

THE 
PRESENT
WORD
ADULT BIBLE LESSONS

LEADER'S GUIDE

SUMMER 2020

MANY FACES OF WISDOM

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LEADER’S GUIDE

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Introduction

We live in a culture in which information holds sway. Our digital technologies place a vast universe of facts and data at the swipe of a fingertip or the click of a mouse. So much information—and misinformation—is available, in fact, that it is easy to be overwhelmed. Get the facts straight! Check for reliable sources! Don't pass on an intriguing Facebook post unless you fact check it to be sure of its veracity. Knowledge is power, we say. Yet it seems that true wisdom is often in short supply.

Over many centuries, wisdom was woven through the warp of Scripture. Sometimes the threads of wisdom reveal themselves as straightforward pragmatism; at other times wisdom comes in metaphors that glimmer as they seek to illumine. Whether expressed in proverbs or in sayings, in the words and actions of Jesus, or in the words of a letter addressed to Christians living in diaspora communities in the first centuries of the church, wisdom adds an essential element to the pattern of the fabric of God's word.

Over the weeks of this summer quarter, participants will have the opportunity to ponder the things we learned as children, the contrast between the wise and the foolish, the nature of true wealth, the trouble people had understanding Jesus, and finally the call from James that our actions must stand as testimony to our faith. May your encounters with the wisdom God desires for us guide your actions and interactions with family, neighbors, and the wider world.

The Uniform Series

The Present Word quarterly Bible study is based on the Uniform Series, a plan for reading and studying the Bible. The objectives of the series are to help persons increasingly:

1. to know the content of the Bible,
2. to understand the message of the Bible in light of their experiences and relationships, and
3. to be aware of God's self-disclosure, especially God's redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, that they may respond in faith and love—to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as the children of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.

The emphasis in these objectives is on the Bible as the record of the revelation of God in Christ as the primary source of understanding the meaning of the Christian faith and as the most effective means of confronting persons with the significant concerns of the gospel. These concerns include personal faith, values, human relationships, social responsibility, Christian hope, and the implications of Christian discipleship under the lordship of Christ and in the fellowship of his Spirit.

One of the distinctive features of the Uniform Series is the collaborative process through which denominational partners engage in the common task of developing the Lesson Guides. The development process begins with a Scope and Sequence subcommittee whose work sets a framework for the biblical themes of each six-year cycle. The Scope and Sequence team for Cycle 23 (2016–2022) chose themes that are creatively expressed in this statement of Christian faith:

The God of the Bible, the source of creation, loves us and calls us in covenant through our faith to worship and to do justice.

The underlined words in the statement compose the eight recurring themes throughout each quarterly segment of *The Present Word*.

Quarter in Brief

God is experienced as wisdom in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. During this quarter, we explore the many facets of wisdom as recorded in the Book of Proverbs, in the Gospels, and in the letter written by James.

Unit I, “Wisdom in Proverbs,” in four sessions, explores the nature of God’s wisdom as found in the book of Proverbs. These sessions describe how Wisdom calls to us; the value of Wisdom and the gifts she offers; and ends by exploring the metaphor of the feast of Wisdom.

Unit II, “Wisdom in the Gospels,” offers four sessions, one session from each of the four Gospels that examines the wisdom of God seen in the teachings and life of Jesus.

Unit III, “Faith and Wisdom in James,” offers a five-session study of wisdom as seen in the Letter of James. These sessions explore the interaction of faith and wisdom, including practical advice regarding faith in action and taming the tongue. The study ends by contrasting two kinds of wisdom.

Resources for the Leader

The following resources are suggested for those who are interested in doing additional research and study.

Bible Study Guides

A Guide to Bible Basics, by Tyler D. Mayfield. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.

A Guide Through the Old Testament, by Celia Brewer Sinclair. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

A Guide Through the New Testament, by Celia Brewer Sinclair. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Bible Commentary Series

Interpretation Bible Studies series. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998–2008.

New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

The New Testament for Everyone series, by N. T. Wright. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004–2015.

