



BNEXT BIBLE STUDY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Lessons for Life

FEATURING THE AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO SERIES

BNEXT STUDY

Tested for Life : Job

Praises for Life : Psalms

Wisdom for Life : Proverbs

Purpose for Life : Ecclesiastes

Love for Life : Song of Songs

AMAZING JOURNEY VIDEO

🎥 The Test

🎥 Get Emotional

🎥 Wisdom from Heaven

🎥 Two Prods and a Peg

🎥 Your Love Life

STUDY **BNEXT**

William P. Campbell



Welcome to BNEXT Amazing Journey

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. This electronic version contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and place a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the mast of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

An important component of BNEXT Amazing Journey are the videos that accompany each series. To access the videos associated with this particular series, see the link below my signature.

Also we have included, in the last pages of this digital version, a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT Amazing Journey series, I hope you will consider leading others through this study material.

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,



William P. Campbell

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In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Job 1:1

Introduction

Why do bad things happen to good people? This is a question all of us have asked. This is especially true when we witness some of the hardships that upstanding, moral people sometimes go through. For instance, a farmer losing his crops to floods or tornadoes, a young child taken by cancer, a church burned to the ground by lightning, a young couple killed by a drunk driver, and the list goes on and on. If there was ever a blameless, upright human being who lost everything, it was Job (Job 1:1)!

Background

Where does the book of Job fit into the overall scheme of the Old Testament? The book of Job can be grouped with four other Old Testament books: Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. These five are books of poetry—writings for the “heart”—found at the heart, or center, of the Old Testament.

- 17 Books of History: five about the Law – Genesis through Deuteronomy; twelve about the Nation of Israel – Joshua through Esther
- 5 Books of Poetry: Job through Song of Songs
- 17 Books of Prophecy: five Major Prophets – Isaiah through Daniel; twelve Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi

The books of poetry are more personal than national. They provide us with lessons on life. Four of the five poetical books (Psalms to Song of Songs) were written during the golden reign of King David and King Solomon. Some have mistakenly assumed therefore that the book of Job was also written during this time. Job, however, is likely the oldest book in the Bible and possibly the oldest piece of literature in the world—aside from the first 11 chapters of Genesis.

There is no mention in Job of the nation of Israel or of its leaders, Moses or Abraham. The book does not mention the covenant on Sinai or the laws given to Moses. The fact that Job found need to offer sacrifices himself suggests there was not yet a priesthood in place. However, there are references to the great cataclysmic flood and the dispersion of the nations following Babel. These considerations, along with the fact that Job lived to be 140 years of age, suggest he may have lived in the time of the early patriarchs, around or before the time of Abraham.

The Story of Job

The book of Job is a dramatic and fantastic story written as poetry. Actually, the first two chapters of the book and the final 11 verses of the last chapter are written in prose, providing the introduction and conclusion to poetic discourses. Thus we have a dramatic poem cradled by an epic story.

This does not mean that Job was a fictional character or an ancient legend. Both ancient Jews and early Christians have accepted the life of Job and the book describing his life as factual and historical. The prophet Ezekiel characterized Job, along with Noah and Daniel, as historical fig-



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“The Test”

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James 5:11

ures of righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). The New Testament writer, James, referred to Job as an exemplary character. "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy" (James 5:11b,c). If writers of both the Old and New Testaments and believers from the earliest times have accepted the story of Job as factual, we need do no less.

The book of Job strikes at the heartstrings of every reader, for the struggle of Job is the struggle of humanity. The story begins in the land of Uz, probably southeast of the Dead Sea, in the territory of Edom (Genesis 36:28; Lamentations 4:21). Job was a paragon of virtue, "...blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).

This is not to say that Job was sinless, for only Christ could ever make such a claim (Romans 3:23). It is to say he was a godly man, a fair and just businessman, a model father and grandfather, a devoted believer in the Most High, who offered sacrifices regularly and who depended on God's grace for his very life (Job 1:2-5).

The conflict in this book begins almost immediately. The source of conflict is Satan himself. Satan, a fallen angel, has been leading a rebellion against God and His followers from the beginning of creation (Ezekiel 28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12-15; Revelation 12:9; Ephesians 6:12). In Job's day, Satan came before God and accused Him of being too protective of Job (Job 1:9-11). Satan argued that if God would allow Job to lose his wealth, Job would deny God altogether.

God, in His divine wisdom and sovereignty, removed the protective hedge from his favored servant, and Satan was allowed to wreak havoc. Job lost his oxen, his donkeys, his farmhands (Job 1:14-15); his sheep, his shepherds (Job 1:16); his camels, his servants (Job 1:17); and even his own children (Job 1:18-19). But through it all, Job proclaimed an enduring trust in God with a golden statement of faith that has endured as a favorite from that day until now: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised" (Job 1:21).

Rebuffed by Job's righteousness, Satan again approached God, claiming that if Job now were to lose his health, he would surely curse God. Once again God allowed Satan's attack, and Job was afflicted with sores from head to foot. To make matters worse, his own wife turned against him and urged Him to deny God, saying, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). Yet again, Job declared an unshakable trust in the Lord, saying, "'Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:10).

Three friends heard of Job's afflictions and came to see him. These three men showed great commitment to Job, for they traveled long distances from different cities to meet him. Realizing the greatness of Job's pain, these comrades grieved in silence with him for a whole week. Loving silence is often the best comfort for a suffering soul.

Finally, Job broke the quiet, expressing the immeasurable depths of his misery. In response, his friends decided they had provided enough sympathizing and began sermonizing. These three friends delivered eight full-length messages. As if that were not enough, a young man named Elihu topped off the preaching conference with a full-scale lecture. Each friend added pain to

Then Job replied to the Lord, "...Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

Job 42:1a-3b

Job's misery by insisting that Job's sin was the cause of his suffering. They clung to the over-simplified and misguided view that righteousness results in prosperity, and sin causes suffering. Tragically, this view is still proclaimed in some Christian circles today.

