

The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

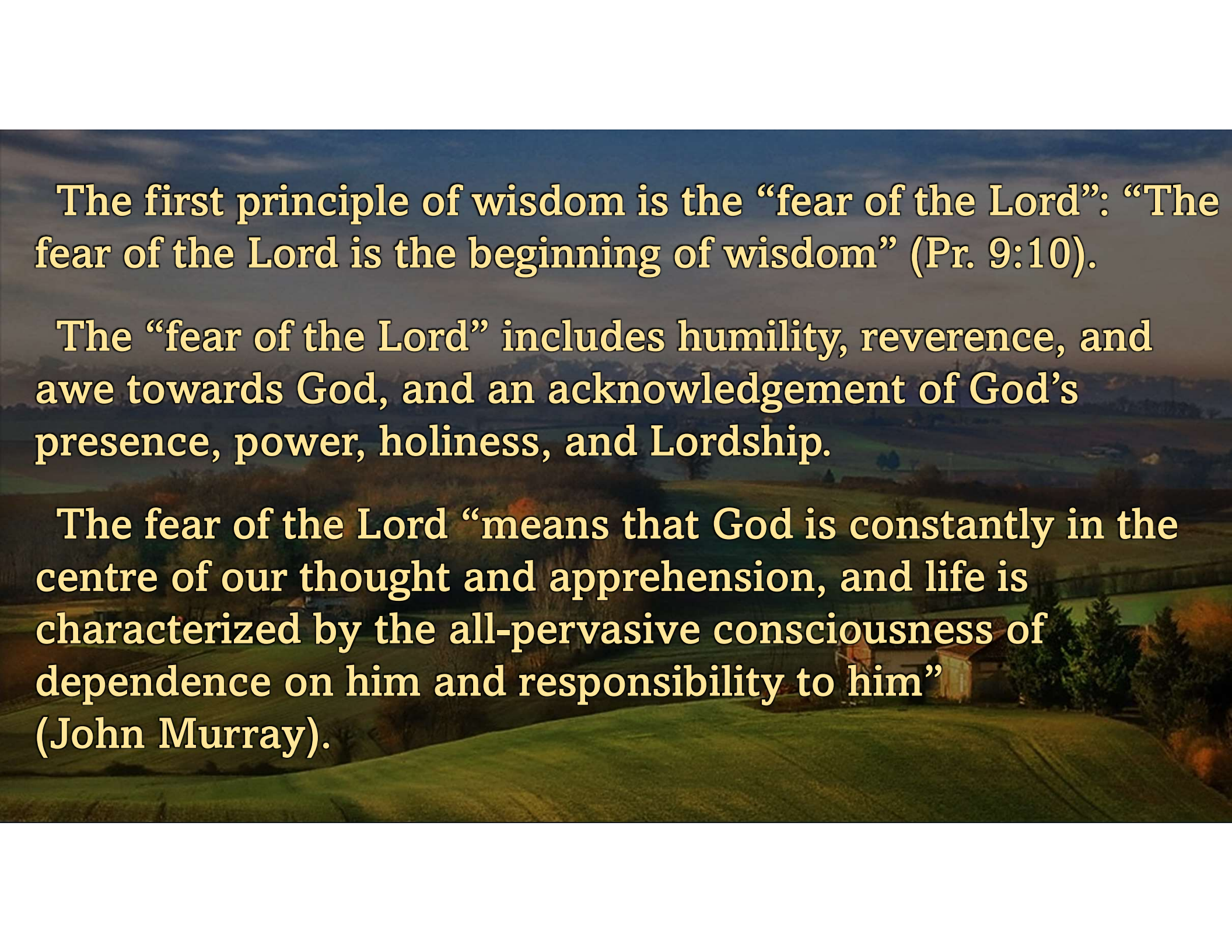
Final session: Conclusions & Applications



What Wisdom is . . .

Biblically, wisdom is knowledge, understanding, and practice that lead toward *shalom* in personal, community, and national life.

Shalom refers to human life before God in holiness, harmony, creativity, and abundant joy; with oneself, with others, and with creation; in accordance with the way God has made the world.



The first principle of wisdom is the “fear of the Lord”: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Pr. 9:10).

The “fear of the Lord” includes humility, reverence, and awe towards God, and an acknowledgement of God’s presence, power, holiness, and Lordship.

The fear of the Lord “means that God is constantly in the centre of our thought and apprehension, and life is characterized by the all-pervasive consciousness of dependence on him and responsibility to him” (John Murray).

The Book of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs teaches us how to live “a life well-managed” (Kidner). Proverbs presents much practical wisdom, but the successful life is first and foremost the godly life, which relies on the LORD and does not stray from the path of righteousness.



The Book of Job

The book of Job examines the meaning of human suffering; the justice, sovereignty, & purposes of God; & the proper human response to God.

While the book of Proverbs acknowledges exceptions to the “rules” of wisdom, the book of Job confronts us with the hard limits of wisdom, where human understanding fails.



Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes teaches us that life “under the sun”—that is, without reference to transcendent reality or life beyond this life—can never yield lasting fulfillment or meaning.

God has set longing for eternity in our hearts (Ecc. 3:11); but we can never gain eternity through fame, fortune, achievement, power, pleasure, or work. What God, and this life, require of us is that we “Fear God & keep his commandments” (Ecc. 12:13).



The Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is a love song which is about exactly what it seems to be about: the delight, excitement, & joy of a romantic, sensual, & intimate relationship between a lover & his beloved.

While the Song is not an allegory about God's love for Israel, or Christ's love for the Church, it does teach us that, beyond its own delight, true romance & sexual intimacy are reminders that the heart of existence is relationship-in-love.



Christ, the Wisdom of God

- The New Testament expresses the theme of wisdom in many ways:
 - Paul contrasts “human wisdom” with the “wisdom of God” in the preaching of the gospel & the “message of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:17-25).
 - Paul also emphasizes the importance of “spiritual wisdom” in the life of the Church (Eph. 1:17; 3:10; Col. 1:9, 28; 3:15-17).
 - The epistle of James parallels the OT wisdom books in its encouragement to seek wisdom from God & live wisely.



Christ, the Wisdom of God

- Most significantly, the NT connects Jesus with wisdom:
 - The Gospels present Jesus as the incomparable man of wisdom, one “greater than Solomon” (Matt. 12:42).
 - Especially in Paul’s letters, the NT points to Jesus as the source of wisdom, the “Christ, in whom are hidden all of the treasures of wisdom & knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).
 - John & Paul imply that Jesus Christ is wisdom incarnate (Jn. 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 1:15-17).



Wisdom Today

- The Bible is as relevant today as it was when it was written & its wisdom literature more important than ever.
- The wise person today:
 - fears God & follows Jesus Christ in faith
 - knows & understands Scripture
 - sees him/herself with genuine humility
 - can interpret culture & understand the times
 - sees what is certain & what remains a mystery
 - suffers wisely
 - grows in wisdom

