



READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

HOW TO READ WISDOM LITERATURE

WELCOME!



READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

HOW TO READ WISDOM LITERATURE

1. Genre of Wisdom Literature
2. PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well
3. 20 Minute Breakout Discussion
4. JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering
5. VIDEO: The Book of Job
6. 20 Minute Breakout Discussion
7. ECCLESIASTES | Wisdom in the Balance
8. VIDEO: Overview of Ecclesiastes
9. CONCLUSION and Q&A

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

3 MAJOR BOOKS OF WISDOM

Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes

There are other places in the Bible where you might find “wisdom” writings such as in James, Psalms and some even consider the Song of Songs to be wisdom writing for lovers.

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

DEFINITION

“The skill in the art of godly living.”

Or more fully, wisdom is “that orientation which allows one to live in harmonious accord with God’s ordering of the world.”*

*ESV Study Bible, p.866

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

MARKS OF WISDOM LITERATURE

- A keen interest in **the way the world works**, our place in the world, and how things operate under God's sovereign care.
- Most Wisdom Literature is **poetry**, but not all poetic material is Wisdom Literature. One of the most important things to note about poetry is that poets think in images
- Wisdom literature often uses **hyperbolic** language to convey a thought or point more forcefully.

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

UNIFYING THEMES

You'll notice these themes in every book of Wisdom Literature:

- The fear of the Lord
- The limits of human wisdom
- The righteous and the wicked in relation to God
- Grappling with suffering
- The nature of true piety

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

FUNCTIONS

1. Wisdom literature helps God's people *navigate the pitfalls of life* in a fallen world.



“Where the bulk of the Old Testament calls us simply to obey and to believe, this part of it... summons us to think hard as well as humbly; to keep our eyes open, to use our conscience and our common sense, and not to shirk the most disturbing questions.”

Job and Ecclesiastes

AN INTRODUCTION
TO WISDOM LITERATURE



The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, pg 11

Derek Kidner

THE GENRE OF WISDOM LITERATURE

FUNCTIONS

1. Wisdom literature helps God's people **navigate the pitfalls of life** in a fallen world.
2. The Bible's Wisdom Literature prepares us to **give an answer to the world's folly** by giving us God's wisdom for life.
 - Other ANE Wisdom Lit (e.g. Egyptian – The Instruction of Amenemope, cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia, Greek & Aramaic wisdom, etc.)
 - The questions that ancient Israelites had to wrestle with were not unlike the questions that the Egyptians, Babylonians or Syrians were asking as well.

REVIEW: Method of Interpretation

1. **OBSERVATION** - Context is King
2. **INTERPRETATION** - Move from Big to Small
3. **APPLICATION** - Don't be Unmoved by God's Word

We must always move from Observation to Interpretation and then to Application. The better your observations, the better your interpretation, and the better your application.



READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

1. INTRO to Proverbs
2. The KEY to Proverbs
3. The Way of Wisdom
4. Interpretive Tools
5. Discussion Group Exercise

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

WHAT ARE PROVERBS?

Proverbs are parables, riddles or short pithy ('full of meaning') sayings that are not designed to spoon-feed the reader but rather to prick him/her into deeper thought and consideration by use of word pictures, analogies or sharp brevity.

“...the very form demands a sweeping statement and looks for a hearer with his wits about him. We need no telling that a maxim like ‘Many hands make light work’ is not the last word on the subject since ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ Just so, Proverbs is not afraid to put two clashing counsels side by side...”

Job and Ecclesiastes

AN INTRODUCTION
TO WISDOM LITERATURE



The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, pg 26

Derek Kidner

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

FORMS OF PROVERBS

- **Descriptive Proverbs**
General observations about life (e.g. Prov. 10:1b)
- **Comparative Proverbs**
Popularly stated as “X is better than Y” (e.g. Prov. 15:16)
- **Prescriptive Proverbs**
The right response to a situation or direct instruction (e.g. Prov. 20:22)
- **Warning Proverbs**
Alert us to dangers (e.g. Prov. 24:33-34)
- **Insight Proverbs**
Help us “see” something more clearly (e.g. Prov. 26:22)