The Message of Job

Most commentators tell us the primary concern in Job is to answer the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" Interestingly, the question is never answered in this epic. The primary message of the book, however, is revealed when God finally confronts Job and his lecturing friends. In Job 38-41, God speaks from a whirlwind, challenging Job with more than 60 questions. God confronts Job with His infinite knowledge (Job 38:1-40:2) and His immeasurable power (Job 40:6-41:34). Job's response was to remain silent (Job 40:3-5) and to repent from presumption and pride (Job 42:1-6).

Final Thought

Why, in God's two great discourses, did He not give an answer to Job's questions, and ours, regarding why the righteous suffer? Perhaps the answer is this: We are asking the wrong question. In this story, we see ourselves in Job, and through Job, we see God. We too ask Job's questions, and we too find no simple solutions. However, all questions melt in the glorious presence of the Almighty God. Arguments turn into wonder and doubts become worship...our questions should lead us on a quest for God until we truly see Him for who He is.

Warren Wiersbe states, "Time seems to rush by when we are enjoying life but to linger when we are suffering. God knows how long our trials should last because He knows exactly what we need" (1 Peter 1:6-8).

We don't know why the righteous suffer. We do know, however, that Satan cannot afflict us, and evil will not approach us unless God allows it. We know too that God will reward us for our faithfulness through suffering—in this life and especially in the next. When we see the sufferings of Job and how the Lord ultimately rewarded Job, we are left with one question to ask in the midst of our own afflictions: "Why do I doubt?" Though we may never understand the *why* we can always trust the *Who*.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the five-week series "Lessons For Life," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Job 1:1-5. Describe Job's character in your own words.

3. Read Job 1:6-12. Notice who brought Job's name up first (Job 1:8). What was Satan allowed to do or not to do to Job?

4. What was Job's response to this first test (Job 1:20-21)?

5. Read Job 2:1-10. In the second test, what was Satan allowed to do?

What was Satan not allowed to do?

Why do you think God restricted Satan?

What was Job's response to his wife's ridicule?

6. What trials are especially difficult in your life today?

Does your response to these trials and to God in some way parallel Job's responses (Job 1:21-22; 2:10)?

Should they? Explain.



Discussion (Small Group Study)

7. Read Job 2:11-13. How many friends came to Job and what was their initial reaction to his tragedies?

What kind of people do you NOT want to be with? Explain.

Later, how did they react and respond to Job's tragedies?

8. Have you ever been in a situation (like Job's) where people "volunteer" their counsel or push their advice on you?

10. What is the most difficult situation you have ever been in? How did you respond? Was God faithful? What did you learn?

How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

Read Job 6:14. What do you think Job was trying to tell his friends?

11. Read James 1:2-4. According to this passage how are we to respond to "trials of many kinds"? Why?

9. What kind of people do you want to be with when you're going through tough times?

Do you find obedience to this text to be difficult, fairly difficult, or impossible? Explain.



12. Skim the final chapter (Job 42). In what way does this parallel the final chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22) and of our lives? Take time to praise God for His sovereign care over us.

15. What was Job's answer (Job 42:1-2)? Do you resonate with this answer? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

13. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. (Note: The word *temptation* here can also mean "trial.") What is the main point of this verse?

16. Considering the whole story of the book of Job, summarize what you think is the main point of the book. What lesson from this book is most valuable to you and why?

Do you live according to this truth? Explain.

14. What are some of the rhetorical questions God asked Job in Job 38:1-23? What was God's point?

Scripture for Meditation

Then job replied to the Lord, "I know that You can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted."

Job 42:1-2



But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:20

Introduction

Why do the Psalms so touch our souls? How can literature written thousands of years ago speak with astonishing relevance to our conditions today? Could it be that our conditions haven't changed that much, and we experience the same emotions as did David, "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14)?

From the time of David, the Psalms have been a vital source of encouragement from Almighty God and continue to be a vital source of spiritual devotion today. They are relevant because they speak to us about real life situations. In the Psalms, we recognize the "thrill of victory" and also "the agony of defeat."

In the Psalter, every color of human emotion is painted on the background of varied human experience. The Psalms have been used for personal and public worship through the ages. People often sing psalms in the form of hymns or praise songs. Psalms inspired many of our best loved hymns such as:

O Worship the King	Psalms 104
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	Psalms 46
O God, Our Help in Ages Past	Psalms 90
It Is Well with My Soul	Psalms 103

We are touched, healed, and stayed on our course by the same, unchanging God who inspired the Psalms so long ago. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The Authors of the Psalms

We generally refer to the Psalms as David's book because he wrote nearly half of them. Seventy-three of the 150 Psalms are specifically attributed to David. However, there were other writers of these poetic prayers and songs.

- Asaph, one of the heads of David's choir, wrote three;
- The sons of Korah, a family of official musicians, penned at least ten;
- Hezekiah, one of Israel's later kings, wrote ten;
- And Heman, Ethan, Solomon, and Moses each wrote one Psalm;
- Fifty of the Psalms were anonymous.

These poems were brought together in five sections, over a period of some 500 years, and then finally compiled into their present form.

The sections are clearly marked in the Bible as each ends with a doxology of praise to God. Scholars have noted that the sections reflect, in some measure, the *Pentateuch* (the first five books of the Bible). The Jewish *Midrash*, or commentary on the Bible, states: "Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the Law, and as a counterpart to these, David gave them the Psalms, which consist of five books."



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"Get Emotional"

With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise Him!

Psalms 109:30

The sections have general themes that roughly correspond to the themes of the first five books of the Bible.

