

Wisdom: Proverbs/Sermon on the Mount
Proverbs, Matthew Ch. 5-8
Adult Education Class
Zion Lutheran Church
January 18, 2026

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Thank you that we can gather here today to study your Word. Lord, in this new year as we seek to be closer to you and know you better, we ask for wisdom....not just knowledge....but the wisdom to actually use the knowledge we have in a way that pleases you.

Lord, some of us don't feel very wise. We are keenly aware that we have memory issues. We forget stuff. We can't find stuff. We can't remember stuff. We repeat ourselves. We lose stuff. Lord, please help us put all this aside as we study wisdom. Help us leave all our worries about our mental deficits at the door, or better yet, locked in the trunk of our car out in the parking lot. Help us forget about 'growing old' and instead focus on 'growing up.' For here and now, we pray for a renewal of our minds as we seek your Word.

Help us believe that as your brother James wrote, 'If any of us lacks wisdom, we should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to us.' So we ask for your wisdom and for help in believing that, indeed, you will give wisdom to us. Thank you for the wisdom you have given Pastor Mindy and our church leaders. Please bless our church, and make us as wise as we need to be to serve you.

In Jesus name, Amen.

INTRO:

What did you learn last week? CLASS DISCUSSION. Did you share wise sayings? Did you mention my personal top three:

"There is no education in the second kick of a mule?"

"You don't have to eat it as hot as they serve it?"

"Even a blind hog can find an acorn... sometimes."

Are these in the OT or the NT? Oh, wait, they didn't make the cut for the Bible. How about this one? *"It is better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than to deal with a stupid fool."* Pr 7:12 This proverb is a lesson directly from nature and it is still true today. Nothing is stronger than the mother's (human or animal) natural protection for her child.

During our farming venture in Tennessee raising Belted Galloway (black and white Oreo cookie cows), my wise friend, Jan, managed to get between a mother cow and her new born calf.....That mama cow tossed her in the air, then jumped over her to get to her bawling calf. Jan said, "I thought I was gong to die. For sure, I have seen all the close-up cow udders I will ever need to see. I can hardly drink a glass of milk without that image in my mind." Animals do teach us things! They are stars in the Book of Proverbs. QUOTE: *"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion."* Pr 11:22 Ouch.

Some of our pithy sayings are just idioms (i.e. concise expressions that carry meaning beyond the words used, e.g. ‘don’t want to rain on your parade’; ‘you are barking up the wrong tree’) These are non-biblical and convey meaning without any particular wisdom. We are no smarter after we hear them, but they are short cuts, useful expressions to supply meaning that we can all relate to and understand.

For example: ‘Take the bull by the horns’? What does this mean today? Where did this come from? Is it from our American west, steer wrestling, rodeo event? Or is it the matadors’ expression: “coger el toro por los cuernos” from Spain where bull fighting started in 700’s c.e.? Or is it from the sport of bull vaulting over two thousand years earlier? Bull-leaping was a sport in ancient Crete in 1600 **b.c.e.** In this Minoan ritual, the athlete grasped a charging bull by the horns and somersaulted over it. (**Show photo Knosses Fresco**). If you ‘take the bull by the horns’ literally, you can, if you wish, somersault over it. Everyone knew that 3600 years ago.

Proverbs, however, are more than idioms. Proverbs are short, well known sayings that offer wisdom, truthful observations, or practical advice on how to live. “The early bird catches the worm.” Some proverbs encapsulate cautionary, common sense: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”; “The grass is always looks greener on the other side of the fence.” The Bible says: “The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails.” Ecc 12:11 **What is a goad?** Not a toad...a goad. Long stick with a sharp metal point on the end to keep the cattle plowing in a straight line. **Show photo.** Like the ‘good-ole’ Tennessee answer to “How you been doing?” “Fair to ‘midlin’; just tryin’ to keep the car between the ditches.” The goad kept the cattle in line.

Background:

Who wrote the ‘book’ of Proverbs? And why? It begins: “*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young—Let the wise listen and add to their learning.*” Pr 1:1-4. *Proverbs* gives advice re skills in living, following God’s design, avoiding moral pitfalls and getting along with people, including rulers. It is a practical guide dealing with the art of living, kind of a ‘relationship guide’ on steroids.

Proverbs Ch 1-9, especially focuses on the reasons that young men should avoid promiscuous women and prostitutes, giving specific and very interesting advice worth checking out. And, it also compares the advantages of wisdom over folly. It personifies ‘wisdom’ as Lady Wisdom, who was present at the creation, “*The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, before the word began...I was there when he set the heavens in place... Then I was the craftsman at his side, I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his role world and delighting in mankind.*” Pr 8:23,27,30-32. The ancient Hebrews were familiar with and admired smart women. However, they also personified Folly as a woman.

