**Wisdom literature** Growth Groups Leaders’ notes supplement 2018 Term 3

**Wisdom on Church**

This is a great booklet, that will help us all to be more careful and intentional in building up each other on Sundays.

Each week, start with a short discussion on some of the questions. You might like to ask a member of your group to summarise the section each week. You could encourage the group to pick one action (eg pray before church; look out for visitors) and then feedback the following week how it went.

**Study 0 - Introducing Wisdom Literature**

Q2 To fear God = awe (awesome)/revere/respect/honour – and how awful it would be to be judged by God.

**Study 1 - Introducing Proverbs**

Q1 There are whole sections identified as not written by Solomon (see outline). We see in 25:1 that King Hezekiah’s men (some 200 years after Solomon) complied “more proverbs of Solomon”. So there were various collections of proverbs that the complier of this final inspired version of the book considered in line with Solomon’s wisdom.

Q2 Ask people to summarise 1:2-6 in their own words. Discuss how we need to fear God (respect, humbly submit) as we read his word.

Q3 After the many warnings of ch1-7, the two women “call out” and urge the reader to follow them ch8-9. The fight for devotion.

Q4 Ask group members to pick a theme by finding a few verses on the same topic.

eg wealth 6:31 7:20, 8:18, 10:15, 22, 11:4, 16, 13:7, 11, 14:24, 15:16, 17:16, 18:11, 19:4, 22,16, 28:8, 29:3

Interestingly, the individual themes are deliberately not grouped together. They are considered all together, just like in our daily lives.

Q5 Mrs Wisdom is wisdom turned into a person. She not only gives out wisdom (rest of the book) but is wisdom. We’re to model from her, her wisdom of life. More specifically, lots can be learnt about the attitude of a godly wife, and response of a godly husband and children to her (31:28,31).

**Study 2 - Introducing Job**

Q1 Blameless = complete integrity before God.

Q3 God has a bigger wisdom – always for our ultimate good (esp seen in the cross of Christ Acts 2:22-24; also Gen 50:20)

Q4 Depending on what is shared here, you might like to pray here or later.

Q5 Satan is destructive and deadly, and bent on proving God and God’s people wrong by tempting them. But he is completely under God’s control and can only do what God permits.

Q7 No! God poses many questions about Job’s ability to be God ch38-41 but never answers Job on why he is suffering (as we know from ch1-2). Job gets it fully on how to rightfully respond to God as he did in the beginning (1:21-22, 2:10, 40:4-5, 42:2-6).

Q8 God puts up with so much blasphemy to his name – from IRA bombing, the crusades, Judas Iscariot, Job & his friends, to us – showing us how incredibly patient he is. *Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation.* (2 Pet 3:14)

Q9 There in much group wisdom to glean on this from life experience. But from Job we have much to model from his response (& the unloving application of the friends). And Jesus (Q10) is our ultimate model.

Q10 Job is Christ-like figure in terms of undeserved suffering, Satanic warfare, God’s will, patient endurance (for Job by the end) (Heb 12:2, 2 Cor 1:6, Rev 1:9, 13:10, 14:12).

**Study 3 - Introducing Ecclesiastes**

Introduce Ecclesiastes by the frame of the book (1:1-11, 12:9-14), noting that the narrator introduces the “Teacher“, who then speaks for the rest of the book. Note: It’s a moot point how much of it is Solomon’s actual words, and how much of it is the narrator setting up the lessons learnt from “older Solomon” and the lessons he would want to pass down to “younger Solomon” or rather to the narrator’s “son” (12:12).

Read of Solomon’s legendary wisdom, resources and failings & thus suitability for learning life lessons from. 1 Ki 3:3-14, 4:29-34, 10:23-25, 11:1-13, 1 Chron 29:25. If time - the story of a wise ruling 1 Ki 3:16-28, and the queen of Sheba 10:1-13 are great.

**Study 4 - Ecclesiastes 1-2 Life under the sun**

Q1 It is not as if God is at all out of the picture (a common misinterpretation of Ecclesiastes). God is “under the sun” upholding created order. But still the march of time, nothing new & death, as generations come & go, leave all forgotten & insignificant.

Meaningless (NIV)/Vanity (ESV)/Futility (HCSB)/Hebel (Hebrew) = breath/mist/vapour = no substance /won’t last/can’t be held onto. Note: not that it has no meaning for what it is, but that it won’t last. The same word is used in Psalm 39:5 & 144:4.

Q2 “Yes” (we have much common ground and recognise futility) & also “No” (The world says to live the dream for a while, even if it doesn’t last).

Q3 The burden of the quest – so much human endeavour to pursue and consider (cf 12:12b) and so much sorrow and grief (1:18).

Q5 Search for meaning by all means (2:10) - set up (1:16-18): pleasure (2:1-3); achievements/work (2:4-6); wealth (2:7-8a); wives/sex (2:8b); success (2:9). Even if gain the whole world (Mark 8:36) 🡪 conclusion: meaningless (2:11).

