

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY03 2024

confessions of a foolish wise man

Scripture Story: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 5.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This is the final installment in the story of Solomon. This king offers a colorful case study in the futile quest to fulfill deep human hungers with cotton candy—stuff, smarts, sex, and so on. In the end, however, Solomon learns that only God can fulfill the deepest desires of the soul.

Ellen White's insightful commentary on this intriguing man offers a great foundation for potentially life-transforming discussions. First, this lesson opens up opportunities to talk about the benefits of confessing sin. Solomon's repentance offers a compelling picture of God's unrelenting grace. Nevertheless, "the harm that his example of evildoing had wrought could not be undone" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 84). The brutal consequences of Solomon's poor choices speak to the importance of choosing wisely in youth. This lesson offers an ideal opportunity to talk frankly with the young people about their choices (premarital sex, drinking, pursuit of wealth, fame, etc.) and the expensive price tags that could saddle such choices. Ellen White adds: "Among the many lessons taught by Solomon's life, none is more strongly emphasized than the power of influence for good or for ill" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 85).

There are several other points you could emphasize in this lesson. For example, you could explore Solomon's pride and cleanly connect his undoing with an arrogant spirit that sought meaning in every place other than the only true source of ultimate fulfillment—God.

Given our world's obsession with success, you may wish to focus this lesson on Solomon's pursuit of success through possessions, power, pleasure, and so on. And yet in the end he exclaims, "Everything is meaningless, . . . completely meaningless!" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, NLT). What a great example Solomon gives us in meeting our deepest needs only in a relationship with God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the benefits of finding our ultimate meaning in God alone. *(Know)*
- Sense the need to confess and repent. *(Feel)*
- Look to God for the answers to the deepest questions of the soul. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 11

"By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. . . . (1 Chron. 29:11; Ps. 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matt. 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Rom. 8:38, 39; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Phil. 3:7-14; Col. 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thess. 5:16-18, 23; Heb. 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Invite the students to play a word association game. Invite them to shout out the first word that comes to mind when they hear the following words:

- Confession
- Repentance
- Humility
- Meaning in life
- The purpose of life
- Arrogance
- Success

Unpack the responses with the students. Talk about these things as they emerge from the life of Solomon. Clearly Solomon was glad to come to that place of confession and repentance later on in life; but how would his life have been different had he always remained humble and repentant before God? Are all of the words listed above connected in some way to Solomon's story? If so, how?

Illustration

Read or share this illustration in your own words:

"A company found itself in the middle of tense negotiations with union leaders. Company officials insisted that workers were abusing sick-leave privileges. The union denied it.

"One morning at the bargaining table the company's negotiator held up the sports page of the local newspaper. He pointed to a picture showing an employee winning a golf tournament in town. 'This man,' the negotiator declared, 'called in sick yesterday. But here he is in the paper beside a caption describing his excellent golf score.'

"After a moment of silence a union man spoke up. 'Wow,' he said, 'think of the score he could have had if he hadn't been sick!'

"Nice try! We can deny—we can try to cover up deceptions or our misbehavior. But it usually doesn't take us very far. Our sins have a way of finding us out. The wise man is abundantly clear: 'He who covers his sins will not prosper' (Prov. 28:13).

"Hollow excuses really don't provide many substantial answers. . . .

"Scripture calls for something far different than lame excuses.

"In a culture that often denies the reality of right and wrong, God calls for boldfaced, on-your-knees, heartfelt repentance. Repentance is a deep sorrow for sin. It is hurting because I have hurt the heart of God. It is weeping over my sins because God weeps over them. It is grieving over my sin because God grieves over it. It is feeling the pain of my sin because God has felt its pain.

Excuses produce only more guilt. Repentance leads to forgiveness. Forgiveness gives way to healing, and healing brings wholeness."—Mark Finley, *Solid Ground*, p. 21.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Use the following questions to connect the introductory story with the lesson:

Can you relate to trying to hide something you have done wrong? What are the common "stains" that young people today try to hide? Why is confession an important component of spiritual life? How do we imperil the quality of our relationship with God and others when we are dishonest about our sins?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- As Solomon reflected in his journal near the end of his life, he clearly had a lot of regrets. Identify some of these regrets. What are some regrets that you hope to never have? How do you need to live each day to ensure that you will not have these regrets?
- What do you think Solomon meant when he wrote the following observations? How might heeding these observations help us to live wisely?

  —"Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones" (Ecclesiastes 10:6, NIV).

  —"One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18, NIV).

