

# Songs for the Soul - Wisdom Teaching & Scripture

**Pastor Michael Stadtmueller:** [00:00:00] All right, so I'm gonna go ahead and begin. And to let you know in the teaching section here, wisdom is an interesting thing to talk about.

I think everybody here knows the person way back in grade school who had great intelligence, but not so great wisdom.

And so I think when we talk about wisdom at a very basic level, most of us think we kinda can at least give an idea of what the word means, and maybe even that distinguish the word between intelligence and wisdom.

But I also wanna spend a moment, uh, talking about wisdom in scripture, because it's a little different, just a little, uh, at least in how they understood it and they saw it as a gift from God.

So to start with, there are five clear sections in the Old Testament, probably not arguing, argued over all these five sections. Perhaps you argue over which is in each [00:01:00] group, but it was the Torah, is the Torah, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, otherwise in Greek known as the Pentateuch. Five, that's why, penta. So the five books.

Uh, by the way, kind of a side note, but an interesting one, did you know the Sadducees... You know, you hear about these Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees only believed, or the Sadducees only believed that the holy books were the Torah. That was it. And it was the Pharisees that believed in all of these other books that we now see as scripture.

That was the fight of the day. So, you know, there's always a fight in church. And so in the first century, it was what should be recorded in scripture. There's probably more than that, but I'm, I'm gonna, gonna highlight that piece.

So after the Torah, those first five books of the scripture, which were thought to be, you know, th- those things largely oral tradition, largely held for generation upon generation, then the [00:02:00] next group was the historical books. Some people call it, um, by dif- different names, but Joshua through Esther is often seen as the historical books.

Followed by right smack dab in the middle is the wisdom books, and that includes the books of Psalms. That's Job through Song of Solomon in your Bible are the wisdom books. So we'll talk about that more.

Some people actually argue that the wisdom Psalms, do they perfectly belong in there? I would say absolutely, uh, because the artistic nature of what they are shares that. But if anybody argues, what you definitely have is these wisdom Psalms.

So I think that's because of that, that sometimes you're like, "Well, is it all wisdom?" I would just kinda push back on anybody who says it's not all wisdom to say, "Boy, if you don't think love has some wisdom in it, if you don't think lament has some wisdom in it, you're probably, um, [00:03:00] misunderstanding the gift of our feelings as connected to our wisdom as well."

Um, so then the final groups are the major prophets and the minor prophets. Do you know the difference between a major prophet and a minor prophet? You gotta get called up to the major pro- No.

Um, the major prophets- The pros ... uh, are simply larger. Larger. They're the larger books of scripture. And so now there's probably a reason for that. Uh, but, but if you really look at it, it is, it is the size of those, those pieces.

So, you know, it's not like, "Well, I, I had a pretty good career. I think I made it to the major prophets." Um, and in fact, unfortunately for prophets, almost all of them in their career, they were persecuted and struggled, with a few exceptions. Uh, because the prophets a lot of times told people what they didn't want to hear. And that's not always a job that is very well appreciated. [00:04:00]

Um, anyways, that's the broad section. I wanna move into wisdom now. So we're only focusing really in on the, the wisdom books, but then we're actually only focusing in on the Psalms, but then we're only focusing in today on the wisdom Psalms.

So to do that, let's talk about wisdom in ancient Israel. Sound good? Ancient Israel understood wisdom differently than what I started with, with the difference between intelligence and wisdom. It was more than that. That wasn't wrong, but you know, where we look and kind of have that struggle to see the difference between intelligence and education and expertise and information, and somewhere along the way we can name the difference, but wisdom might be a little different.

Biblical wisdom was not that. Wisdom is learning to live in harmony with how God made the world. So ancient Israel believed wisdom was woven [00:05:00] into creation itself. They believe that wisdom always was.

In fact, I had a professor that said, "You know, the interesting thing about wisdom is if you really follow the Bible closely, and you stand before your board to become a pastor, you might be declared a heretic by just reciting what you read, because wisdom challenges our orthodoxy."

