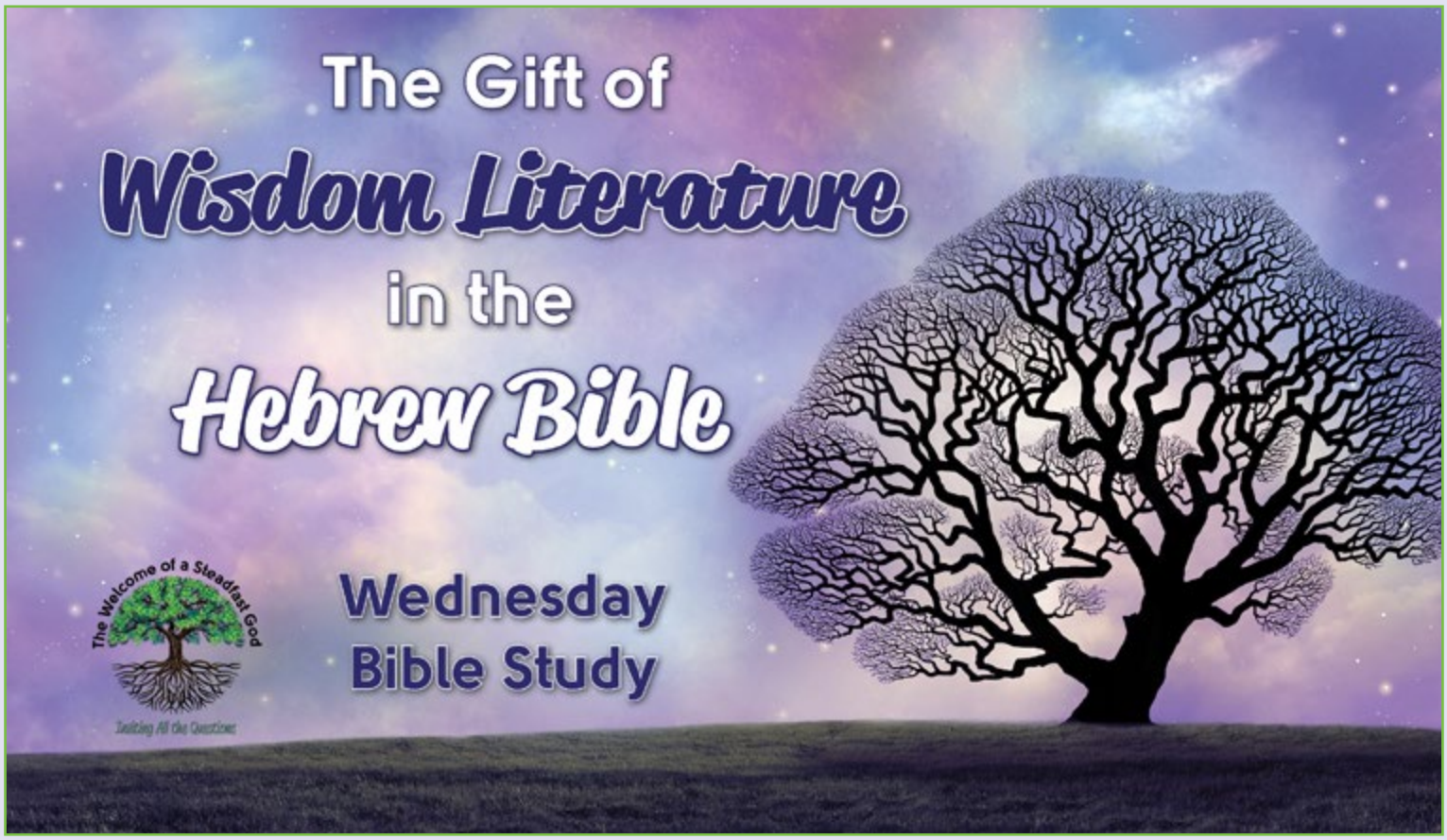


Fall Bible Study Guide

Wednesdays, November 4 – 18

6 p.m. in Nativity or on Zoom

Central Lutheran
MINNEAPOLIS

Welcome

Welcome to the second session of fall learning where our focus will be on Wisdom Literature.