  —"Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 4:6, NIV).
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 is a fitting summary of what the wisest man who has ever lived

had to say at the end of his storied life. The sum total of all his wisdom is captured in this verse. Find as many different translations of that verse as you can. Have each student read a different version of the text out loud until all the translations have been read. Next, have a volunteer read the following texts and then discuss how each text relates to Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Philippians 2:12, 13; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 John 3:16; Mark 12:28–31; 1 Peter 2:21

Sharing Context and Background

The following themes seem to emerge naturally from Solomon's story. Depending on the theme(s) that you choose, share this broader biblical background in your own words.

1. **Confession—**If using this lesson to talk about confession, it's important to share what confession is, and what it is not. Listen to James's appeal for confession: "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail" (James 4:8, 9, NIV).

   Truth be told, there's plenty to confess in all of us. James's appeal to double-minded sinners to purify their hearts is a key to enjoying life with God. In so doing we come near to God and He comes near to us. We counter conflict and foster community. It works like aloe vera on a sunburned soul.

   Confession is the purifying process through which God allows us to experience His grace (see also James 5:16). Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person."[1]
2. **Success—**The Bible is brimming with success stories of young people who modeled time-tested morals. For example, Isaac refused to rebel against his dad—even though it meant climbing onto an altar to be killed. Joseph refused to compromise his employer's trust in him—even though his choice put him in the prison. David refused to take Goliath's taunts—even though it meant facing a giant with only a slingshot. Throughout the Bible we find stories of young people who refused to compromise their principles—no matter the cost.

   Invite the students to brainstorm about other Bible characters who illustrate what true success looks like.
3. **Pride—**Review the origin of sin. Consider Satan's haughty claims: "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13, 14, NIV).

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Instructional Scaffolding

Wikipedia defines this teaching method as "the provision of sufficient supports to promote learning when concepts and skills are being first introduced to students. These supports may include:

- "Resources
- "A compelling task
- "Templates and guides
- "Guidance on the development of cognitive and social skills."

The word "scaffolding" was developed as a metaphor to describe the type of assistance offered by a teacher or peer to support learning. In other words, teachers try to help students master a concept by providing support.

As you teach a concept in this lesson, keep in mind types of "scaffolding" you might use in order to support your main idea(s) and reinforce learning. This support could take many forms such as outlines, recommended outside reading, storyboards, key questions, mnemonic devices, and/or training other students.

A quick tour through Scripture reminds us that God has zero tolerance for pride. "The LORD preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full" (Psalm 31:23, NIV). "Whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, I will not tolerate" (Psalm 101:5, NIV). "The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 16:5, NIV). "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble" (James 4:6, NIV).

Why is pride so disdainful to God? How can we nurture a humble spirit?

III. CLOSING

Activity

A fun way to wrap up the lesson is with this improvisational activity.

Role-play a scene from a pastor's office where an actor playing a teenage Solomon comes and confesses his sins. Then have the actor come again as the old Solomon to confess sins that spanned a long life. Encourage the students to be as true to the biblical account of Solomon as they can. In other words, Solomon should confess sins that he really did struggle to overcome. Finally, have the student playing Solomon remain in character and share with the class what he learned in his life. Again, encourage the actor to be as factual as possible.

Summary

A well-worn children's story makes a fitting conclusion to this lesson:

Once there was a spider that dropped a single strand down from the rafter of an old barn and began to weave his web. Day by day the spider stretched his web until it spanned an expansive fly zone. Daily the web snagged a buffet of bugs, making the spider the envy of all spiders.

One day the spider was cruising along his elaborately woven web and noticed the single strand disappearing into the rafters. *Hmmm*, the spider wondered, *of what value is that strand? It's not going to catch me my dinner.* With that thought the spider climbed up . . . and severed the single strand. Of course, the entire web swallowed the spider as he floated to his demise.[2] Like the spider, Solomon learned the hard way what happens when you sever the strand that connects you to God. In the end, he confesses that life has no meaning apart from God.

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[1] As quoted in *Bible Illustrator* by Parsons Technology.

[2] Adapted from Max Lucado, *Turn #1 Toward God's Glory* (Portland, Oreg.: Multnomah Publishers, 2005).



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 5.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
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confessions of a foolish wise man