And maybe that's wisdom's job, is to always make us question a little bit. That's me. That's not a professor saying that part, but I really think that might be a simple way to say it. Uh, but wisdom does challenge orthodoxy, and especially in scripture.

So they believe that wisdom was not invented by human beings at all, that wisdom itself was from God. Wisdom was a gift from God.

Uh, from Proverbs 8, there is this verse: "The Lord created me at the beginning of His work. When He established the heavens, [00:06:00] I was there."

The name of wisdom in scripture, and then there's extra things, was Sophia. So you may have heard the name Sophia, and if you look that name up, it means wisdom.

Well, it is thought that wisdom was the na- was the name, uh, was, was named Sophia, and that line alludes to this tract of, of... I shouldn't use the word tract with scriptures. But anyways, uh, it, this line of thought that was introduced at some point into the scriptures that was connected with this understanding of Sophia, who was wisdom.

So more things with that. Wisdom stands beside God in creation, not as another god. That's the place where people get challenged, 'cause it's like, whoa, hold on. If wisdom supersedes us, does that make it kind of more equal with, with God? Is that, [00:07:00] like, messing with the triune God? Is this the quadratonic God?

No. No, this is part of God's ordering of reality. Wisdom is part of God's ordering reality. Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis said, "Biblical wisdom grows from paying close attention to how life actually works."

That creation itself becomes a teacher, which, you know, I love that, and isn't that something that every farmer will tell you? They can learn all these things

from a book. They can have all these things that they study, uh, and you can get all sorts of things for your garden in the back, and you know some of it is trial and error, and you also know that sometimes the best way to learn how to garden is not from a book, but from another gardener. Taking the wisdom that somebody else has and having that from beginning to end.

So whether it's, uh, creation itself becoming the teacher, how does that [00:08:00] look? It could simply be the seasons. To see the seasons themselves as a gift of wisdom.

Another example for you, I had somebody tell me this story once when I had my internship out in California, and I think it's so wise, this person who said this. They said, "You know the problem Californians have? They don't have any wintertime." And he said, "They're never taught that they have to slow down, and that might be their biggest issue."

And I thought, you know, that's an interesting thing. The season of winter not existing for Californians in parts of the, of the country. It, it could be... I think that's a wise, astute statement that they had to find another way to slow down, and it's so easy not to.

Uh, so those who long ago were in agrarian society, the planting and the harvest, that would so help you to just see that. You have the time. To everything there is a season under heaven. You guys know the song, To Everything Turn, [00:09:00] Turn, Turn. That's those words, but that's scripture. That's Ecclesiastes. That's in the books of wisdom.

There's also things on speech and consequences. They tie up that generosity creates community, not only for yourself, but for others. And for when community grows, then you grow within that community. So generosity is this tie into wisdom. So patterns in the world can connect to our actions. That's what we see in the books of wisdom.

Ancient Israel then believed that wisdom meant learning to live inside God's created order. And as we have grown, there is something in the modern age where we-- you know, if we go to modernity, um, and what it-- you can define what modernity is, but it really happened at the time of the Enlightenment.

We started to ask really good questions, and most of [00:10:00] that's a positive. Luther came out of modernity to question the Catholic Church as far as some of the basics of saying, "Can't we revisit some of those things? Not because they're

Catholic, but because we should be able to question." Da Vinci questioned. Artists questioned the way things had to be done. All of that was good.

The one thing we los-lose though is the thought that some things will always be best. And I do think sometimes we lose that. Um, I also-- total tangent, but I think he's a great character. If you've ever read the book Jurassic Park, the book, not the movie. The scientist in the book that's played by Goldberg [Goldblum] in the movie, he says-- and he says it in the movie actually. They, they say the line, "You've spent so much time trying to figure out if you could do that, nobody asks whether you should do that." And that's just an interesting thing about wisdom, I thought.