Psalms	Related to <i>Pentateuch</i>	Theme
1-41	Genesis	Man
42-72	Exodus	Deliverance
73-89	Leviticus	Sanctuary
90-106	Numbers	Unrest
107-150	Deuteronomy	Word of God

The Message of the Psalms

The intent of the Psalms was not to promote their authors but to point to God in prayer and praise. The Psalms were Israel's prayer book and songbook. The word *psalm* comes from the Greek word *psalmos*, which meant "a poetic composition sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments." The common Hebrew title for the book is *Praises*. Another Hebrew title is *Prayers*. This book is a collection of poetic praises and prayers and was written to be set to music.

Several categories of Psalms are recognized. For example:

1. *Messianic Psalms*: Speak of the coming Messiah. Hundreds of years before Christ was born, the Hebrew Psalter described:

- His obedience (Psalms 40:6-10)
- His zeal (Psalms 69:9)
- His rejection (Psalms 118:22)
- His betrayal (Psalms 41:9; 55:12-14)
- His sufferings (Psalms 22:1-18; 31:5; 34:20; 69:21; 129:3)
- His resurrection (Psalms 16:10)
- His ascension (Psalms 68:18)

2. *Acrostic Psalms*: Each line begins with a successive letter of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. This form of poetry would be easily committed to memory. Psalms 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145.

3. *Penitential Psalms*: Psalms of contrition and repentance are helpful when we come to God confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness. Five of these were written by David. Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143.

4. *Hallel Psalms*: Hallel, from the word "Hallelujah," is prominent. "The Hallel" was to be sung at Passover — Mark 14:26 and Matthew 26:30. Psalms 113–118.

5. *Historical Psalms*: Describing Israel's History. Psalms 78; 105; 106.

6. *The Psalms of Ascent*: It is unclear how these Psalms were used—perhaps for pilgrimages to Jerusalem or for the ascent to the steps of the Temple. They may have been designated ascent

With my mouth I will
greatly extol the LORD; in
the great throng of wor-
shippers I will praise Him!

Psalm 109:30

Psalms because the music tied to them increased in ascending scales. Psalms 120-134.

7. *The Imprecatory Psalms*: Psalms which pray against or invoke evil upon someone or something. Psalms 35; 55; 58; 59; 69; 83; 109; 137; 140.

How do we justify these Imprecatory Psalms with the commands of Christ to love our enemies? We must recognize the progression from the Old Testament to the New Testament. David and the other writers of the Psalms lived in an age which looked forward to the coming of Christ, but which did not yet know the fullness of God's grace. God provided the Law to prepare us to receive that grace of the New Testament. We also need to remember the times: God sanctioned limited physical warfare in the days of the Psalms, which prefigure spiritual warfare today.

We need to look at the tone: The Imprecatory Psalms depict an abhorrence for sin and evil that should reside in the heart of those, even today, who rightly love their enemies. As the expression goes, we should "hate the sin but love the sinner." Finally, these Psalms are often predictive and speak with the voice of God, who alone will be the final arbiter and judge of all mankind.

8. *The Devotional Psalms*: Containing precious promises of God, and a full range of human emotions in response to the presence of God. There are approximately 70 such Psalms.

Final Thought

The Psalms have been tested and found true for God's people through the ages. They reach each of us wherever we are in our lives—whether extreme joy or devastating pain. They convict, uplift, chastise, and encourage.

A young Charles Hadden Spurgeon shared the following personal story regarding the impact of a particular Psalm upon his life. "In the year 1854, when I had scarcely been in London twelve months, the neighborhood in which I labored was visited by Asiatic cholera....Family after family summoned me to the bedside of the smitten, and almost every day I was called to visit the grave....My friends seemed falling one by one, and I felt or fancied that I was sickening like those around me....I felt that my burden was heavier than I could bear, and I was ready to sink under it....I was returning mournfully home from a funeral, when my curiosity led me to read a paper wafered up in a shoemaker's window....It bore in a good bold handwriting these words, 'Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling' (Psalm 91:9-10 KJV).

"The effect upon my heart was immediate....I felt secure, refreshed....I went on with my visitation of the dying in a calm and peaceful spirit; I felt no fear of evil and I suffered no harm. The providence which moved the tradesman to place those verses in his window, I gratefully acknowledge, and in the remembrance of its marvelous power I adore the LORD my God."

God placed the Psalms at the center—the very heart of the Bible to touch the heart of every believer. They are a rich resource for prayer and private praise. In every circumstance, there is a Psalm tailored for your situation. Read them. Memorize them. Meditate upon them. Apply them. Enjoy them. They are words from God's heart to yours.



Spending Time With God

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Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Psalm 1:1-6. On what basis can we expect blessings from God?

How does this Psalm challenge you personally?

3. Read Psalm 8:1-9. What does this Psalm say about God?

About man?

About you?

4. Read Psalm 16 as a prayer. Did it work? Do you utilize the Psalms to strengthen your prayer life? If not, will you consider doing so beginning this week?

5. What is your favorite Psalm? Read it now and record some of the most helpful statements from that Psalm that you might carry them in your heart today.



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 2

Praises for Life | Psalms

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. See Psalm 19:1-6. Compare with Paul's statement in Romans 1:18-20. Do you agree with Paul? Explain.

8. Read Psalm 22. What does this account describe? What do you find most amazing about this Psalm?

What experiences with God's creation have helped you to see and believe in the greatness and goodness of God?

9. Read Psalm 23. Originally there were no chapter divisions between the Psalms. How does this Psalm fit well after Psalm 22?

7. Read Psalm 19:7-14. Which of these descriptions of the Word of God do you like best. Why?

How has Psalm 23 encouraged you sometime in the past? (Do you have a short story to tell?)

What is the purpose of God's Word as described in the last four verses of this Psalm?

10. How have the Psalms encouraged your spiritual growth?



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 2

Praises for Life | Psalms

How do you use the Psalms? If you have time and if you have not yet done so, pick the Psalm that has been most helpful for you and tell why.

b.Challenge:

c. Comfort:

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Read Psalm 42. Note the passion and emotion flowing through the lines of this poem. What is the place of emotion in our religious experience?