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

OUTLINE

- Chapters 1-9 | **A Fatherly Approach**
- Chapters 10 - 22:16 | **A Plain Man's Approach**
- Chapters 22:17 - 24:34 | **More Fatherly Teachings**
- Chapters 25-29 | **More Sentence-Sayings**
- Chapter 30 | **An Observer's Approach**
- Chapter 31 | **A Motherly Approach**

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

KEY THEMES

- **The Sovereignty of God** (e.g. Proverbs 16:33)
- **Creation's Order**
 - **Common Grace** (e.g. Proverbs 20:12)
 - **General Principles** (e.g. Proverbs 24:3-4)
- **The Experience of Life** (e.g. Proverbs 13:21)

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

THE KEYS TO PROVERBS | Chapters 1-9

To know **wisdom** and **instruction**,
to understand words of insight...
(Proverbs 1:2)

- **WISDOM** - The word 'wisdom' (ḥokmâ) is the ability to understand the way God designed life to work and skilfully respond with the appropriate action. It was applied to artists and craftsmen in Exodus 31:1-3.
- **INSTRUCTION** - Paired with wisdom is the word 'instruction' (mûsār). It is also translated as "discipline" because it refers to a chastening lesson that corrects moral faults and shapes one's character.

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

THE KEYS TO PROVERBS | Chapters 1-9

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

*Note that fools (the opposite of the wise) are those who despise wisdom and instruction or discipline.

“The fear of the LORD refers primarily to a subjective response of humility, love and trust in God so that a person is willing to submit his or her life to the ways of God. **It is a God-centred view of life that includes a reverence for God**... Without it wisdom, as defined by God, is not attainable.”

FAVOUR in the
Sight of God
A theology of wisdom literature



Finding Favour in the Sight of God, pg21

Richard P. Belcher Jr

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

THE KEYS TO PROVERBS | Chapters 1-9

The **fear of the Lord** is the beginning of knowledge;
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(Proverbs 1:7)

- **ASSONANCE FOR EMPHASIS & MEMORIZATION**

yirat yehvah re'shit da'at

The fear of the Lord is the key to Proverbs and wisdom in the Bible.

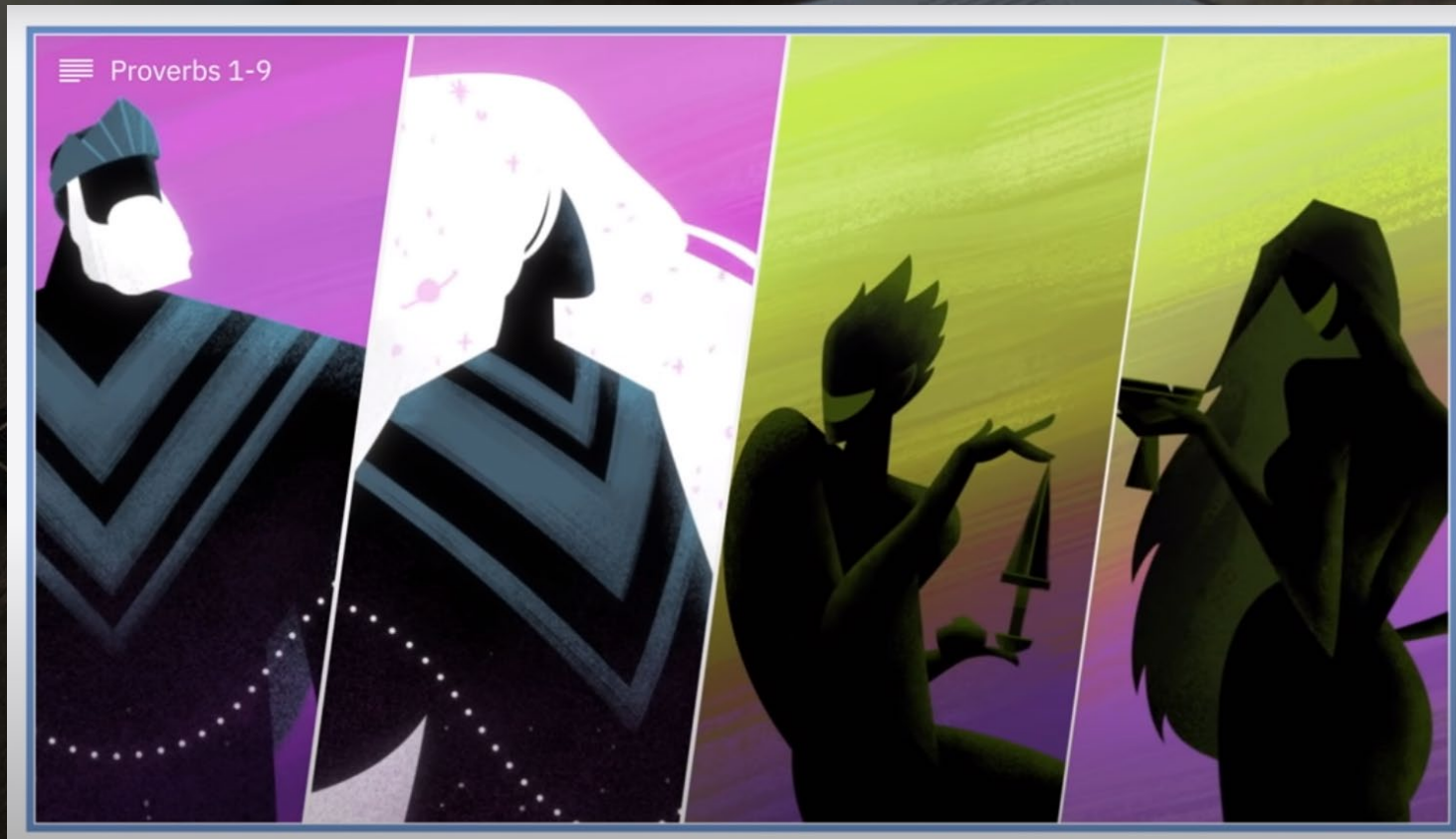
PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