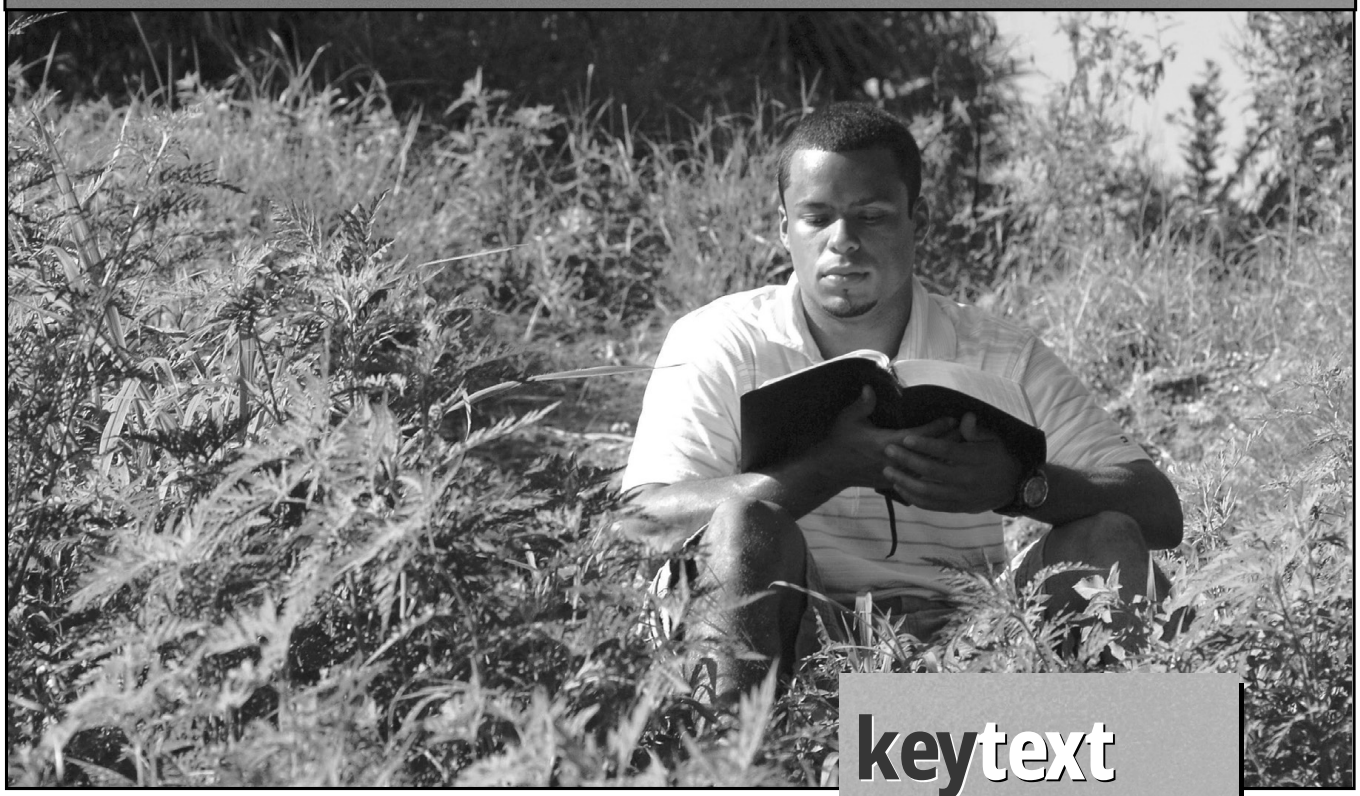


Photo by Jacqui Janetzko

keytext

"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, NIV)

flashlight

"By his own bitter experience, Solomon learned the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good. . . .

"Yet the Lord forsook him not. By messages of reproof and by severe judgments, He sought to arouse the king to a realization of the sinfulness of his course" (*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 76, 77).

"Solomon's repentance was sincere; but the harm that his example of evil-doing had wrought could not be undone. . . . Though the king confessed his sin and wrote out for the benefit of after generations a record of his folly and repentance, he could never hope entirely to destroy the baleful influence of his wrong deeds" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 84).

what do you think?

Number from 1 (meaning it's the most important reason) to 10 (the least important reason) why you think people find confession and repentance difficult to do.

____ They don't believe they'll be able to stop committing the sin.
____ They're afraid of what others might think.
____ They feel guilty for what they did.
____ They don't want to feel humiliated.
____ They fear being viewed as hypocrites.
____ They're afraid of punishment.
____ They don't feel the Bible teaches that confession and repentance are all that important.
____ They don't want to stop doing what they're doing.

Which of the following individuals do you think is the most prideful? Why?

____ Josh is constantly showing off his latest electronic toys.
____ Lawrence ignores his friends when a cute girl walks by.
____ Rebecca keeps reminding you that she has a 4.0 grade point average.
____ Benito constantly bullies other students in the dorm.

did you know?

In 1842 the first bathtub was denounced as a "luxurious and democratic vanity." Boston made it unlawful to bathe, except on doctor's prescription. In 1843 Philadelphia made bathing illegal between November 1 and March 15.

And yet, how many Christians have adopted a similar schedule of spiritual cleansing? Many of us would rather endure the stench of our unconfessed sins than come clean before God!

INTO THE STORY

"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:29, 30, NIV).

"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.' But that also proved to be meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 2:1, NIV).

"King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon" (1 Kings 10:23, 24, NIV).

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18, NIV).