Note how David brought his joy, depression, hope and despair to God. Do you do the same? Should you?

12. Read Psalm 139. What is the central point of this chapter? How does this Psalm challenge you? Comfort you?

a. Central Point:

Scripture for Meditation

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 1:1-2



For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.

Proverbs 6:23

Introduction

We often use proverbial sayings, such as:

“Practice makes perfect,”

“Haste makes waste,”

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”

But, did you know that many of our pithy sayings trace their roots to the Bible?

“A gentle answer turns away wrath...” (Proverbs 15:1a),

“Pride goes before destruction...” (Proverbs 16:18a),

“Iron sharpens iron...” (Proverbs 27:17a).

So what is a proverb? A proverb is a short adage designed to help us live a fulfilled life. It is a neatly packaged saying that conveys wisdom to be remembered. Someone has defined a proverb as a “short statement based on long experience.” The English word *proverb* is a compound from the words *pro*, meaning “for,” and *verba*, meaning “words.” A proverb is like a picture which we have all heard is “worth a thousand words.” It is a portrait gallery that we can view, one picture at a time. As a literary form, the proverb has always been important to societies and nations throughout the world. Proverbs pass essential truths from one generation to the next.

Some scholars note that King Solomon probably wrote the Song of Songs when he was a young romantic, the Proverbs when he was middle aged and filled with wit and resource, and Ecclesiastes as he grew older and more aware of the meaningless vanity contained in the pursuit of pleasure.

The Motive Behind the Proverbs

The Proverbs were written to share with us wisdom for daily living. If most of the Bible tells us the way of salvation, the writings of Solomon teach us the practical truth for our daily walk with the LORD for He cares about the paths we choose. If the Psalms are devotional, the Proverbs are practical.

While the Psalms focus on our relationship with God, the Proverbs focus on our relationship with others. Both aspects are important in the Christian life. Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” Then He said, “‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37 and 39b). Relationships matter to God!

Proverbs includes encouragement for the wise and warnings for the unwise. This book discusses sexual sin, handling money, the tongue, liars, lazy people, discipline, flattery, bribery, disputes, strong drink, true friends, and our homes.



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“Wisdom from Heaven”

Solomon answered... give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?

1 Kings 3:6a, 9

The Message Behind The Proverbs

The message behind the Proverbs is recorded in the first chapter, "...for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight" (Proverbs 1:2). The key to such wisdom is found just a few verses later, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Proverbs 1:7). *Fear*, in this context, denotes "reverence," "respect," and "trust."

Biblical wisdom is always defined in the context of God's purpose and plan for our lives. Proverbs abounded in nations surrounding Solomon, even as he wrote. However, their wisdom often left God out of the picture. Compare a proverb from ancient Egypt with that of Israel: "Do not lean on the scales nor falsify the weights, nor damage the fractions of the measure" (Egyptian). "Differing weights and differing measures—the LORD detests them both" (Proverbs 20:10).

Ultimately, the wisdom of the book of Proverbs comes to life in the person of Jesus Christ, "...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Jesus became "wisdom" for us (1 Corinthians 1:30).

In His wisdom, Jesus affirmed the wisdom of Solomon and his Proverbs: "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31). True wisdom begins with the fear (reverence, respect, trust) of God, and results in the salvation of God through Jesus Christ.

King Solomon once prayed that God would make him wise, and his request was wonderfully fulfilled (1 Kings 3:5-9). Solomon later wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32). We find many of these proverbs in the more than 900 verses of Proverbs along with the book of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon did not write all the Proverbs. Proverbs 30 and 31 are attributed to Agur and Lemuel, respectively. Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34 are attributed to "the wise men" in general (Proverbs 22:17, 24:23). We note that in the days of Solomon there were many "wise men" (1 Kings 4:31). Solomon likely gathered wise sayings of the sages in his generation (950–900 BC) and of those who went before him, like King Hezekiah who formed a literary team (700 BC) to compile many of Solomon's writings (Proverbs 25:1, regarding 25:1–29:27).

Since a proverb is a statement of a general truth, it should not be taken as a divine promise. For example, Proverbs 16:7, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." We know too well that Joseph, David, Daniel, and even Jesus pleased the LORD, but they still had enemies. In Proverbs 10:27 it says, "The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short." Here again we recognize that many devoted followers of Jesus Christ died young while many of those who opposed the very existence of God lived to be 80, 90, or even 100 years old. What we must remember is that in the light of eternity the wicked are the losers.

For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 2:6

The Medium Behind the Proverbs

The Bible is a library containing many forms of literature: prophecy and history, story and sermon, biography and genealogy, personal letter and public circular, prose and poetry. The Proverbs are part of the Bible's "wisdom literature," composed of a specialized form of poetry. The Hebrew word for *proverb* is *mashal*, which comes from a root meaning "to be like," or "to be compared to." The *mashal* (proverb) is an effective medium for conveying God's wisdom.

Many of the proverbs are two-line sayings—couplets of comparison with a powerful message. The majority compare by using contrast, with the hinge word *but*. For example, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

Other proverbs compare by building one thought up as stronger than the first, often signaled by the word *than*. "Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly" (Proverbs 17:12).

A third type of parallelism occurs through imagery such as simile. In such cases, note the words *like*, or *as* to draw the comparison: "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed" (Proverbs 26:14).

For effect, the Proverbs are often clustered into thematic groups—an example would be the section about the way of the fool (Proverbs 26:1-12). While modern proverbs are usually brief and to the point, the proverbs of the ancient Hebrew included other literary styles. We find sections given to poetry, parable, prayer, and story.