So [00:11:00] at this point, I wanna kinda shift gears within that. What is then the difference between wisdom and information? 'Cause you can have a whole lot of information in the information age that we live in. In fact, I would argue that you are more informationally intelligent than any generation in history. As a whole, I don't think it's even close.

Informationally intelligent. I'm adding that word because I think the amount of stuff that you know, wow. What information do you have? That's what modern life values. How much you hold. I'm not--

A-again, this is not binary. It's not completely true, but you know that we lift up that question where Bi-biblical wisdom asks, are you living in alignment with reality as God created it?

Another way to talk about that, I would talk to a yoga person about centering or centering your breathing or all of these things, and I'm no expert in these [00:12:00] areas. I don't have the wisdom in these areas. But you think about these ways that we can be more using our resources of our own body in a way that is in harmony with our steps, that we're not actually as worn out because everything that we're doing in our day is in line with what God has created us to do.

And I think sometimes even though all of us probably say, "I'm no expert," all of us know a day where we experience that, that alignment with what feels better, and maybe we didn't informationally do nearly as much.

Walter Brueggemann describes wisdom as "learning the grain of creation." I think that's a cool statement too. Uh, imagine sanding wood. You go with the grain, and things work more naturally. If you go against the grain, it's that much harder.

Another example of that is, I would say, skiers. Now, as a [00:13:00] Colorado boy, if you've ever learned to ski, you know when you first start, that hill kicks your butt, and you learn that the hill, you don't have to ski downhill. You learn to ski on those angles, and there's some wisdom there, I believe.

So fighting the grain of life becomes harder. Wisdom learns the grain is, is God's Word, and we find a way to live into that.

So the wisdom Psalms, what do we do with the wisdom Psalms? See how we're going deeper and deeper?

Wisdom Psalms specifically teach faithful living. They do sound more like proverbs than prayers. So if you're ever on a Sunday morning, you hear a Psalm, and you're like, "Well, that doesn't sound like a Psalm. That sounds more like..." And you open the book to Proverbs, it sounds like some sayings, some of those. That's probably more likely to be connected to the wisdom Psalms. So they sound a little bit different.

[00:14:00] They're less emotional expression. Uh, the weeks that we've talked about up to this point are mostly about feelings. Uh, feelings, laments, trust, praise, and thanksgiving. You can see how feelings tie so much into those. Wisdom, again, I don't wanna say that it's absent of feeling in general at all, but the first instinct is.

In fact, by the way, emotional intelligence I think is very much into wisdom, and they would lift up to you an emotional intelligence that every w- an emotional intelligent person realizes that every thought that you have is actually connected to feelings. And when you try to discount that, you are... That's a whole other conversation. So I'm gonna leave it out on that one. But it's a fun one. It is a fun one.

Okay, more reflection. Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel noticed that, uh, wisdom Psalms are unlike lament and praise Psalms in form. Instead of speaking [00:15:00] directly to God, they often teach the community.

So the focus of m- so many of them is, "Why, oh why, have you forsaken me?" You're talking to God in the lament, or, "We give thanks to you, oh Lord." All of these things are re- are directed towards God.

The wisdom Psalms are directed towards the people. Because wisdom Psalms don't have to teach God, they have to teach one another. They are things that we pass on to one another, another.

So the key characteristics of a wisdom Psalm, they often include two paths or choices. You can go this way or you can go that way.

And a reflection on consequences. Wisdom Psalms do that just like the Proverbs do. My, one of my favorite Proverbs that I just know by heart, it says, "A dog returns to its vomit, like a [00:16:00] fool to his folly." Reflection on consequences. And I, I don't know, maybe that doesn't fit the purpose, but, but they kind of go together like that. And you see the, you see the, the real life thing in how, yeah, a fool kind of does that. And we've all seen a dog throw up, and then, "What are you doing eating that stuff again?" And he's, "Oh."

As we return to- ... the wisdom Psalms, the third piece, the third dot there is they have questions about justice. Wisdom Psalms acknowledge the hardship about us understanding justice completely.

By the way, next week's goes into justice a little bit more, but these start questioning and bringing that in.