"There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones" (Ecclesiastes 10:5, 6, NIV).

"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'—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

"Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

" 'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Everything is meaningless!' "

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind."

(Ecclesiastes 12:1–8, 13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

How is it that the wisest man in the world could make such foolish choices in life?

_____
_____
_____

If Hollywood were to produce a movie based on the life of Solomon, what would you suggest to use as a title?

_____
_____
_____

What does Solomon's repentance teach us about God?

_____
_____
_____

Is it possible to be as successful as Solomon and remain fully humble and dependent on God? Explain.

_____
_____
_____

In your opinion, what is the most important lesson we can learn from Solomon's story?

_____
_____
_____

Read through a random selection of the Proverbs; then write a few proverbs of your own.

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punch lines

"Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them" **(Psalm 62:10, NIV).**

"The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them" **(Proverbs 20:7, NIV).**

"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" **(Matthew 16:26, NIV).**

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" **(Hebrews 10:24, 25, NIV).**

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. "Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud" **(Proverbs 16:18, 19, NIV).**

further insight

"Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life."

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 23

Sabbath

Read 1 John 1:9, 10.

Read through the *What Do You Think?* section and then reflect on the following questions:

- Which is easier—to confess or conceal wrongdoing? Why?
- What does God think about the practice of confession?
- How can confession bring a person closer to God?
- Why do people try to hide wrongdoing?
- What are the dangers of failing to confess sins?

Compare your answers in the *What Do You Think?* section with that of your friends and discuss:

What is the most common number 1 ranking for failure to confess sin?

What reasons, besides the ones listed, might people give for not practicing confession?

Explain any connection you see between pride and the unwillingness to confess and repent of sin.

Sunday

Read 1 Kings 10:23, 24.

Review the Bible verses that describe Solomon's quest for meaning by pursuing wisdom, pleasure, and wealth. Why do you think these pursuits failed to quiet the innermost longings of his soul?

What things of the world are you pursuing that are failing to fill the innermost longing of your soul?

Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 12.

Review the *Key Text* for this lesson. What does it mean for you to "remember your Creator"? Solomon urges you to do this before you get old. He gives some very vivid and colorful illustrations of getting old. Draw lines to match the words of Solomon to the aging ailment that he is describing. Check your answers with the key following.

Words of Solomon	Ailments of Aging
1. ". . . the grinders cease because they are few"	A. Failing eyesight
2. ". . . those looking through the windows grow dim"	B. Loss of hearing
3. ". . . people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint"	C. Phobias and paranoia
4. ". . . people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets"	D. Teeth rot and fall out
5. ". . . the almond tree blossoms"	E. The get-up-and-go got up and went
6. ". . . the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred"	F. Death
7. ". . . the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well"	G. Hair turns gray

Answer key: 1-D; 2-A; 3-B; 4-C; 5-G; 6-E; 7-F

Tuesday

Read Matthew 6:24.

The quote in the *Flashlight* section highlights the hard lesson that Solomon learned about "the emptiness of a life that seeks in earthly things its highest good." Pray about how earthly things influence you. Ask a mature Christian about how to not get caught up in the earthly things that many teens are getting caught up in, such as materialism, poor choices of friendship, premarital sex, alcohol, drugs.

What "master" are you serving?

Wednesday

Carefully read the *Punch Lines*. Contained in these verses you will find profound principles for enjoying a better life. Read the texts over and over until you have them deeply entrenched in your mind. Then apply the verses and use them today as an experiment in humbly walking with God.

Thursday

Read Matthew 16:26.

Review the life of Solomon, then ask yourself: *From what aspect of Solomon's story do I need to learn the most?*

Friday

Read Proverbs 16:18, 19.

Ellen White offers this commentary on Solomon's life: "Not only to the youth, but to those of mature years, . . . the life of Solomon is full of warning. We see and hear of unsteadiness in youth, the young wavering between right and wrong, and the current of evil passions proving too strong for them. In those of maturer years, we do not look for this unsteadiness and unfaithfulness; we expect the character to be established, the principles firmly rooted. But this is not always so. . . .

"From such examples we should learn that in watchfulness and prayer is the only safety for both young and old. . . . One may for many years have enjoyed a genuine Christian experience, but he is still exposed to Satan's attacks. In the battle with inward sin and outward temptation, even the wise and powerful Solomon was vanquished. His failure teaches us that, whatever a man's intellectual qualities may be, and however faithfully he may have served God in the past, he can never with safety trust in his own wisdom and integrity" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 82).

Questions to consider:

- What is the state of my character?
- Am I watchful and prayerful each day?
- How can I trust in God rather than in my own wisdom and integrity?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings (or *Royalty in Ruins*), chapter 5.

**Royalty in Ruins* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.