Final Thought

"The book of Proverbs is not a do-it-yourself success kit for the greedy but a guidebook for the godly." —Warren Wiersbe

Take time to read and meditate on the Proverbs. Proverbs are easy to memorize and hard to forget. God has given us 31 chapters of proverbs, one for each day of the month. Try meditating on a chapter of Proverbs each day this month. It is life changing. Make it a habit for life!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series "Lessons For Life," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.



Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Proverbs 1:1-6. What are some of the reasons for this book?

3. Read Proverbs 1:7 and compare with Proverbs 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:27; 15:16,33; 19:23. What do you learn about the “fear of the Lord”?

How might you apply what you've read to your life?

4. Compare Proverbs 1:8-19 with Psalm 1. In brief, what are the dangers of bad counsel and the benefits of following the advice of the righteous?

5. Make a list of some of your close friends and confidants. Do you have a strong source of good counsel in your life?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. How would you define “wisdom?” Name one of the wisest people you know.

Explain why you selected that person.



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 3

Wisdom for Life | Proverbs

7. Read Proverbs 3:1-4. What are the benefits of embracing the truth and wisdom found in God's Word?

In what ways do you fail to follow them?

9. See Proverbs 3:7-8. How does guilt, sin, and the stress associated with it, tend to affect our bodies?

Do you read the Proverbs often? Have you found them to be helpful for your own life? Explain.

Have you noticed a correlation between your spiritual health and your physical well being? Explain?

8. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. How can we know the will of God? Do you believe this?

10. See Proverbs 3:9-10. Compare with Luke 6:38. Discuss the truths in these passages as they relate to your pocketbook. Why is it foolish to live like a miser, unwilling to share with others and unwilling to give for the things of God?

In what ways do you live by these promises?



11. Can you think of a short little pithy saying that perhaps your parents or grandparents said to you as you were growing up?

13. Read Proverbs 4. This refers to our walk as God's children and the various paths we may choose. What are some of the unwise paths people are tempted to take?

Why do you think they repeated this to you?

How can we avoid these paths?

Did it influence your actions or attitude? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Read Proverbs 1:20-33. As time allows, read and record insights regarding "wisdom" (See also Luke 2:52, Acts 6:10; 1 Corinthians 1:17-25; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9; James 1:5; 3:13-17; Revelation 7:12).

Scripture for Meditation

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.

Proverbs 21:2



The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd.

Ecclesiastes 12:11

Introduction

There are many self-help books published today that seek to offer insight into the true meaning of life. One would think that if anyone could author such a book, it would be Solomon. He seemed to have it all together. He had money, power, prestige, property, fame, women, horses, carriages, palaces, and yes, even wisdom. Yet, at the end of his life, this man writes to say that it's all meaningless. As you read the book of Ecclesiastes, you experience the hopeless feeling of this writer because he repeats the despairing state of mankind by using the word “meaningless” (“vanity” in some translations) 37 times.

However, to truly understand Ecclesiastes, you must read the book in its entirety; otherwise, it seems to contradict the themes and teachings of the Bible. Ecclesiastes draws insight from the past and warns against wrong living. It reveals the emptiness of life without God. If you look only at the book's descriptions of the things of this world (the search for contentment), you will miss the whole point, as described in the writer's wise conclusion.

The Author and Message of Ecclesiastes

The name Solomon is not found in the book, but allusions to the life of this king are found in the first two chapters. Many scholars see no reason to doubt that King Solomon was the author. Arguments against his authorship are not conclusive, and statements suggesting him as the writer are straightforward and clear (Ecclesiastes 1:1,12,16; 2:9).

The title *Ecclesiastes* translates from the Hebrew word *Qoheleth*, meaning preacher, or teacher. In fact, Ecclesiastes 1:1 states, “The words of the Teacher (*Qoheleth*), son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Solomon writes as a teacher, gathering insight from the many experiences of his life.

The first verse in this book suggests who the author is, but the second verse gives the message of the author: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

The teacher repeatedly refers to life as meaningless. He also states that there is no lasting value in science (Ecclesiastes 1:4-11), philosophy (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18), or the pursuit of personal pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:1-11). True happiness cannot be found in drinking alcohol (Ecclesiastes 2:3) or building great edifices (Ecclesiastes 2:4); in gardening (Ecclesiastes 2:4-6) or in hiring servants to do all the work for you (Ecclesiastes 2:7); in great wealth (Ecclesiastes 2:7-8) or in great fame (Ecclesiastes 2:9); in breeding cattle (Ecclesiastes Ecclesiastes 2:7); or in composing music (Ecclesiastes 2:8). The world-views of human invention cannot satisfy the longings of the human soul, whether materialism (Ecclesiastes 2:12-16) or fatalism (Ecclesiastes 3:1-15), deism (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4:10) or naturalism (Ecclesiastes 5:1-8).

Ecclesiastes takes the best the world has to offer and holds it up to the light of the sun. In fact, the phrase “under the sun” can be found at least 30 times, reminding us that our best thoughts and accomplishments are for naught. Only when our minds are set in the heavenlies, “over the sun,” do we find real purpose for our lives. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:2-4 to: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in



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“Two Prods and a Peg”



So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” When we consider the great plan of God to make all things new, we perceive the vanity of setting our hopes and dreams on the temporal world.

An Outline of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a sermon about life. It has an introduction, main body, and conclusion. Illustrations are drawn from the author's rich personal experience. The following outline will help you understand the importance of each chapter in the book.

Introduction: <i>There is no purpose in:</i>	Ecclesiastes
Life without God	1:1-11
Wisdom without God	1:12-18
Pleasure without God	2:1-16
Hard work without God	2:17-26
Time without God	3:1-22
Justice without God	4:1-16
Religion without God	5:1-7
Wealth without God	5:8-6:12
Morality without God	7:1-29
Government without God	8:1-17
Hope without God	9:1-18
Conclusion: <i>Find your purpose in God:</i>	10:1-12:14
Purpose for living	10:1-11:6
Purpose from your youth	11:7-12:8
Purpose from God	12:9-14

The Purpose of Ecclesiastes

Prior to concluding his argument, the wise teacher repeats the verse that opened his book: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!” (Ecclesiastes 12:8). The teacher then gives two suggestions that offer promise for a meaningful life.