A NOTE ON FOOLS

- **Kěsîl** - is the dull or thick-headed person who has a tendency to make wrong decisions because he will not listen to other people. (e.g. Prov. 18:2, 6–7 & Prov. 17:24).
- **Ĕwîl** - stresses moral deficiency, a lack of self-control as displayed in words or temper (e.g. Prov. 12:16) and thinks he has all the answers (e.g. Prov. 12:15).
- **Nabal** - is a disgraceful person who does not have respect for anything or anyone (e.g. Prov. 17:7, 21; 30:22).

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THE WAY OF WISDOM | Chapter 9



At the end of chapter 9, it calls for a choice to be made. **Will you follow the way of wisdom or the way of folly?**

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

THE WAY OF WISDOM | Chapter 9

• Following Wisdom is Following God



PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

THE WAY OF WISDOM | Chapter 9

A Story of Rival gods



- Lady Wisdom's house is at "the highest point of the city." (v.3)
- Only the deity of a city could dwell at the highest point
- Lady Folly's house is also at the highest point (v.14)
- **Thus, the reader is confronted with rival 'gods' calling for him to follow them, dine with them, share intimacy and worship them.**

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

1. Literary Context

Train up a child *in the way he should go*,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
(Proverbs 22:6)

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

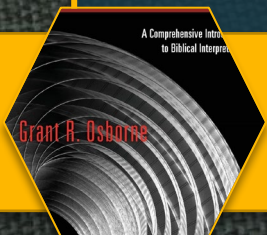
INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

1. **Literary Context**
2. **Principles NOT Promises**

No ill befalls the righteous,
but the wicked are filled with trouble.
(Proverbs 12:21)

The blessing of the Lord makes rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it.
(Proverbs 10:22)

“Most important, we dare not read more into the proverbial statement than is there. By their very nature they are **generalized statements**, intended to give advice rather than to establish rigid codes by which God works.”



The Hermeneutical Spiral, pg 247
Grant R. Osborne

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

1. Literary Context

2. Principles NOT Promises

- Proverbs focuses on the general rule NOT the exceptions. The exceptions are actually picked up in the other two wisdom books - Job and Ecclesiastes.
- Another way to think of them is that they are “dependently true now” but will be “ultimately true then” when God consummates His Kingdom on earth.

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

1. **Literary Context**
2. **Principles NOT Promises**
3. **Situational Application**

Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.
(Proverbs 26:4-5)

PROVERBS | Wisdom for Living Well

A STRATEGY FOR READING PROVERBS

Gleaning



One of the best ways to approach the sections in Proverbs that are sentence sayings is to start collecting them together and arranging them by the topic they address to build a more full picture of the wisdom on it.