Some 3000 proverbs are attributed to Solomon, king of Israel from 970-930 b.c.e., (1 Kings 4:32). Out of the 3000, there are some 800 recorded in the scroll of Proverbs. Interestingly, some of these proverbs are similar to ancient Egyptian sayings that are even older. The Wisdom of Amenemope is a literary work composed in Egypt between 1300-1075 bce. It contains 30 chapters of advice for successful living, recorded by the scribe Amenemope as a legacy for his son. It includes ancient wisdom advice from Egypt going back to 2700-2200 b.c.e. (The oldest copy is a papyrus scroll in the British Museum 12 feet long by 10 inches wide.) When it was translated into English in 1922 c.e., scholars noticed it had similarities to the Hebrew Bible book of Proverbs, specifically the '30 sayings of the wise' in Pr 22:17-24:22. After years of academic controversy, the Catholic New American Bible gives credit to Amenemope in Pr 22:19.

Let's look at one example:

Amenemope Ch. 10 says "Associate not with a passionate man, Nor approach him for conversation; Leap not to cleave to such an one; That terror carry thee not away." Prov 22:24-25 says "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."

Perhaps the Hebrews knew about this Egyptian wisdom from their 400 year sojourn in Egypt? Maybe it is just a coincidence? **One thing is for sure, there is no other book that spans the collected wisdom of 5000 years.** Proverbs as we have it today is conveniently divided into 31 chapters, one for every day of the month. A wise person might add these to their daily devotion. Imagine how wise we would be if we read the book of Proverbs 12 times during the year. This book is worth reading.

FOCUS: WHY STUDY WISDOM NOW?

Our current study idea is from a daily devotion from Father Richard Rohr on Dec 31, 2025 for the New Year. Father Richard, surely one of the wisest people I know, says the study of wisdom in the church has taken a back seat to the study of love, yet they are equally important historically and for the maturity and growth of the church. [Wisdom Daily Devotion 12/31/25 take-home handout available, CAC]

Simply put, **if the early Christians had not been incredibly wise and smart, we would not be here today; they easily would have been eradicated by the Roman Empire.** In the first century, Jesus taught them the wisdom they needed to survive and thrive for the then and there. He spoke to them in real time about real life challenges. When Jesus sent the disciples out to preach and heal, he said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore **be as wise** as serpents and innocent as doves." Matthew 10:16

CONTEXT: Today, we are going to look at just two examples from Jesus' wisdom in the Sermon on the Mount, that relate to Solomon's proverbs. First, it is fair to ask: "DID JESUS' FIRST CENTURY AUDIENCE KNOW THE PROVERBS?" **Did they have the context and background to understand what Jesus was saying based on what they knew and remembered from the Proverbs?**

We know there were many synagogues in and around the Galilee area and that holy scrolls were kept there e.g. the Torah, Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs. They were available to be read, or read to them by scribes. People heard the Proverbs read in synagogue, just as they heard the Law and The Prophets. And it was easy to remember the Proverbs...just as we have remembered 'proverbs' and 'sayings' and 'idioms' today. It is safe to say that their memories were better than ours. True some were not literate, but people who are not literate often have superior memories.

(STORY RE Jan's dyslexic friend, Bettye B, Tullahoma, Tn., with a brilliant memory, learns to read in her 70's and her Rhodes scholar, space engineer, atheist husband becomes a Christian in his 80's because he listens to the Bible with her on Audiobooks during Covid.)

So, yes, the people knew Solomon and knew his proverbs. They knew that God came to Solomon in a dream and asked what he can give him as king? *"Since you have asked for this (wisdom) and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies, but for discernment in administering justice, I will do all that you have asked, I will give you a wise and discerning heart."* 1 Kings 3: 11-12 Then, Solomon settles that court case by ordering the two fighting women to 'split the baby.' That is not a story anyone forgets.

Jesus is speaking to large groups of people, men, women and children. *"Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him."* Matthew 4:25...Outdoors, on a mountainside near the Sea of Galilee, hundreds, perhaps thousands, assembled to hear the carpenter from nearby Nazareth. There were no buildings large enough to hold the crowds. They met outside in plain sight and sound of the Roman soldiers. Jesus' reputation for wisdom and insight had spread and he taught with authority.

Jesus tells the crowd: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I came to fulfill it." He is saying, **'I am expanding and explaining what you know and have heard before.'**

He starts with murder: "You have heard that it was said to people long ago, "Do not murder. And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is **angry** with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell." Matthew 5:22 [Raca means 'empty-headed' in Aramaic. The word for 'fool' in Hebrew is Nabal, like husband of Abigail, David's wife, who was mean, stupid, and proud of it.]

Jesus starts with murder, because everyone knows they aren't supposed to kill people. "Don't murder" is probably the easiest of the ten commandments to keep. Who can murder anyone in Roman occupied Israel? They are practically under martial law, soldiers everywhere. Not much murder going on, no reports of serial killers, but there is a lot of **anger** toward others, including the Romans. Jesus expands the law and the meaning of murder. Jesus is saying don't live with anger. It will eat you up and make

you act bad. Angry people get in trouble. Make peace. Stay out of trouble. His brother James writes 15 years later: *“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”* James 1:19. Paul writes 20 years later: *“Be angry if you must, but don’t let the sun go down on your anger.”* Eph 4:26

Jesus also mentions Solomon’s visit from the Queen of Sheba who came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom. He says, **“now one greater than Solomon is here.”** Matthew 12:42 What does this mean? Is Jesus telling the people that they should listen up because what he is teaching is wiser, more important, and more powerful than any proverbs they remember from Solomon? YES. Jesus’ teaching is meant not to just gently guide, but to change lives. Jesus teaches to rearrange how one looks at the world and to revitalize and to ‘re-boot’ how one lives. Jesus is saying, “You really, really should choose to get serious about what I am saying to you about how to live and how to think because God sent me to do this **now**. God sent me to explain to you clearly, and **from you to all the subsequent generations including those meeting at the Zion Lutheran Church today in Houston, Texas**, that this is how we will change the world for better...with **wisdom that leads to peace**.”