1. A Word of Warning

We are first warned to watch our sources of mental input. What we take into our minds will shape how we think, act, and live. Someone has said rather graphically, “Garbage in! Garbage out!” Remember that we choose daily which books we are going to read. We choose daily how much time we will spend reading the newspaper or magazines, or watching television. We

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Colossians 2:8

choose daily whether we will or will not spend time in God's Word—reading, memorizing, meditating, and applying the truths we learn. The choice is ours.

The author advises us to draw our primary input from the Bible, that we might find God's purpose for our lives: “The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body” (Ecclesiastes 12:11-12).

The teacher's warning is based on sound wisdom. We would do well to remember God's purposes for our lives for one day we will meet our Creator. “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

If we heed the warnings of this book and choose to follow and fear (i.e., live with an awesome reverence of) God the rest of our days, the purpose of the book will have been fulfilled in our lives.

2. A Word of Wisdom

Solomon wrote near the end of his life to offer others wisdom for their lives. We can choose to glean wisdom the long and hard way, through the rugged path of trial and error, or we can walk down the road paved by Solomon's experiences and enjoy success and meaning in our lives.

The king urges us to: “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Age is a relative concept. Today is the day of your youth! God has designed you for Himself, whether old or young, you are His creation. Yes, there will be struggles and uncertainties in this thing we call life, but the Creator has never lost control. He has a purpose and that purpose is to conform us to his Son, Jesus. Thank you, Solomon, for your candor and frankness in this mixed-up world. And thank you especially for pointing us to the One who is in charge—our Creator.

Final Thought

We have purpose in life because God created us for His pleasure. Sometimes things happen to us that we don't understand, but one day we'll see His purpose. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

After pursuing philosophy, science, pleasure, hard work, and great wealth, Solomon discovered true purpose in life is found only in the author of life, God. Someone asked the late theologian, Dr. Karl Barth, if he could state the single most profound thought he had considered in all his studies and all his extensive travels. With a faint smile he responded:

“Jesus loves me, this I know;
For the Bible tells me so.”



Child of God, you are not an accident. God made you, loves you, desires fellowship with you, and has prepared a home where you may dwell with Him forever. We have a great God, who delights to do great things for us. Life in Him has great meaning and real purpose!

Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series “Lessons For Life,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. Write down one insight that was especially challenging or encouraging for you.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. What is the main point here?

3. Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18. What experiences give Solomon a right to pen this book?

Describe some of the experiences of your life that would cause you to warn a youngster of the vanity of a life without God.

4. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 and compare with Ecclesiastes 2:12-23. What are the main concerns with these two sections?

What is the conclusion of Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26)? Pray, asking God to show you any perspectives or goals in your life that are temporal only, lacking the eternal stamp of God's approval.

Do you agree with these verses? Why or why not?



Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Are there any insights or questions from the section above that you would like to explore further?

What things do you most enjoy doing?

6. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11. In what settings (funeral, greeting card, etc.) have you seen this famous poetic section used?

8. Read Ecclesiastes 3:14-22. Did Solomon have much hope in the afterlife?

What does this poem mean to you?

Imagine life before Christ when understanding about life after death was vague and clouded. Compare with 1 Corinthians 15:23-58. Would your life be different today if you had Solomon's dim view of the world to come? Explain.

What do you think is the meaning of the phrase in verse 11, "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men...?"

9. From Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, describe some of Solomon's warnings about worship. Which of these warnings challenges you most? Why?

7. Read Ecclesiastes 3:12-13. Compare with Luke 12:13-21 (especially verse 19). Who should enjoy life more, the Christian or the unbeliever? Explain.

10. Describe the futility of working oneself to the bone in order to store financial securities (Ecclesiastes 5:8-17; 6:1-2). Are you, at times, guilty of this?



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 4

Purpose for Life | Ecclesiastes

According to Solomon, why is this vanity?

13. Read aloud Ecclesiastes 12:11-14. What is the ultimate conclusion of Solomon?

11. Ecclesiastes 7 is packed with powerful statements of wisdom. Read verse 2 aloud. Has there ever been a time when the loss of a friend or loved one has challenged you to set wiser priorities in your life?

Do you agree? Do you live by this conclusion? Explain.

If so, are you still living by those priorities? Explain.

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, especially verse 1. If you were asked to tell (very briefly) a Sunday school class of youngsters why it is important to serve God from our youngest years, what would you say?

Scripture for Meditation

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 12:13



But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:20

Introduction

Each poetical book of the Old Testament has its own central focus.

Job	Testing
Psalms	Worship
Proverbs	Wisdom
Ecclesiastes	Purpose

We now examine Song of Songs, which focuses on love, a concept held as the greatest of Christian virtues in the Bible (Deuteronomy 13:3b; Luke 10:27; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:22). Of all the songs written by King Solomon (1 Kings 4:32 says he wrote 1,005!), God chose this as Solomon's best and placed it in the Holy Bible.

A famous Jewish Rabbi, Akiba, once claimed that "The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies." Some 1,200 years later, Bernard of Clairvaux demonstrated a similar reverence for this book when he preached 86 sermons from its first two chapters alone!

The Author of The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is often called *The Song of Solomon* —demonstrating who is the assumed author of the book. In fact, the first verse of the book names Solomon as the writer. Six other verses refer to him by name (Song of Songs 1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12).