GROUP DISCUSSIONS: Proverbs 26

- Read Proverbs 26 together
- Pick out one key theme in the chapter that stands out to you
- Discuss what wisdom you glean from Proverbs 26 on this theme

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READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

1. INTRO to Job
2. Interpreting Job
3. His Miserable Comforters
4. God's Response & Epilogue
5. Discussion Group Exercise

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

If Proverbs sought to give us wisdom for living wisely in the world so that we would enjoy a life blessed by God, ***Job serves as the counterbalance*** to our impulse to interpret the Proverbs as absolute promises.

“Job wrestles with the disorder of suffering and its relationship to piety. The friends of Job operate with a mechanical view of divine retribution so that if Job is suffering he must have sinned. This is a distortion of the view of Proverbs but it causes Job to wrestle with God’s justice and how he should respond to suffering even though he is innocent. The mystery and sovereignty of God is emphasized in God’s response to Job, showing that people understand little about God’s ways in the world concerning individual suffering and that the proper response is to fear Yahweh.”

FAVOUR in the
Sight of God
A theology of wisdom literature



Finding Favour in the Sight of God, pg 14

Richard P. Belcher Jr

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

OUTLINE

- Chapters 1–2 | Prologue
- Chapter 3 | Job's lament
- Chapters 4–27 | The cycle of speeches - Job's friends and his protests
- Chapter 28 | Wisdom poem
- Chapters 29–31 | Job's last defence
- Chapters 32–37 | Elihu's monologue
- Chapters 38–42:6 | God's speeches and Job's responses
- Chapters 42:7–17 | Epilogue

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

GENRE

The prologue and epilogue are written as prose, whereas the whole rest of the book of Job is actually poetry. So, clearly, Job is not a traditional narrative.

“Job is best understood as a debate about how to respond to suffering that leads to the question concerning where wisdom is to be found.”

(Dr. Richard P. Belcher Jr)

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

KEY TO INTERPRETING JOB

- **The Prologue | The Heavenly Courtroom**
 - Behind-the-scenes on the heavenly court case
 - The “Satan” (Accuser/Adversary) = Prosecution
 - Question: Does God’s finest servant, Job, serve God for conscience or convenience?
 - By the end of this section, Job has been vindicated in his integrity
 - **We know his suffering is NOT because of his sin**



H. H. Rowley (1860-1969)

“We may pause to note that the cause of Job’s suffering was more than the Satan’s insinuation against him. He was suffering to vindicate more than himself. **He was vindicating God’s trust in him.** He was not so much abandoned by God as supremely honoured by God.”