Q7 Human wisdom is better than folly, but it won’t last (death/forgotten) 🡪 not the way to find meaning either. Hatred of life is a fair response if there is nothing else to give us meaning. Life should be very depressing, but for the common grace of God.

Q8 We’re to trust God, receive life as a gift, live within this limit, & rejoice in the actual working & playing as they happen (as compared to seeking to find meaning in their outcome). In other words, we’re to “live by faith”. Life is not meant to be seen as an avenue of gain but an arena of receiving gifts (cf Lam 3:22-23).

Q9 Sit lightly with what the world offers as important – what to eat, drink, enjoy, spend, see, wear, accumulate, achieve – in a generation where will it be? What’s on our bucket list before we die (kick the empty bucket)? It’s all meaningless!

Q10 We have a work that lasts – the gospel work that results in the glory of God’s eternal kingdom. Our goal – invest well!

Q11 We’re to find satisfaction in the existence of now. There is something godly about “Carpe diem” (cease the day)/mindfulness (very qualified) – to be thankful in all things – because we have life as a gift from God – we are in relationship with him forever (Col 2:6).

**Study 5 - Ecclesiastes 3 God’s timing**

Q4 Yes (of course) & No (people are can’t see rhyme nor reason in the capricious of the “gods”/life). But we need higher reasons to work out say whether to go to war or not – there is some higher evaluation needed than mere chance.

Q5. Eg: helpless, comforted, threatened, frustrated, thankful.

Q6 Humans have an innate sense of some sort of overall order (in the image of God?), but we can’t work it out nor change it.

Q7 cf Eve not fearing/revering/obeying God – via the craftiness of the serpent (Gen 3:1). She saw that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was “desirable for gaining wisdom” (Gen 3:6) – the very essence of human/Satanic wisdom is knowing better than God. And like fresh flowers cut off from their source of life (see the series image), surly humanity would now die. You could highlight that fearing God hear is already letting us in on the overall conclusion the book (12:13), and central to both Proverbs and Job.

Q8 Hear the growth group’s collective wisdom, this will take time but it’s worth it to keep us thinking evangelistically. In the end it’s a call to trust/put faith in God ie there’s 2 ways to live – either continue to reject God & face Judgement or trust on Jesus dying on the cross for our judgement & live for him now as the loving ruler of the world.

Q9 No difference – with our world moving from the sanctity of humanity (made in God’s image as distinct from the rest of the animal kingdom) this is being reinforced – with increased support for: abortion, infanticide (post birth terminations), euthanasia, human embryo harvesting and research.

Q10 There is a time to delay judgement but not forever – God will one day call full time on this world, and the one who rises from the dead is the rightful righteous judge – Jesus Christ’s return on Judgement Day.

Q11 We’re in the last days and now is the time of God’s favour and very last days for salvation (2 Cor 6:2). Urgency of our times is often lost in our consciousness (2 Peter 3:8-13) . Pray for opportunities to share Jesus with our friends and family who don’t know him.

**Study 6 - Ecclesiastes 4-6 Wealth**

Q2 4:1-3 Shows the real & terrible power of oppressors

4:4 Shows envying what others have is meaningless

4:5 Shows that laziness is not the right option

4:6 Shows peace is better

4:7-12 Shows companionship is greater

4:13-16 Shows life no guarantees: the king has power & the youth has popular wisdom – but both rejected

5:8-9 Shows us we should not be surprised by oppression

5:10-17 Shows us wealth doesn’t satisfy: never enough (v10); benefits diminish (v11); worry (v12);

self harm (v13); no guarantees (v14); can’t take it with you (v17);

6:1-9 Shows wealth cannot satisfy [At a funeral: “How much $ did she leave behind? All of it!”]

6:10-12 Human knowledge is powerless against the powerful (eg God; kings; oppressors; death)

Q3 5:1-7 Respect God most of all - quick to listen & slow to speak (James 1:19);

To fear God – effects our listening to God (v1) & our tongue (v2-7) (ie what we say cf James 3)

*Col 3:15-17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him****.***

Q4 If God gives us his Son – what won’t he give us (Rom 8:31-32). We don’t need to invest in our wealth as if our life depended on it.

*Deut. 8:3 God humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

**Study 7 - Ecclesiastes 7-8 Wisdom under the sun**

Q1 They are reality pills of what matters, and to number our days. They are sources of wisdom.

Q3 God deliberately blocks us – so we rely on God (fear him) & not ourselves.

Q4 Caution to limited our reliance – except the ultimate wisdom to not rely on it & fear God.

Q5 The search for wisdom is also so limited by humanity’s corruption.

Q6 Wisdom is a great aid to life aid but it’s foolish to see it as the aim of life.

Q7 It’s wise to live as best we can with their power as a given, so obey them. (cf Rom 13:1-7).

