

# Engaging Gospel Doctrine (Episode 108)

## LESSON 31

### “Happy Is the [One] That Findeth Wisdom”

Hook	This lesson is about nothing less than the secret to living well. No pressure, right?
Goal	
Overview	
Conclusion	

Manual Goal: To inspire class members to be more Christlike by applying the wise counsel in the books of [Proverbs](#) and [Ecclesiastes](#).

(This is very interesting, because Proverbs and Ecclesiastes have strongly opposed viewpoints)

EGD Goal: Class members should reflect on the differences between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the context of their own lives. Most importantly, this lesson provides an opportunity to discuss the underlying principle of wisdom—keys to living well.

Outline of this non-episode 😊 (Which turned into pretty much a full episode without discussion, fine)

1. Introduction to Wisdom literature
2. Proverbs
3. Reflective Wisdom
4. Ecclesiastes
5. Life wisdom: What are the secrets to living well?

### Wisdom Literature

Wisdom was the higher learning of the ancient world, transmitted by scribes (ancient academics and lawyers). Egyptian wisdom was prominent; in fact Proverbs

Much of wisdom stemmed from lived observation, but there was more.

“all sages believed in the existence of an underlying body of rules that determined reality...things...happen according to certain set, eternal patterns, and in a sense, even God is subject to their rules...justice must always prevail in the end; the righteous must always be rewarded and the wicked must always be punished” (Kugel, 509-510).

Self-restraint and humility are destined to win out in the end  
Consistent division of humanity into the categories of “wicked” and “righteous”

Discussion: Does this depiction in Proverbs line up with your own life experience? Why or why not?

### Proverbs

## Traditional wisdom, five collections

- I. 1:1-9:18 “Proverbs of Solomon” instruction genre, nature of wisdom, meaning of life, path to success (probably composed last, not earliest, type of intro to the Proverbs)
- II. 10:1-22:16 Gathering of heterogenous proverbs, advice on how to live in the world (older than other proverbs)
- III. 22:17-24:22 “words of the wise, thirty instructions, modeled on Egyptian source, Instruction of Amen-em-ope (Could date to the time of Solomon or even a bit earlier)
- IV. 24:23-34 “these are also the sayings of the wised”, addition to collection III
- V. 25:1-29:27 “proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied” placing collection in late 8<sup>th</sup>/early 7<sup>th</sup> centuries bce
- VI. Appendices (30:1-31:31) addressing skepticism, mysterious dimensions of life, “manual for rulers” (framed as teaching by the queen mother!), portrait of the ideal woman

Other themes to look for: “Woman wisdom”, Sophia in Greek, Hokhma in Hebrew, both feminine (Proverbs 8 is amazing, and a Heavenly Mother centered reading could be deeply rewarding) Women actually figure quite prominently in Proverbs, relatively speaking.

## Reflective Wisdom

### Ecclesiastes

(Ecclesiastes has actually been an intensely controversial book. Read it carefully and note there is much to wrestle with, since the book itself is a wrestle with the question of meaning and the fundamental unfairness of life) Reading the book is a wrestle, as the author wrestles with deep questions. This is a “be challenged by” book for sure.

Ecclesiastes “presents a running dialectic: the “vanity of things’ set over against the goodness of life...it restructures accepted truths about life, death, pleasure, and toil, and reevaluates them realistically, holding experience up to the light and refracting it” (Oxford Companion to the Bible, 177) He is intentionally difficult and contradictory.

“vanity” “hevel”, air, breath, puff of wind”, that which is ephemeral

Kugel calls Ecclesiastes “a lover’s quarrel with conventional wisdom” (perhaps some listeners will relate)

Philosophical treatise of life and the absurd (chapters 1-6)

Ethical discussion on how one should live one’s life (7-12)

Answering the Preacher’s questions (these would make for amazing discussion. You could ask if anyone pays attention to the ideas in Ecclesiastes; they are hauntingly radical and challenging)

Fundamental question: “What does one gain by all one’s toil?” (1:2-3) The author tackles and acknowledges the inability of humans to make sense of the world

“for in wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge, increase sorrow” 1:18; 2 Nephi 9:28-29 provides more insight.