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

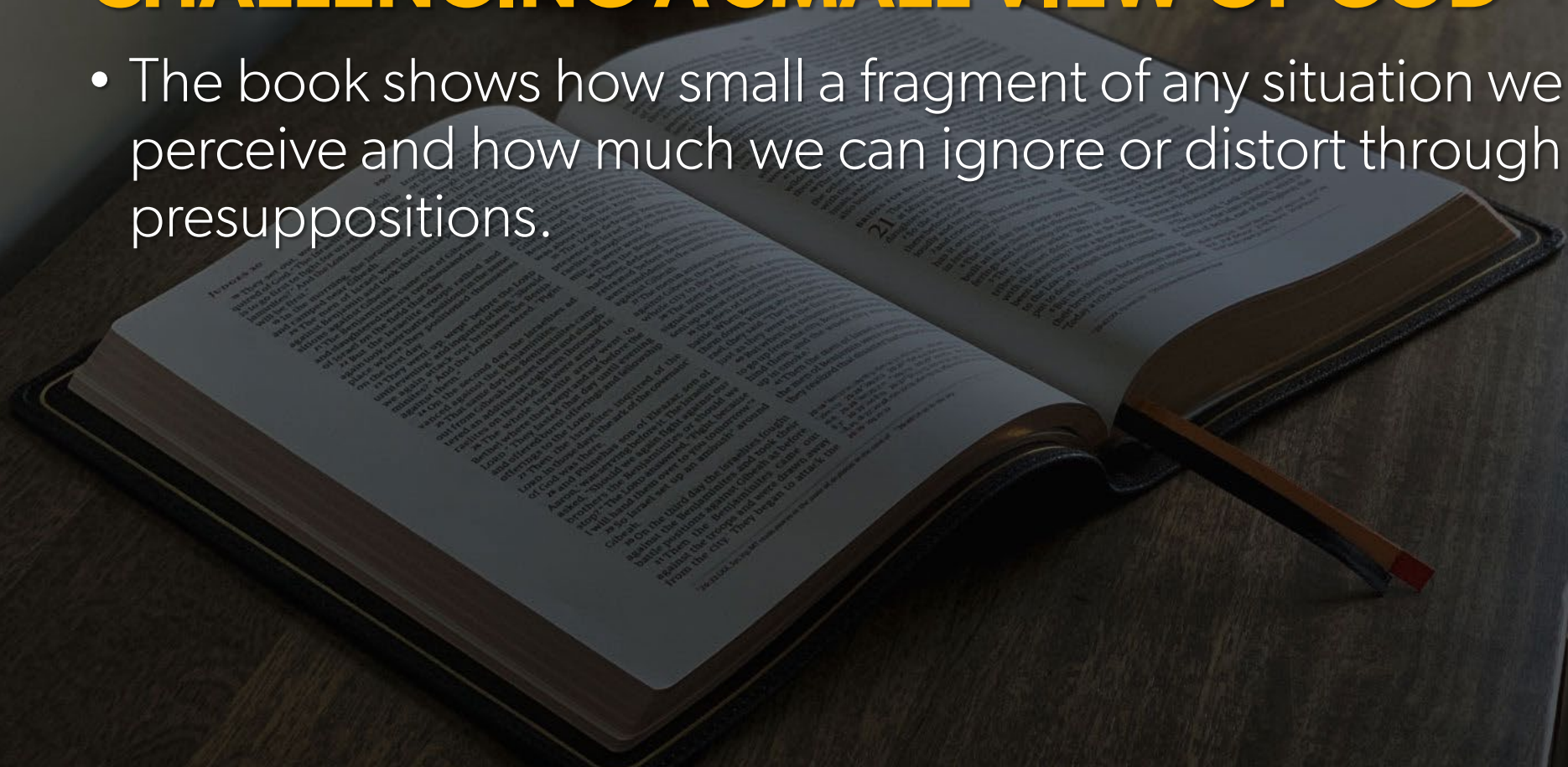
JOB'S MISERABLE COMFORTERS

- They start off well
- They represent the collective wisdom of the ANE
- Their view of God's justice is ultimately mechanical and simplistic
- Not all they say is wrong (e.g. Job 5:13 & 1 Cor. 3:19)
- They believe in the One True God
- It is their belief in this God that causes them to struggle with Job's suffering - it challenges their preconceived notions of God.

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

CHALLENGING A SMALL VIEW OF GOD

- The book shows how small a fragment of any situation we actually perceive and how much we can ignore or distort through our presuppositions.



JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

The Conflict | Who is wise?

- Each time cycle, the friends' speeches get shorter and shorter reflecting the fact that they are running out of arguments.
- In this contest between Job and his friends, the question that dominates the whole book: Who is really wise in all of this?
- Job anticipates the answer to this question in the poem on divine wisdom in chapter 28 where he ascribes all wisdom to God.

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

Elihu | The Recent Seminary Grad



- Claims to have new insight that the other three friends have missed.
- Despite his many words, he really doesn't add anything new...
- **After Elihu's monologue, it is clear that human wisdom has run out. It is time for God to take the stage.**

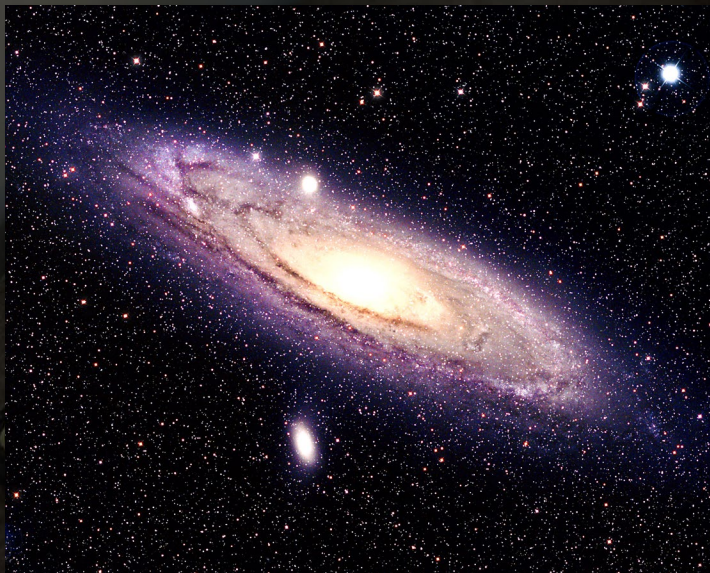
JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