Lesson: Now, let’s look at our two examples.

First example: How does a wise person treat enemies? Who were the first century enemies of people in Jesus’ audience? primarily Romans

Solomon: “If your enemy is hungry give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. and the Lord will reward you.” Proverbs 25: 21

Jesus: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:43

Just before this, Jesus told them: “You have heard it said, ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth [Ex 21:23-25] but I tell you, ‘Do not resist an evil person’. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. [Greek verb means being slapped on the cheek with the back of the hand in an insulting manner, not socked in the face or cold-cocked. The point is don’t be easily insulted.] And if someone wants you to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone, for example a Roman soldier, requires you to carry his pack, i.e. equipment, for a mile, go with him two miles. [This is where we get the phrase “go the extra mile.” In the first century, a Roman soldier could legally require anyone to carry his 100 lb pack for one Roman mile, 1000 paces.] Could Jesus’ advice be about how to handle the Romans in a peaceable and surprising manner? He is saying, ‘Give the Romans no cause to arrest you. Pursue peace with everyone, friend or foe, or Roman. Do more than Solomon’s proverb suggests. Do more than is required by law. Outwit them. Love them.’ **This wise advice on how to deal with the Romans may have contributed to the survival of Christianity.**

Second example: How does a wise person handle everyday disputes?

Solomon: “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.” Pr 17:14

Solomon: “What your eyes have seen, do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame?” Pr 25:8

Solomon: “If a wise man goes to court with a fool, the fool rages and scoffs and there is no peace.” Pr 29: 9 [Does he mean the fool is the adversary or the attorney?]

Jesus: “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.” Matthew 5:25-26. Figure out how to get along because you don’t want end up in a Roman court or prison. Jews had a reputation as difficult to fight in a war and impossible to govern. Romans referred to them as porcupines. JewishHistory.org). Their arguing amongst themselves and grievances with each other needed to stop. They needed to avoid the Roman courts.

Jesus had novel, very unusual, ideas about how to treat people, how to get along in the world and how to please God. Jesus gave lots of advice about social interactions, including interactions with the Romans who were running their world. Jesus’ solution to any issue was always the most peaceful one, aiming at harmony, kindness, honesty, and sincerity of heart. **The people who took Jesus’ wisdom to heart are the ones who preserved Christianity; they defeated the gods of the great Roman Empire without ever raising an army or going into battle. All within 300 years.**

Jesus shared practical wisdom that went beyond the proverbs and maxims they had heard before. He expanded on them and energized their meaning. They wanted to be wise, just as we do. They listened and responded wisely. **What is the goal of wisdom? Peace.**

CONCLUSION:

Do we get wiser by just reading the Bible? Answer: Yes. We do. How? How do we wrench wisdom from the Bible? Is ‘wrench’ even the right word? Some people memorize bible verses. Some people journal or write letters to God. Some people sit with the Bible and study it....history and context....and maps and atlases. These are all good.

There is also another beautiful way to study the Bible, not for mastery or information, but for deep communion with God. It is called **Lectio Divina**. How many of you know about this? It is as simple as setting aside some time to consciously be present with God by reading the scriptures to discuss things with God, to pray and listen for guidance, to tap into God’s wisdom. **Distribute Handout.**

The early church leaders began this practice in the 3rd century, and it was practiced in the monasteries for hundreds of years. In the 20th century it gained a

renewed emphasis by the Second Vatican Council which encouraged Christians to engage Scripture prayerfully. Lectio Divina is four-fold encounter with the scriptures: Reading (lectio), Reflecting (mediatio), Praying (oratio) and Resting in God's presence (contemplatio). The goal is to absorb the meaning of a passage, to accept the wisdom from it, to listen and commune with God.

First, **Read** the scripture slowly (aloud if possible). Read it twice. On the second time, notice a word or phrase that catches your attention.

Second, **Reflect**. Hold on to that word or phrase. Ask yourself: Why might this be speaking to you today? What is happening in our lives that connects to it?

Third, **Respond**. Read the text a third time. Speak to God from your heart. Offer a prayerful response, bringing your word or phrase to God, listening for how God is speaking to you through it.

Fourth, **Rest**. Rest quietly in God's presence.

Practicing Lectio Divina: Matthew 7:24-28 after Sermon on the Mount:

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall. Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

This is how we absorb wisdom. This is how we interact with God.

Go in peace and wisdom, my friends. Thank you.

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