Some argue that a king who had 700 wives and 300 concubines could not have written a book that so wonderfully upholds fidelity in marriage. Commentators have suggested that the *beloved* in this song was Solomon's first wife. However, it is evident by the text that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs when his total number of wives and concubines numbered 140 (Song of Songs 6:8). Perhaps the best solution to this perplexing problem is to recognize that God works through imperfect messengers to convey His profound messages. There was never a perfect prophet, priest, or king in the Bible, other than Jesus Christ. Solomon's book has redeeming value because it points us to our Savior. In the same way, our lives have redeeming value when we tell others the way of salvation. If God only worked through perfect instruments to accomplish His purposes, we would have no poetical books to study, no Bible in which to place them, and no message of life for our needy world.

The Interpretation of The Song of Songs

Perhaps no book in the Bible has been more subject to debate over proper methods of interpretation than the Song of Songs. There have generally been two approaches to the interpretation of this book: symbolic and practical.

Symbolic: In which the characters and story-line portray essential truths about the love of God for His people, and their rightful response.

Practical: In which this book is viewed as a collection of poetry about romance, marriage, and



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Now, brothers and sisters,
about times and dates we
do not need to write to you,
for you know very well that
the Day of the Lord will come
like a thief in the night.

Matthew 24:4,5

sexuality, providing sound advice for dating and marriage.

Perhaps God's intention is for us to benefit from both approaches.

The Symbolic Approach

Those who have taken a symbolic approach to the Song of Songs have recognized Solomon's love for his bride as a type, or picture, of God's love for His people. This approach has inspired some of the most dedicated saints to endure hardship and persecution through an ever-deepening love for God.

Solomon, it appears, fell in love with a beautiful young woman working in the vineyards. He decided to win her trust and love by disguising himself as a peasant worker. He worked along side her, gained her trust, and then asked her hand in marriage. Once she accepted, he revealed his true identity and brought her back to his palace for a grand wedding. The Jewish Rabbis, from the earliest times, recognized this book as a picture of the marriage relationship God entered into with the Jews through the covenant on Mount Sinai. Indeed, Hosea and the other prophets often referred to the Israelites as adulterers, harlots, and violators of a marriage contract when their hearts turned from God.

Christians accept the Jewish interpretation and have also recognized the further parallel of Christ and the Church. Our Lord, the King of Kings, has become one of us. He walked and worked with us, and won our trust. He asks each of us to give our hearts to Him in a relationship that models the intimacy and longevity of marriage. One day He will come back to bring us to His kingdom for a great wedding (Revelation 19:7).

The symbolic approach recognizes the Song of Songs as a great book of devotion. Those who adopt this approach, however, should avoid extremes. Many of the early Church fathers, including Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, have found hidden and symbolic meaning in nearly every aspect of the text. The difficulty of using the symbolic approach like a microscope is that we have no way of being sure what is the correct interpretation. For example, in Song of Songs 1:15, Solomon describes his maiden's eyes as extremely beautiful, "like doves." Origen noted that doves stay faithful to their mates, and he taught that the Church should be faithful to Christ. In contrast, Bernard of Clairvaux noted that doves have solitary, retiring habits, and, according to his interpretation of this verse, he taught that Christians need to be separated from the world and to live solely for the Lord.

The Practical Approach

Some regard the Song of Songs as an anthology, or collection, of poetical sonnets about love and marriage. As such, the descriptions of body parts and lovemaking are recognized as essential components to the only book in the Bible that gives specific and rather comprehensive guidelines for romance and marriage in the Bible. The Jews often regarded the book in this way, guarding their youngsters from reading these pages on love before their time. Origen and Jerome taught that the Jews did not permit their young men to read the Song of Songs until they were at least 30 years old!

Now, brothers and sisters,
 about times and dates we
 do not need to write to you,
 for you know very well that
 the Day of the Lord will come
 like a thief in the night.

1Thessalonians 5:1,2

Let the words of Origen of Alexandria, from the third century of the Christian era, reveal what may have been the driving reason for spiritualizing every aspect of this book: “I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passions of this bodily nature, to refrain from reading the book and the things that will be said about it.”

Today, a well-guided study of this book can be a helpful aspect of pre-marital counseling. The Song of Songs also confronts two extreme and erroneous points of view on marriage. It gives answer to the ascetics (those who practice self-denial and lead simple, non-materialistic lives for religious reasons) who claim it is wrong to be married (1 Timothy 4:3). It also quiets the hedonists, who believe that the satisfaction of human lust is of primary importance (2 Timothy 3:4-5). The Song of Songs upholds proper and wedded love as a wonderful creation of God. It also warns against the dangers of sexuality outside the bonds of marriage (Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5; 8:8-9). Many scholars note that Song of Songs follows a logical progression, encouraging a growth toward true maturity in love:

Early Courtship	Song of Songs 1:2 – 3:5
Day of Marriage	Song of Songs 3:6 – 5:1
Deepening Love	Song of Songs 5:2 – 8:4
The Nature of Love	Song of Songs 8:5 – 8:7
Epilogue: Looking Back	Song of Songs 8:8 – 8:14

A Holistic Approach

Throughout history, believers have benefited from both the symbolic and practical approaches to the Song of Songs. There is no reason to do less ourselves. We find, in fact, that most of the Old Testament is meant to be understood practically and literally and yet is packed with symbolism and analogy about God's plan of salvation.

Final Thought

When we read the Song of Songs, our tendency is to ask how it should be interpreted. Perhaps, the better question is how people around us interpret our Christian witness? Do we so exhibit the love of God in our marriages, families, and churches that people are encouraged through us to believe that God is love? It has been said that we are the only translation of the Bible some people will ever have the opportunity to read. Think about it.

Spending Time With God

This lesson, from the series “Lessons For Life,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 5

Love for Life | Song of Songs

for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. BEFORE YOU BEGIN, PRAY.

Devotion (Personal Study)

1. Read the commentary portion of this study guide. What thought from the commentary did you find interesting or helpful?