GOD'S RESPONSE | A Whirlwind of Truth

- **Job had hoped for a divine interview to learn why he was suffering.**
- **God doesn't seem to directly answer that question.** Instead, He rebukes Job for casting doubt on His Divine reputation.
 - "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me and justify yourself?" (Job 40:8)
 - "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me!" (Job 38:2-3)

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

GOD'S RESPONSE | A Whirlwind of Truth



It is improper of us to try to judge the Judge of all the Universe on how He runs the cosmos.

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

Epilogue | Vindication

- **Job's response is to repent of his quickness to presume to know better than God.**
- The story ends with God vindicating Job in front of his friends and restoring double to Job all that he had lost.

“Job is a wisdom debate about how to respond to suffering. Job’s initial response is patient submission. Job’s wife responds with panicked pity. The friends’ initial response is silent sympathy. Job’s response in chapter 3 can be called persevering protest. The friends will then respond by accusing Job of sin as the reason for his suffering. How one responds to suffering or a person who is suffering is important.”

FAVOUR in the
Sight of God
A theology of wisdom literature



Finding Favour in the Sight of God, pg 86

Richard P. Belcher Jr

JOB | Wisdom for Struggling with Suffering

The point of the book is not necessarily to exhaustively explain all of the suffering or the reasons why God might allow every instance of suffering, but rather to move us to trust God.



GROUP DISCUSSIONS: Job 40

- Read Job 40 together
- What do you learn from the exchange between God and Job? What one thing stands out above the rest?

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READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

ECCLESIASTES | Wisdom in the Balance



ECCLESIASTES | Wisdom in the Balance

- **Ecclesiastes serves as a balance to a well-rounded biblical view of wisdom.** The unpredictability of time, death and chance make life hard to understand and master fully. Instead, enjoy it all as a gift from God for God will bring everything into judgment.
- In Ecclesiastes, there are two distinct voices: the narrator who frames the story in the opening and closing sections of the book, and a character named "Qohelet" in Hebrew.

“Qohelet wrestles with the disorder in the world concerning the breakdown of the deed–consequence relationship as he examines labour, wisdom and God’s justice in a world that does not make sense. The epilogue of the book clearly points to the solution of the proper response: fear God and keep his commandments.”