Q8 Even the most powerful are as limited as us in knowing the future, and especially about their death.

Q9 To fear God & enjoy him forever.

**Note:** **7:28** **Please explain?** The gender distinction is not the point, rather it’s a poetic way of highlighting the rarity of finding someone who is upright. In context, given the warnings of a wayward woman 2 verses earlier (7:26), the dire need for the man not to be obliging is still being highlighted.

**Study 8 - Ecclesiastes 9-10 Findings of the search for meaning - Living life to the full**

**Overall literary structure**

8:16-17 is a summary statement concluding the Teacher’s quest to find meaning under the sun: we cannot discover the wisdom of God that makes sense of what goes on under the sun.

If this is the summary of chapters 1-8, then how are we to understand chapters 9-12?

Chapters 9-12 can be collected together under: “How we’re to respond to such a finding (8:16-17)?”

*While we have life (9:1-6), which is so fleeting (9:7-10), and uncertain (9:11-12), choose wisdom over over-confident folly (ch10). However, it’s still wise to invest confidently without knowing the circumstances (11:1-6), even with youthful disregard for over-caution (11:7-10), for old age will come before we know it (12:1-7). So, in summary how to respond: learn the lessons from the Teacher (12:8-12) & fear God and keep his commands (12:13-14).*

So ch 9-12 expands on us trusting in God’s wisdom – ie living by faith (Hab 2:4, Rom 1:17, 2 Cor 5:7, Gal 2:20, 3:11, Heb 10:38)rather than needing sight to make sense of our lives and to make decisions.

Q1 The living still have hope (cf 7:2) – an opportunity to turn to God (fear him) and live forever.

Q2 Make the most of now – investing in what lasts – loving & investing in the service of God’s kingdom.

Q3 Wisdom is far more valuable/powerful than raw power.

Q4 Wisdom is limited and foolishness is powerful – so we need to show great caution with foolishness.

But still Wisdom is still better

 10:1 A dead fly festers = one rotten apple can spoil the lot.

 V2-3 Fool is trapped in their foolish ways

 V4 Stay calm

 V5-7 Mixed up world – fools are promoted – wrong people in power

 V8-11 Mixed up world – no guarantees in life

 V12-14 Words matter – take care (Prov 10:19)

 V15 Fool – self-consumed & lost

 V16-17 Two types of rulers – gluttons vs diligent workers, abuse of power

 V18 Laziness – destructive (failure to launch – never grew up)

 V19 Partying has its place & so does wealth – more useful

 V20 There is no such thing as the privacy of your own home – have nothing to hide

**Note: 10:2 Please explain?** Other than a Malcolm Turnbull ad, the verse is saying that even though you cannot externally read someone’s inner heart motivations, the heart of the wise & the foolish are complete opposites.

**Study 9 - Ecclesiastes 11-12 Findings of the search for meaning - Fear God**

Q2 Even though we don’t know the outcome of life let alone investments - don’t be over cautious, be bold, take risks.

Note: Sharing this gospel is always a risky activity – but never in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

Connect to Q3: Youth can be good at taking risks & some may well pay off. Older people need to let younger people try their ideas - our job is to make sure we help then pick the not too crazy ideas!

Q3 Rejoice in your youth/light – love life & don’t hold back – but remember youth is nothing special either (11:10).

Q4 Remember to be responsible too – there is much more going on that God ultimately cares about & we’re responsible for. We make our decisions soberly.

Q5 It’s an poetic allegory – so don’t make too much of a bit of over/under reading (enjoy the range of possibilities):

V1 days of darkness = old age, where we lose strength to bother with please

V2 return to darkness of pre creation (darkness pre creation of light Gen 1) = death

V3 Keepers = house servers = arms

V4 Grinders = house cooks = teeth,

 Looking through windows dimly = eyes failing

V5 Afraid heights/streets = Loss of confidence in body strength to not fall, let alone defend oneself

 Almond tree blossoms = pallid complexion

 Grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred = so weak

V6 Silver cord severed & golden bowel broken = life is precious & yet fragile & ephemeral

 pitcher shattered, wheel broken – productivity is over

 dust cf Gen 2:7, 3:19

Q6 To remember our Creator before our twilight years/darkness/death. God has made us more than dust in the beginning & has every right over us.

Q7 The Teacher: imparted knowledge (v9); set out the findings of his quest for meaning for us (v9-10, 1 Ki 4:29-34), goads (ie a cattle prod needed when pulling loads) & nails – painful but best embedded deeply in us (v11); shepherd – to look out for us sheep (v11); don’t over think/analyse – there is no need to go beyond the findings of this book for real wisdom (v12).

Q8 There’s no guarantees in this life but in the end life wisdom is very simply … Trust & obey – no guarantees, except judgement and God’s expressed will in his Word. Romans 1:5, 16:25-27 shows us that faith & obedience is the same idea.

Q9 Ponder the implications of Luke 12:4-5.