Good is not necessarily rewarded (3:16-20; 7:15), \*Opposite\* view as Proverbs!

3:11 “He also puts eternity in their mind, but without humans ever guessing, from the first to last, all the things that God brings to pass” (also gives humans the hunger for wisdom, but without the ability to attain it)

“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death, than the day of birth” (7:1; that first part is amazing in Hebrew: **טוב שם משימן טוב** (Ecc 7:1 WTT))

So much profundity! “It is better to listen to a wise’ man’s reproof than to listen to the praise of fools” (7:5)

“So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun”. (8:15; cf. 2:24)

“The only profitable attitude to adopt is to live in the world as one finds it, to be moderate in all things (even piety), and to enjoy the good pleasure that life gives, for even this is a gift.” (Oxford Companion to the Bible, 177)

Lessons from Ecclesiastes: It is ok to question traditional wisdom. He emphasizes again and again the precious gift of this life.

(bring up the challenge: For the sake of argument, let’s say you came to the knowledge that your existence would cease at death; would you live your life differently?)

## Life Wisdom

So what are the secrets to living well? I am not going to lay out the answers, but rather invite suggestion by organizing “wellness” into the following categories. What are keys to success and thriving within each of these areas?

**Physical** (including Health, economic well being):

**Intellectual** (learning, thinking clearly and well):

**Emotional** (processing negative emotions, gratitude, maturity):

**Social/Relational** (love, quality of relationships):

**Spiritual** (actualization, communion with God, connection to something greater, spiritual rituals, renewal, perspective):

**Ethical** (subcategory of spiritual?)

**Engagement and Achievement** (which crosses categories, life satisfaction, satisfaction in specific aspects of life)

A message from my friend Jennifer White:

Researchers from different disciplines have examined different aspects of well-being that include the following: Physical well-being. Economic well-being. Social well-being. Development and activity. Emotional well-being. Psychological well-being. Life satisfaction. Domain specific satisfaction. Engaging activities and work.

Research: Frey BS, Stutzer A. Happiness and economics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; 2002. Veenhoven R. Sociological theories of subjective well-being. In: M Eid , RJ Larsen (eds). The science of subjective well-being. New York: Guilford Press; 2008:44–61. Kahneman D, Krueger AB, Schkade DA, Schwarz N, Stone AA. A survey method for characterizing daily life: the day reconstruction method. *Science* 2004;306:1776–1780. Eid M. Measuring the Immeasurable: Psychometric modeling of subjective well-being data. In: Eid M, Larsen RJ (eds.) The science of subjective well-being. New York: Guilford Press; 2008:141–167. Dupuy HJ (1978). Self-representations of general psychological well-being of American adults. Paper presented at the American Public Health Association Meeting, Los Angeles, October, 1978. Fazio, A.F. (1977). A concurrent validation study of the NCHS General Well-Being Schedule. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, national Center for Health Statistics, 1977. Vital and Health Statistics Series 2, No. 73. DHEW Publication No. (HRA) 78-1347. Kaplan RM, Anderson JP. The quality of well-being scale: Rationale for a single quality of life index. In: SR Walker, R Rosser (Eds.) Quality of Life: Assessment and Application. London: MTP Press; 1988:51–77. Keyes CLM. The mental health continuum: from languishing to flourishing in life. *J Health Soc Res* 2002;43(6):207-222.

Also here are 2 links of other ways of looking at well-being

<http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/126884/five-essential-elements-wellbeing.aspx> These elements are the currency of a life that matters. They do not include every nuance of what's important in life, but they do represent five broad categories that are essential to most people.

The first element is about how you occupy your time or simply liking what you do every day: your Career Wellbeing. The second element is about having strong relationships and love in your life: your Social Wellbeing. The third element is about effectively managing your economic life: your Financial Wellbeing. The fourth element is about having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis: your Physical Wellbeing. The fifth element is about the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live: your Community Wellbeing.

and

[http://wellness.ucr.edu/seven\\_dimensions.html](http://wellness.ucr.edu/seven_dimensions.html) Social Wellness Emotional Wellness Spiritual Wellness Environmental Wellness. Occupational Wellness Intellectual Wellness Physical Wellness