FAVOUR in the
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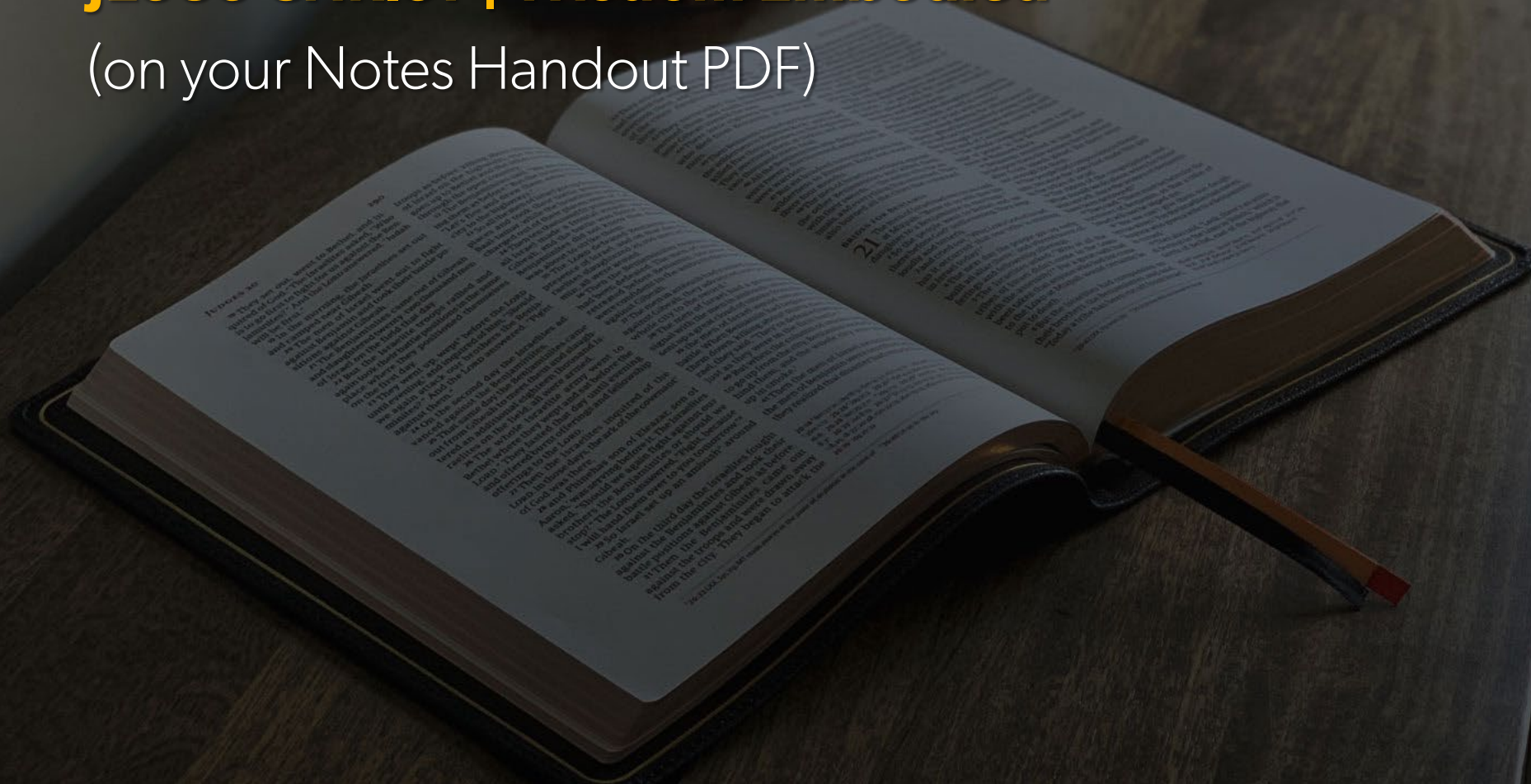
WISDOM AND CHRIST

- **The Cross guarantees to us that God cares about our suffering and has a good purpose for it** (Acts 2:23)
- **Job yearned for an advocate/mediator to bring him together with God** (Job 9:33).
- **Jesus is our mediator between God and man** (1 Tim. 2:5-6)
 - We can say with more certainty than Job:
"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God." (Job 18:25-26)

WISDOM AND CHRIST

JESUS CHRIST | Wisdom Embodied

(on your Notes Handout PDF)



