



Introduction

Many schools follow a programme of key values throughout the school year. These values can be an important framework for helping to define and validate the work of the school 'beyond the curriculum'. Each value can be used as the theme for collective worship, the focus for classroom reflection and the subject matter for main hall or quiet corner displays.

The Bible has so much to offer in this area of positive personal, relational and community values, and its timeless wisdom can help all schools pass on to the next generation the qualities of life that are most valuable and which, as Christians, we believe are not only God-given but also can be God-energised in our lives.

Preparation

What follows is a series of ideas linked to the value of "**Wisdom**".

It includes: key themes to explore, a key Bible verse to use, key concepts to unpack, ideas for displays and reflective corners, as well as Bible story links with further connections to material on the Barnabas websites.

Development

Key themes to explore:

- How wisdom differs from knowledge
- How people develop/grow in wisdom
- How people experience and show wisdom
- What are the characteristics of someone who is wise
- Different sources of wisdom: stories, fables, sayings and proverbs
- Examples of wisdom from different cultures, traditions and faiths

Key Bible Verses

Just like most faiths, the Christian tradition lays emphasis on the need to 'get wisdom' as a mark of spiritual maturity. The Bible talks of wisdom as a gift from God (King Solomon asks for this gift - 1 Kings 3) and in the New Testament wisdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12). True wisdom is intimately bound up with 'honouring God', as the book of Proverbs declares (for example, Proverbs 2:6; 9:10) and 'the wisdom that comes from above' (James 3:17, CEV) is described as pure, peaceable, gentle, helpful and sincere. Only God is truly wise and Christians see this expressed supremely in Jesus Christ, who is described as the wisdom of God ('He has become God's wisdom for us' 1 Corinthians 1:30, NIRV). So, for Christians, 'growing in wisdom' is about growing more Christ-like, and indeed he in turn is described as growing in wisdom when he was a child (Luke 2:39, 52, CEV 'Jesus became wise').



Wisdom isn't about what you know (this is knowledge/information) but about what you do with what you know – the application of your knowledge. Being wise doesn't necessarily have anything to do with age or intellect. Although it is a gift, it is a virtue that needs to be nurtured. The Bible has specific books of wisdom in which, through poetry, story and proverbs, advice is given on how wisdom might be developed. The book of Proverbs is a selection of over 300 sayings of Solomon (who wrote over 3000 in total – see 1 Kings 4:32) and helps the reader to discover what wisdom is, often contrasting it with foolishness; the book also probes into some of the characteristics of wisdom, highlighting a judicious use of silence, a reluctance to say too much and a caring attitude toward those less fortunate. Proverbs also points its readers to examples in nature from which we can learn wisdom, for example, 6:6 'learn by watching an anthill'; compare this with Aesop's fables or the stories about Anansi the spider from West Africa.

Key verses:

'All wisdom comes from God' (Proverbs 2:6).

'Keep in tune with wisdom and think what it means to have common sense' (Proverbs 2:2).

'Wisdom is worth much more than precious jewels' (Proverbs 8:11).

'Respect and obey the Lord! This is the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 9:10).

'Wisdom is shown to be right by what it does' (Matthew 11:19).

Words about wisdom

To profit from good advice requires more wisdom than to give it.

Years make us old but very few of us wise.

A wise person thinks before he or she speaks.

The courage to speak must be matched by the wisdom to listen.

Knowledge comes by taking things apart but wisdom comes by putting things together.

A wise person knows when to be silent.

Wisdom is knowledge guided by love.

Wise people always know more than they tell, but fools tell more than they know.

A wise person talks less but says more.

Wisdom is knowledge in action.



You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.

Naguib Mahfouz

I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday.

Abraham Lincoln

Wisdom is knowing what to do next; skill is knowing how to do it, and virtue is doing it.

David Starr Jordan

Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure. We get very little wisdom from success, you know.

William Saroyan

Science is organised knowledge. Wisdom is organised life.

Immanuel Kant

Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.