As always, these Bible studies are more holy conversations. No previous knowledge is expected; in fact it helps to enter the study as if for the first time. We call this *beginner's mind*. You are invited to attend in person or via Zoom each week, and the invitation is always open for you to attend when it works for you. Remember, you're invited to join the conversation, regardless of where you are in your faith journey. For this study, you may want to read the assigned readings ahead of time.

Attend Each Week, or When it Works
In person or via Zoom
Zoom Meeting ID: 831 4545 1261

You'll want a Bible for our shared study of Wisdom Literature. We recommend a good study Bible and any translation you have is fine. A variety of translations enriches our conversations because of the nuances in language. The study texts are listed in the schedule and at the beginning of each lesson. A basic outline of the lesson is included in this booklet, and the pastors will provide additional information and handouts prior to or in class.

Christ Care Prayers begin each lesson; it is a time when we pray for one another and the needs of the world. If you have a prayer concern that you do not want to share in front of the group, you can send a private chat to the pastor who is leading the study.

Thank you for joining this Bible study, these holy conversations.

Schedule

Wednesday, November 4:	The Steadfast Nature of God in Proverbs *Proverbs, Chapters 1–3*	page 4
Wednesday, November 11:	The Steadfast Nature of God in Job *Job, Chapters 38–42*	page 5
Wednesday, November 18:	The Steadfast Nature of God in Ecclesiastes *Ecclesiastes, Chapters 1–4*	page 6

Introduction

You already know that The Old Testament is broken into four unique sections. They are the *Pentateuch,* which are the stories that begin with "In the beginning" and end with the ancient Hebrews as they stand in reach of the Promised Land. Following the Pentateuch are the history books that cover the history of God's people beginning with Joshua and continue through Esther and the time when the temple is rebuilt after the Exile. Tucked in next is the Wisdom Literature that we will look at in this study. And the Old Testament ends, of course with the words of the prophets that overlap the history books reaching back in time to the days of Solomon.



This is a quick glance at the books included as Wisdom Literature in the NRSV-UE (Newly Revised Standard Version – Updated Edition), and a brief description of what they are and why they are included in scripture. Ellen Davis, one of the authors and scholars who shaped our understanding of Wisdom Literature says this about the genre: "The proverbs are spiritual guides for ordinary people, on an ordinary day when water does not pour forth from rocks and angels do not come to lunch."

These books are gifts that help us navigate the complexities of ordinary days. It is also important for us to remember to read these through a pre-enlightened lens. They were written when we asked questions with a very different understanding of how the world worked.

Proverbs: These chapters offer practical sayings and principles for everyday conduct, contrasting wisdom with foolishness.

Job: This story explores the deep mystery of suffering, divine sovereignty, and how humans respond when life breaks down.

Ecclesiastes: This book examines the fleeting, repetitive nature of life "under the sun" and questions traditional formulas of cause and effect.

Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs): This is a poetic, romantic expression of love and marriage often grouped with wisdom themes.

Psalms: While largely a collection of prayers and hymns, many are classified as wisdom Psalms because they reflect on human suffering, justice, and trust in God.

These books are not so much prescriptive as they are suggestive. You may read passages with which you completely agree, and others, with which you completely disagree. Ironically, that tension may be exactly what the wisdom literature is designed to do. These ancient stories and texts are intended to inspire thought and contemplation of a steadfast God and how we, as God's people, are to navigate our way from this life to the next.

So with all of that, let's get started.

The Steadfast Nature of God in Proverbs

Wednesday, Novmeber 4, 6 p.m.

Suggested reading: Proverbs, Chapters 1–3

Proverbs 1:7
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and knowledge."

Tonight's Conversation
Scholarship associates King Solomon with the writing of Proverbs, although much of its content can be attributed to the time in which it was written. Believed to be compiled around 400 b.c.e., it was written as an ancient guide of 'best practices' for living a good life. Containing 31 chapters, Proverbs is full of wisdom and advice that comes to us in the form of short sayings that invite the reader to reflect on life.