The Old Testament for Everyone series, by John Goldingay. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

Bible Dictionaries

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary—Revised and Updated. Edited by Mark Allan Powell. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011.

Books

The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Video Viewing

When you show videos to a group of learners, you need to obtain a public performance license from Christian Video Licensing International (CVLI) at us.cvli.com. Check with your church, though, to see if an umbrella license has already been obtained. Often, many denominations—through conferences, jurisdictions, dioceses, and other structures—secure licenses for their churches.

Website

Opening Doors to Discipleship is a series of four courses in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition to help persons equip themselves to be faithful teachers and leaders (openingdoorstodiscipleship.com).

Worship Leaflets

Geneva Press offers *The Present Word* quarterly Worship Leaflets. Each leaflet includes a brief service of worship with prayers, hymn texts, and opportunities for reflection on the Scripture passage of the day. Order your quarterly *Present Word* Worship Leaflets at pcusastore.com.

THE CALL OF WISDOM

MAIN IDEA

The wisdom of God instructs us to discern the direction we should go and gives us the insight we need to understand life.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 1

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself as leader. Read and reflect on lesson 1, “The Call of Wisdom” (Participant’s Book, p. 1).
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture. Although the first verse attributes the book to Solomon, internal evidence suggests that Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings compiled over time. Regardless of its authorship, it was fitting to attribute such sayings to Israel’s wise king.
- Provide Bibles, Participant Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1, nametags and pens.
- For the suggested introductory activity, print some familiar sayings on notecards, such as “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” with half the aphorism on one card and half on another.
- Obtain a white pillar candle and matches.
- Consider whether you will primarily lecture or if you will facilitate discussion.
- Step 6 in each lesson offers additional options from which to choose.
- Because the suggested hymn for this lesson is a verse from a well-known Advent carol, consider singing it without accompaniment.
- The hymn “Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom” (*Glory to God*, 174) is appropriate for the first unit.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide nametags.
- If group members are not familiar with one another, hand out one of the prepared notecards to each person. Invite participants to find someone with the card containing the other half of the saying. Ask pairs to introduce themselves and then have persons introduce their partners to the group.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light the Christ candle, noting that its light is a tangible reminder of the presence of the risen Christ.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the morning hymn.

Teaching Tip
When asked to sit in silence for more than a few moments, many adults become distinctly uncomfortable. You might begin with a very short time of silence, perhaps thirty seconds. Encourage adults to breathe in and out deeply, focusing on eliminating distractions as they exhale and on breathing in a sense of God's Spirit. In later sessions, try extending the time of silence.

SCRIPTURE

Proverbs 1:1-4, 7-8, 10, 20-22, 32-33

1:1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

²For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
³for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
⁴to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
.....

⁷The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁸Hear, my child, your father’s instruction,
and do not reject your mother’s teaching;
.....

¹⁰My child, if sinners entice you,
do not consent.
.....

²⁰Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.

²¹At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

²²“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
.....

³²For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;

³³but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant's Book, p. 2

- Read the Scripture responsively, with the leader reading a verse and participants reading the next.
- Option: Invite the group to read verses 1–4, 7–8, and 10 in unison. Then read verses 20–21 yourself. Ask participants to imagine Wisdom as a woman in the street. Have a woman read the remainder of the passage aloud. Discuss the following, or ask participants to reflect on these questions in silence: If you were walking down a busy city street, how would you react to Wisdom's words? Would you stop and listen? Discount her as some sort of crazy street prophet? Cross the street to avoid her?