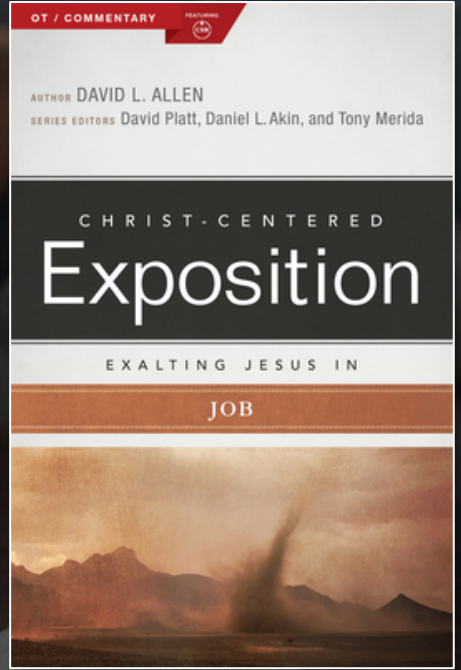
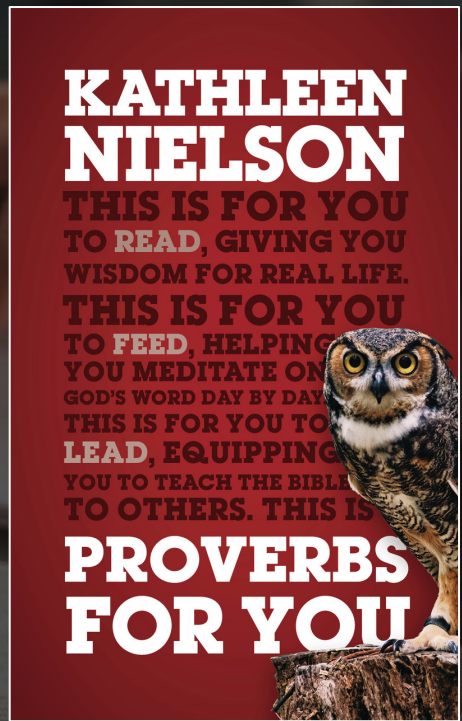
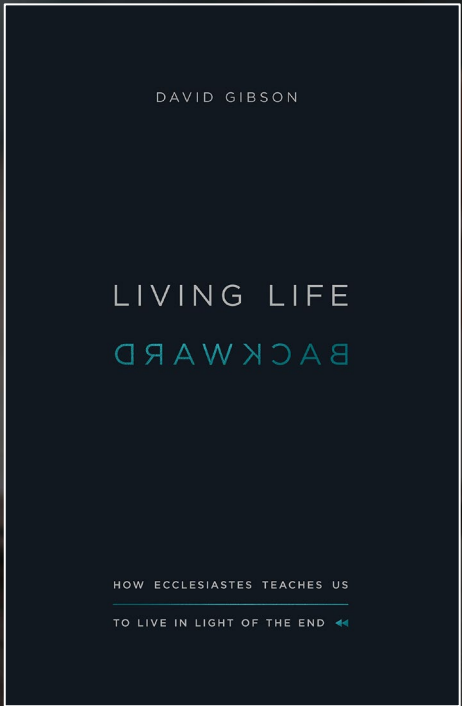
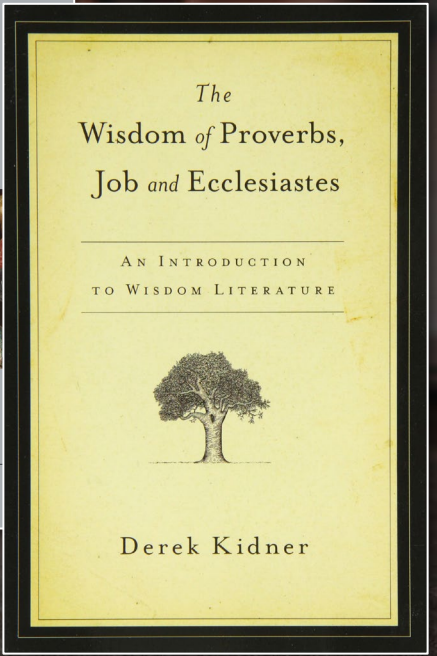
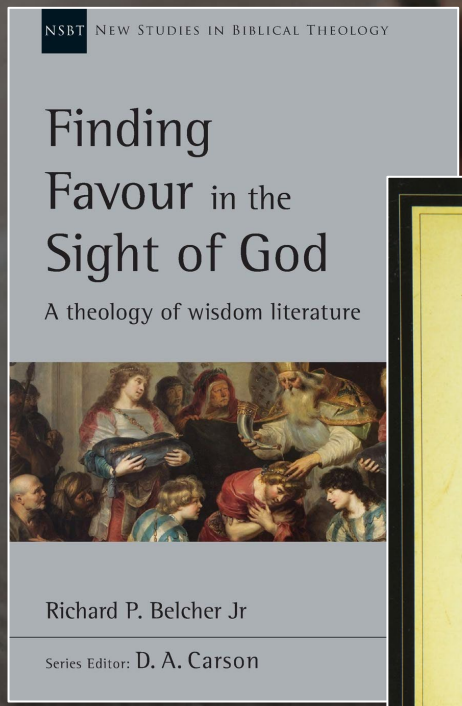
WISDOM AND CHRIST

JESUS CHRIST | Wisdom Embodied

- **We must read our Bibles Christologically.**
All of Scripture points us to Jesus Christ as the center of our worship and salvation - including wisdom itself because in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).
- Jesus's predominant form of teaching was a form of wisdom called the parable, which in Hebrew is *masal* also translated as "proverb".

The Wisdom who beckons us is none other than Jesus Christ. Will you hear his voice?

🔍 QUESTIONS?





READ SCRIPTURE WORKSHOP

HOW TO READ WISDOM LITERATURE

Thanks for coming!
YOU ARE LOVED!