While its application and purpose can be read through a secular lens, the inclusion of this phrase assures the reader of its Hebrew origin: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." In the very first chapter of this remarkable book is the awareness that our goodness comes as the result of a steadfast God.

It's worth noting here that there is a particular slant toward the masculine and patriarchy. While reading, we invite you to remember the time and culture in which Proverbs was written. You can imagine that if the book was written today, some of the language and imagery would be very different. As we read, you are encouraged to hold loosely to the texts that separate and imagine ways of rephrasing and rewording the text to accommodate a post-enlightenment worldview.

From a literary perspective, note the poetic rhythm or cadence of Proverbs and how it reads so differently from other texts in scripture.

Proverbs 2:20
"Therefore walk in the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the just. For the upright will abide in the land, and the innocent will remain in it…"

Christ Care Prayers

Welcome

Conversations and Reflection

1. How do you experience the welcome of a steadfast God in Proverbs?
2. What does the text tell you about the author and the audience?
3. What might we imagine about the world as Proverbs was written?
4. How does reading Proverbs make you feel? Enlightened? Curious? Empowered?

The Steadfast Nature of God in Job

Wednesday, November 11, 6 p.m.

Suggested reading: Job, Chapters 38–42

Tonight's Conversation
This week we will survey chapters 38-42 in Job.

Job is an expansive exploration of innocence and suffering. In 42 chapters, the book of Job surveys the lived experience of suffering and loss and, in the end, reconciliation of Job's relationship with God. Understood to be one of the oldest inspired books in scripture, Job explores one of our biggest questions of a steadfast God and that is "why do the innocent suffer?"

Using a resource that is informative for you, try to find a summary of the story of Job. It will be helpful for our conversation if you are just a little familiar with the story of Job and why his story is important enough to be include in scripture.

It's important for us to note that when the texts names God and Satan, the Satan is not the same character as the Satan we talk about later in scripture. The Satan in Job is better understood as an accuser or antagonizer.

Christ Care Prayers

Welcome

Conversations and Reflection

1. How is God understood as steadfast or not steadfast in the story of Job?
2. Does God redeem Godself in the final chapters of Job?
3. How does Job represent suffering in the world?
4. What are the questions that come to mind as you read this ancient text?

Job 38:4-7
"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurerments – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid the cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

The Steadfast Nature of God in Ecclesiastes

Wednesday, November 18, 6 p.m.

Suggested reading: Ecclesiastes, Chapters 1–4

Tonight's Conversation
This session of study captures the essence of a steadfast God. Understood to be written by a teacher who looks back on life, the teacher reflects on the many things learned over a lifetime.

As we continue to explore the nuances of God's steadfast welcome, especially in a culture that feels unsteady, Ecclesiastes assures us that there is a time for everything. God's timing is not our timing; God's ways are not our ways. God's steadfast presence and welcome, however, are constant and we can trust that presence and welcome just as we can trust that the sun will rise in the morning and the stars will shine at night.

Ecclesiastes 1:4-6
"A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.
The sun rises and the sun goes down,
and hurries to the place where it rises.
The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north:
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns."

An interesting note for us is that Ecclesiastes is read during the Jewish feast of Sukkoth or the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. It is observed in the fall and celebrates God's care for the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, to remind the people that God's care is constant; God's care is steadfast.

Christ Care Prayers

Welcome

Conversations and Reflection

1. How do these chapters in Ecclesiastes capture the essence of a God who is steadfast?
2. In what ways do the words of Ecclesiastes resonate or have meaning for you?
3. What does the text tell you about the welcome of a steadfast God?
4. What are the images or stories in your life that help you experience God as steadfast?

Thank you for taking this brief survey of Wisdom Literature with us. The blending of the secular and the sacred in these books are such a beautiful way for us to make connections between faith and life.

If you've enjoyed this study and these conversations, consider reading more of the Wisdom materials in scripture as a contemplative practice. The Psalms and Song of Solomon are two additional books that incorporate and explore both wisdom and faith.

Notes



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An Everyday Church for Everyone

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