

Sermon Guides for Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Series Title: The Wise Life

Tag Line: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes for Today

Dates (2020): June 7, 14, 21, 28

Key Verse:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6 NRSV)

Series Overview

Most of us want to live a good life, or a happy life, or a successful life. But to what degree do we want to live a wise life, one that is anchored on God's wisdom? What does that even mean, and how does one achieve it? The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes give us practical guidance on a life of wisdom, helping us improve our personal behaviors, our relationships with others, and our commitment to God.

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes comprise part of a section of the Bible called "Wisdom Literature," whose purpose is to explore the complexities of human existence and provide signposts for daily living. Proverbs emphasizes obedience to God and the pursuit of God's wisdom. Ecclesiastes challenges conventional wisdom by deconstructing every human effort to live a good life. Ultimately, these passages push us to new priorities and perspectives, so that we can live a wise and holy life.

Colors, Images, Mood, Vibe:

Cool colors.

Images depicting a head and heart in balance, question marks.

Feelings of confidence and trust in a sure foundation.

Sermon 1

Title: The Wise Life: Trust

Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-12

Key Word: Trust

Theme: Choosing God's Way.

Main Idea: The key to the wise life is not found within, but in God.

Sermon Description:

Before there was a self-help section in the local bookstore, or a popular psychology section on Amazon.com, there were ancient aphorisms: little nuggets of guidance that claimed to hold the key to the good life. Proverbs is written in the style of such ancient sayings, but these have a distinct feature about them: rather than point to within to finding the secret to life, they point to God. Perhaps no verse in Proverbs captures this idea more summarily than Proverbs 3:5-6, which many people learned to commit to memory at a young age. Do not lean on your own understanding, but acknowledge God, who will direct our paths.

Sermon 2

Title: The Wise Life: Holiness

Scripture: Proverbs 12:13-22

Key Word: Holiness

Theme: Holy Speech and Behavior

Main Idea: Live faithfully, not foolishly.

Sermon Description:

Sometimes, the Bible puts it as plainly and simply as possible. Proverbs 12 is written like one of those old “Goofus and Gallant” cartoons in children’s *Highlights* magazine. It offers a binary, black and white portrayal of two different ways to live: Faithfully, which means adhering to God’s commandments and pursuing God’s holiness, or foolishly, which leads to destruction and harm of self and others. God’s commandments aren’t meant to be a “cosmic killjoy” that merely prevents us from living a certain way. It is a pathway to holiness, which leads to deep joy and profound contentment.

Sermon 3

Title: The Wise Life: Integrity

Scripture: Proverbs 16:1-20

Key Word: Integrity

Theme: Loyalty, Humility, Care for the Poor

Main Idea: The Bible is rich with nuggets of wisdom; we need to read it and apply it.

Sermon Description:

Proverbs 16 is a good reflection of the genre of writing that Proverbs is best known for: short, pithy pieces of wisdom that we commonly associate with the idea of proverbs. These are the closest the Bible comes to “fortune cookie” kinds of wisdom, which makes them easy to read and comprehend. But applying them is a different matter. Sometimes, the hardest words of wisdom to apply are not the cryptic and complex, but the simple and plain.

Sermon 4

Title: The Wise Life: Time

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Key Word: Time

Theme: A realistic view of human existence

Main Idea: God's sense of time is bigger and richer than ours. This reality can give us confidence and comfort for daily living.

Sermon Description:

Ecclesiastes is a peculiar book, in that a cursory reading would suggest hopelessness, and even nihilism. However, it contains rich wisdom in its own right. Rather than choosing to see the world for how one wishes it to be, it sees the world for what it really is, which is an important starting point for hope. It does not settle for catch-phrase theologies, or clichés that over-promise and under-deliver. It steps back and observes the totality of the human experience, which underscores the need for God and creates space for God's Spirit to work. No passage captures this dynamic more fully than the iconic third chapter, popularized by the song "Turn, Turn, Turn" by the Byrds, which has given many people comfort over the years. It is a reminder of the cyclical nature of time, in which resurrection can follow death and hope can be birthed from despair.