Uh, teaching language itself. There's a teaching language piece, kind of like that statement that I said, "You learn this. This is for you." It's not towards God.

It's something-- You know, it almost sounds [00:17:00] like a parent. I, as a kid, I didn't ever find the wisdom Psalms, but I found the wisdom Proverbs and such, and I always-- I remember one time finding them and thinking to myself, "You know why I like these? It's like a fortune cookie. I can read just one and feel like I get something out of it." It's just a little saying. Um, so they have teaching language, which sort of makes it feel like.

And this is the next one, everyday faithfulness. They are an everyday-

Which I think leads to the next one that is long-term perspective. They offer us a long-term perspective on life, and I would argue that that's how the wisdom Psalms came about. They would have been the equivalent of that spiritual person that had some amazing information, but went beyond the information. You had the carpenter, you had the [00:18:00] farmer, you had this person that would talk about wisdom that saw and connected the different worlds into and connected with God.

Examples of Psalms, uh, of the Psalms that are wisdom Psalms, I'll just name five for you, and again, you can Google. This is a good example. Just show me wisdom Psalms if you ever wanted to find more. Psalm one, thirty-seven, forty-nine, seventy-three, and one twelve. And again, you don't have to look at all

those, but I thought if you wanted to dig in further, that's kind of a fun way to do it.

Interesting thought, many scholars think Psalm one and Psalm two intentionally introduce the entire Psalter. Um, we talked about that the last four Psalms were all praise Psalms. I don't know if you remember that, but that was an earlier week we talked about that. Uh, Psalm one and two starting with [00:19:00] wisdom, what's that about? We can wonder if nothing else. Don't think that the order of the Psalms was not intentional though, and that says something. That says something to us. Even if I don't know what it says, I know it says something.

So Psalm one specifically asks, "How should faithful people live?" Psalm two asks, "Who ultimately rules the world?" Wisdom and trust. That wisdom and trust are what rule our world.

Again, wait, what about God? Well, they're talking about the worldly reality of how we live. And in the long run, you can see that even with the earthly tyrants of our world, in the long run, a tyrant who is not leading with wisdom and trust, they might live their life, they might hold that power, and that's gonna go.

So I always like to lift up a Jesus part of the wisdom Psalms. If you [00:20:00] think about the Sermon on the Mount, that is a teaching Psalm that is connected to wisdom, and other ones in there. "Consider the lilies and the birds of the field. They neither toil nor struggle..." the way that we struggle. A balance with nature around us. That was Jesus teaching from wisdom.

Um, also I want you to know somebody last week said, "Are we gonna read Psalm one nineteen?" They said that as a joke. I can't remember who said that last week, but I almost did because Psalm one nineteen is a wisdom Psalm. It's-- They said it as a joke because it's like four pages. It's really, really long. And in my mind I was like, "Well, we could just read eight or twelve verses of that and, and stop." Actually, Psalm one nineteen, if you look at it closely, it's almost in verses six at a time that seem to be connected, and they're all wisdom. So it's almost like this little section.

I do wonder, I haven't [00:21:00] done too much study of Psalm one nineteen, so I don't...I don't-- But I wonder about some of the details. I'm sure somebody's done a lot of work. I have a book I need to spend a little more time with on this, but that would be an interesting one to find out more about too.

So all of that brings us to the reading of scripture. So we're gonna go ahead and open our Bibles to Psalm one, and we're gonna read Psalm one.

And I'll read out loud, but you're welcome to read. I also understand that if you have it and you wanna hold that place and just listen, that's great.

For those who are new, I always ask, you're gonna have time in your small group to, to respond, but I always ask the question: what did you notice? Because I truly believe that when we read scripture, the Holy Spirit is present with us, and sometimes what you feel in that moment, what you notice might be the Holy Spirit nudging us right then.

So share. Share what, what you heard, what you focused on as you, as you go through that. What did you notice? What [00:22:00] stuck out? What felt different than ever before for you?

Here we go.

"Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.

"They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

"Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the ways of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."