4. A Word about Wisdom

Participant's Book, p. 2

- Present the following key facts about wisdom in Proverbs:
 1. The intended audience of Proverbs was inexperienced boys about to enter adulthood. Wisdom begins in the home, with children learning from both their parents.
 2. These young boys are warned against being enticed by sinners.
 3. Proverbs 1:7, the key verse for this lesson, can be considered the motto for the entire collection and connects human wisdom to holy reverence: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of growth in wisdom. In this context, “fear” can be defined as humility mixed with awe in the presence of the God who works wonders and imparts. Wisdom is nothing without reverence. It is more gift than possession, and it is priceless.
- Refer participants to the three scenarios cited as examples in the Participant's Book. Ask:
 1. Which of these, if any, would you identify as wisdom? Why?
 2. What would you say is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
- We read that wisdom is a concept and a practice, and it is transcendent. With the ideas presented previously as well as what we read in the Participant Book, how would you define wisdom? How do you respond to the idea that wisdom is nothing without reverence?
- What words of wisdom guide you in daily life? Which forms of wisdom speak to you most clearly: intellectual, emotional, or practical?

5. Teachable Moments

Participant's Book, p. 4

- Call the group's attention to the anecdote about Thumper the Bunny and invite someone to summarize it. Ask:
 1. What is meant by the question, “Are we like Thumper?”

2. The book of Proverbs hinges on the idea that your elders will prepare you to live a worthy life. How do you respond?
 3. The observation is made that there is more to wisdom than knowing what is right. What do you think? Can you cite an example when someone demonstrated knowledge of the right actions but nevertheless did not act wisely?
- Form three small groups or pairs, depending on the size of the group. Each group is to formulate a list of proverbs, sayings, or conventional “wisdom”: Group #1 should gather what they recall from hearing parents, teachers, or other adults; Group #2 should assemble messages from books, movies, or other media; and Group #3 should garner bits of wisdom gleaned from their own experience or observation. In the total group, have pairs or groups report their lists. Discuss:
 1. How has something you learned in any of these three ways become applicable in your daily life?
 2. In what ways, if at all, has conventional “wisdom” proved to be a less than reliable guide for making decisions?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant’s Book, p. 5

- Invite participants to give examples of messages they are receiving through their news feed or cable news networks, talk shows, or social media that seem to employ fear.
- Choose from among these optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Ask volunteers to describe the best advice they ever received. How was it helpful? In what circumstances have they successfully applied it?
 2. Compare the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–36; and 9:1–6. What differences can the group identify?
 3. Discuss the differences between knowledge and wisdom. Why are both important?
 4. This reading leaves out some verses in Proverbs 1 that further emphasize the punishment of those who do not heed Wisdom’s call. How does that idea fit with your moral framework and your understanding of God?

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet, and enlist volunteers to lead the remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord’s Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless participants as they leave. This can be as simple as saying “God bless you, (*Name*) as each person leaves. Extinguish the Christ candle.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture reading that may be helpful for your study.

1. "Proverb" is a translation of the Hebrew word *mashal*, which means "a saying."
2. While the Book of Proverbs begins by ascribing its sayings to Solomon, internal evidence points to it being a collection of wisdom from various individuals, edited and compiled over time.
3. The prologue to the Book of Proverbs clearly indicates the collection's intended audience: inexperienced young men about to enter adulthood.
4. Proverbs 1:7 is considered the motto for the entire collection and firmly connects human wisdom and knowledge to service of God. (See also 8:13; 9:10; 14:27; 15:33; 19:23.)
5. Though Wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs (1:20–33; 8:1–36; 9:1–6), women are noticeably absent from it, appearing primarily in relation to the young men the book addresses.

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Jun. 8	Work for the Good of All	Galatians 6:1–10
T	Jun. 9	Live Together in Harmony	Romans 15:1–6
W	Jun. 10	Wisdom Is Walking Together in Love	2 John 4–11
Th	Jun. 11	Joseph Resists Temptation	Genesis 39:6b–18
F	Jun. 12	Wisdom Saves from Temptation	Proverbs 2:12–19
Sa	Jun. 13	Walk on Just and Good Paths	Proverbs 2:20–22; 4:24–27

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encourage them to read Psalm 34:1–2, this week's Devotional Reading, and to reflect on what kinds of wise choices might lead to the life the psalmist invites us to consider.
2. Suggest that participants reflect on these questions when making choices:
 - Which choice would please God?
 - Does a potential decision align with the mercy and justice the prophets proclaimed as God's desire?
 - Can we view the outcome through the lens of love and feel it would be wise?