2. Read Song of Songs 1:1. Why do you think this book is entitled *Song of Solomon* by some, and *Song of Songs* by others?

The title Song of Songs suggests that this is a song above all others. Are you surprised that such a romantic and apparently sensuous book would be in the Bible? Why or why not?

3. Read Song of Songs 1:2-17. This is generally recognized as a story of the love between King Solomon and a beautiful Shulammitite woman. Some Christians say it is in the Bible to teach us about proper love and romance between humans. Others say it is in the Bible as an analogy of Christ and the Church to teach us about God's love for us. Which do you think is right? Why?

4. Read Song of Songs 2:1-4. Contemplate the phrase, "His banner over me is love" (Song of Songs 2:4). Read Psalm 103 and list at least five of the benefits of God's love toward us. Add a few personal examples of how God displays His love toward you.



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 5

Love for Life | Song of Songs

5. Read Luke 10:27. Which part of the Great Command of Christ do you struggle with most? Why?

8. Do you think our love for God should include a sense of romance? If so, in what way?

Discussion (Small Group Study)

6. Read all, or portions of, Song of Songs 4. Have you written romantic poetry before? If you are comfortable doing so, share what inspired you to attempt to write such poetry.

How can we deepen our love relationship with God?

7. If you are married, do you think the spark of romance could use strengthening in your relationship? Share practical insights that make that happen, including thoughts from favorite books, inspiring conferences, or other resources.

9. It has been said that mature love puts the other person's needs and desires above our own. Do you see a progression of maturity in the love relationship expressed in the verses below? Explain.

“My lover is mine and I am his...” Song of Songs 2:16

“I am my lover's and my lover is mine...” Song of Songs 6:3

“I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.” Song of Songs 7:10.



SERIES

LESSONS FOR LIFE | BOOKS OF POETRY

LESSON 5

Love for Life | Song of Songs

10. Complete this thought: “To me, the difference between a puppy love for God and a mature Christian love is...”

What other verses or stories in the Bible come to mind as you contemplate the love of God?

11. There are illusions to the importance of fidelity and chastity outside of marriage in the Song of Songs (Song of Songs 2:7; 3:5; 8:8-9). What do you think are some of the main reasons our society has veered from this standard? What can we do about it?

13. Why do you think God included the Song of Songs as part of the Holy Scripture?

What is the most important thing you have learned as a result of this study?

Digging Deeper (Further Study)

12. Read Song of Songs 8:6-7. What do these verses say about the strength of true love?

Scripture for Meditation

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14



BNEXT Amazing Journey Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide section is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others, but of aiding them along the way. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to aid you in your role as facilitator. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.

MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

The BNEXT Study / Amazing Journey includes a weekly video of 15–20 minutes in length. The video provided is on a flash drive, so make sure you have USB-compatible technology. Please review the video *before* each class. Here's a materials checklist:

- TV or computer with a USB 2.0 (or faster) port
- For larger groups, a projector is needed (and may even enhance a small group experience)
- Amazing Journey videos (on USB flash-drive)
- This Participant's Guide (one per participant)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The BNEXT study series' are versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, which includes time for group discussion and video viewing. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to watch the video together. Alternately, the flash-drive videos may be made available for each small group, in which case, after the opening and welcome time, everyone can move to groups and remain there until the end of the day's session.

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

Group Size: Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

Group Leaders: Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- A hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word.
- A commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end.
- The ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach.
- A willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Participant's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson and be thinking about how to present the questions to the class. You should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions: Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions, before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facilitator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. These lessons are designed to easi-

ly be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion," or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor, or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: biblegateway.com, biblestudytools.com, biblehub.com, and blueletterbible.org.

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our Bible

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

LEADING THE CLASS

First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT Amazing Journey* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/.

The first class is unique in that the participant will not have anything to prepare. Use this time for getting to know one another and to introduce the BNEXT lesson format. There is an 18-minute BNEXT introduction video that accompanies this first lesson. Before showing the introduction video, we recommend:

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (10 minutes)
 - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: “Tell us something unique about yourself.” Or perhaps, “What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?” Or, “This first lesson will provide an overview of the Bible. How comfortable are you with the Bible as a whole? Do you think you can benefit by learning more about each of its books and sections?”
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Handout materials and give an overview (7 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the format of BNEXT Amazing Journey:
 - Reading of a specific book(s) or chapters of a book of the Bible.
 - Lesson commentary and questions (at least the Devotion and Discussion questions, and ideally, more) to be completed individually through the week.
 - Meet weekly to watch a 20-minute video and to go

through the Discussion questions (and if time allows, the Digging Deeper questions).

- b. Review the “Rules of Engagement” (found in the front of this Participant's Guide).
 - c. Ask if there are any questions.
3. Discuss the study you will be doing (15 minutes)
 - a. Inform class of how many weeks you will be meeting to cover the study and what date will be your last date for this study.
 - b. Ask the group, “What do you know about [insert study's Bible book(s) name(s) such as Genesis].
 - c. Ask the group, “What do you hope to have answered about (Genesis)?”
 4. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey Introduction and Overview video (18 minutes)
 5. Video discussion (5 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are one or two participants who have a comment on the video or who may have learned something new from the video.
 - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief to allow others to respond.
 6. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 7. Dismissal

Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (5 minutes)
 - a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).

- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are about to watch a video on the Exodus from Israel: “Why do you think the Exodus was important?”, or “From what you know about the Exodus, how does it relate to the work of Christ on the cross?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.
 - c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” in the front of this Participant's Guide.
 2. Discuss lesson questions (20 minutes)
 - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss. These are the questions they have been encouraged to complete on their own prior to the class.
 - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote good discussion.
 - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 3. Watch the BNEXT Amazing Journey video (about 20 minutes)
 4. Video discussion (10 minutes)

Ask what participants may have learned or found interesting in the video.
 5. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
 - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
 - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
 6. Dismissal