the question still lingers: What is wisdom? What does it mean to be *wise*?

Have your students read the following texts in as

many versions as possible: Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:1-7; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 15:31-33; Isaiah 11:1-3; Isaiah 33:5, 6; Micah 6:8, 9.

What light do these verses shed on the origin of wisdom? Discuss and write your students' distinct ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard where everyone can read them.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Seek God's kingdom first, and you'll get everything else in the deal." Nice words to live by, but is God faithful when we ask Him for wisdom for everyday life?

Nineteenth-century London preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "Men do not seek God first; God seeks them first; and if any of you are seeking Him today it is because He has first sought you." The great Christians of history weren't all prosperous by worldly standards, but they were all rich in wisdom. They put God first, and people respected them because they respected God. Wisdom brings humility. Ellen White wrote: "I have no special wisdom in myself; I am only an instrument in the Lord's hands to do the work He has set for me to do" (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 46).

Paul Rusesabagina, who saved the lives of more than 1,200 people during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, grew up watching his wise father quietly command the respect of villagers. "He was usually the elder who spoke last," Rusesabagina remembers. A particularly petty dispute his father resolved, "a small misunderstanding that had blossomed into a full-scale war of pride," stands out in his memory. One farmer's crop had jumped the line onto another man's property, but most was where it should be, so there "was no clear villain or victim. 'Listen, you two,' [my father] said, motioning with the blade of his hand. 'This is where the line is. Respect it from now on, and respect each other as well. I don't want to hear about this again'" (*An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography*, by Paul Rusesabagina. Penguin Books, 2006).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

What's your biggest priority in life? To find true love? To be the greatest at your art, sport, or business? To find yourself?

Solomon's story may seem far removed from us (most people don't find themselves ruler of God's own theocracy, offered anything we desire), but the book of Proverbs makes clear that wisdom is for everybody. Proverbs 30 brings us the wisdom of one Agur, son of Jakeh, with a prayer that any longtime Christian will find familiar:

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and dishonour you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:7-9, NIV).

How do those verses sum up a Christian perspective on life?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- How did Solomon win his people's approval despite so much intertribal conflict?
- What mistakes do you see Solomon making that will later come back to haunt him?
- The people were happy and prosperous under Solomon. What spiritual dangers does prosperity bring that can result in poverty?
- How would you describe God's offer to Solomon?
- *Underline* what's new to you in the story.
- *Circle* the words or phrases that best capture the story's various emotions.
- What questions does this story prompt in your thinking?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: James 1:5; Proverbs 2:1-5; 3:13-18; Philippians 1:9.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

In Proverbs, wisdom is next to godliness. Proverbs' themes have been summarized in five major points:

1. Actions have consequences. In God's world good deeds lead to blessing and bad deeds result in negative consequences or punishment.

God is passionate about justice.

2. How we treat others and relate to God is as important as the technical things we know.
3. God gives everyone freedom of choice. In contrast to much of Greek philosophy and fear, we are not ruled by fate. The ideal of wisdom is that when people know the good, they will do it.
4. In everything we do we either follow the road of righteousness or the highway of folly, with sure results.
5. Proverbs contrasts the opposite types—the wise and the foolish, the slothful and the studious, the rich and the poor.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

It's a familiar text to most Christians, but while archaeologists find parallels between many of the Bible's proverbs and other “wise sayings” in ancient Middle Eastern manuscripts, only the Bible describes wisdom as beginning with worship. Gerald Wheeler writes: “A major difference between nonbiblical wisdom and that of Scripture is that the other wisdom documents taught that one could have success by what one did. The Bible teaches that true success comes from whom one worships. . . .” “The fear of the Lord/God” is a fundamental and widespread image. It combines awe, reverence, faith, and obedience—the whole life of the believers as they relate to God. As His followers live out a concrete expression of their loyalty and faithfulness, they respond to the leading of God, who alone can provide atonement. A truly godly life can only come through God Himself” (*Wisdom: Timeless*

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

More Improvisation

Laugh and learn with some Bible improv. Proverbs' contrasts and vivid imagery provide endless possibilities for improvisational fun. Have one student narrate while others act out some of the “wise vs. fool” descriptions from Proverbs. The lighthearted humor, visual reinforcement, and whole-body learning will cement the principles in their minds like nothing else. For example:

- “The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin” (10:8, NIV).
- “The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down” (14:1, NIV).
- “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue” (17:28, NIV).
- “In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has” (21:20, NIV).
- “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control” (29:11, NIV).

See also Proverbs 6:6-11; 12:27; and other verses throughout the book.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**

Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book Prophets and Kings. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

Treasures from Proverbs, Review and Herald, 2000), p. 42.

Proverbs focuses primarily on external behavior, for Bible writers believed that what we do reflects who we are. We see this in Proverbs 6:16-19, NIV: “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

Violence of words and deeds is equally condemned in Proverbs, “For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife” (30:33, NIV).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have your students rewrite specific proverbs, in groups, to apply to their own situations—at school, with parents and siblings, with friends—and in their own words. For example, Proverbs 30:32, 33;

Proverbs 28:1, 6-8; Proverbs 13:20-22; Proverbs 11:4-6; Proverbs 11:22-27.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Proverbs are timeless. “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion” (11:22, NIV). You don’t have to live in 900 B.C. to come up with an instant association for those words—just look at the nearest tabloid newspaper. “He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise” (11:29, NIV). Remind you of anyone you know?

“He who winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin” (10:10, NIV). “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (24:26, NIV). “The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (28:1, NIV). Each one is still as true as it’s ever been.

Proverbs is one of the most underrated books of the Bible, but it’s packed with power for anyone who wants to glorify God and live an outstanding life. James 1:5 says: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (NIV). In Proverbs, God gives us some words to live by.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 1.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.