Albert Einstein

Key concepts to unpack

Wisdom isn't the same as knowledge. It isn't something to be learned as a curriculum subject. **So how do we gain it?**

Wisdom is about how we handle our good and bad experiences of life. It is about how we use the knowledge we have. It is about our choices. **What helps you make a wise choice?**

Wisdom isn't about giving opinions but about acting wisely once you have weighed up the possibilities. Wisdom acts for the good of others and not for purely personal gain. Wisdom earns respect because it is focused on long-term thinking. **Who do you think is a wise person and why?**

Wisdom is about being prepared to listen to the advice of others, thinking before you speak and choosing silence over words. Wisdom involves considering others, deliberating over the issues, reflecting on the long view and taking into account all possible consequences. **How good are you at doing these things? What would help you do better?**

In most cultures wisdom about life is passed down the generations through stories and sayings. We learn how better to handle situations by hearing about others who have faced similar dilemmas and choices. Famous proverbs and aphorisms often distil this wisdom into neat formulas with rhyme and humour, in order to help people remember what is important, for example, 'a stitch in time saves nine'.

Collect some well-known proverbs from the Internet and then talk about them with the children. Can they express the wisdom in these sayings in their own words?



Read a story from *One Hundred Wisdom Stories from around the World* by Margaret Silf (Lion Hudson) and talk about what wisdom it is teaching. N.B. This is a good source of assembly stories.

Or read one of the stories about Anansi the spider from West Africa (you can find them on the Internet).

Another useful book is *One Minute Wisdom* by Anthony De Mello (Bantam).

Ideas for a hall display or reflective corner in a classroom

- Include a book of wisdom stories (see above) and/or a copy of Aesop's Fables and/or a collection of wise sayings
- Have the Bible open at a key verse in Proverbs
- Include some wise sayings or a riddle to solve (see [Bible Riddles](#))
- Set a mystery question that needs more than knowledge to answer, such as: 'Which way is it to heaven from here?'
- Include some pictures of famous wise people, like Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, King Solomon, the Dalai Lama, Jesus.
- A popular symbolic animal for wisdom is an owl - include a picture or small model if possible
- The iris or orange blossom are both used to symbolise wisdom; jade is a precious stone associated with being wise

Some reflective questions to include:

- o *Who do you know that you might describe as a wise person?*
- o *What makes someone wise?*
- o *Who do you turn to for good advice?*
- o *How do you think you might become wise?*

An idea for collective worship

1. The story about the two women and the baby in 1 Kings 3:16-28 is perhaps the most famous example of Solomon using his gift of wisdom - see a retelling of the story in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 148. Tell this story (from memory if you can) and pause before the end to see whether the children can be wise enough to work out what to do! It makes a good way into discussing what wisdom is.
2. Or use the story about the two builders: Matthew 7:24-27. Jesus is saying that a wise person is someone who hears the words of Jesus and does something about them. There is a [rap version](#).

Bible story links and classroom activity outlines



The Dream: the story of God's gift to Solomon

Background to the story

After seeing off various challenges from rivals for his father's throne, Solomon finally became king. What an inheritance he had! David had been so respected and had had such a deep experience of God - how could Solomon hope to follow in his footsteps? Solomon truly believed in God and wanted to be a faithful king (see 1 Kings 3:3 and also 2:1-4) but he must have been nervous! God had spoken to David so often through his poetry in the psalms, had shown himself so often through miracles of protection during his lifetime, and had blessed David with a very personal experience of his mercy. Could Solomon also be that close to God?

As he began his reign he must have longed for his own personal experience of the invisible God. Is this perhaps the reason for the extravagant sacrifices at the shrines, particularly in Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4)? Are they evidence of his urgent search for God and his longing that God should not hide himself from him? It was then that he experienced the dream. This is a moment from the life of Solomon when he felt particularly close to God and was offered whatever gift he wanted.

Bible links

This story is told in two places: 1 Kings 3:1-15 and 2 Chronicles 1:1-13.

You will need

A child-friendly version of the story. Paper; pencils and pens; items for some simple challenges (see below); materials to make decorative bookmarks

Opening the story

- Ask the class whether they can remember any of their dreams. Do they ever have the same dream twice? Are their dreams exciting or scary sometimes?

God often speaks through dreams in the Bible and that is one reason why it is a good idea to pray before we go to sleep at night. An ancient prayer of the Church (from the service of Compline) says this:

*From evil dreams defend our sight
From fears and perils of this night
Tread underfoot our deadly foe
That we no evil thought may know.*

And there is also David's prayer in Psalm 4:8:

I can lie down and sleep soundly because you, Lord, will keep me safe.



Telling the story

In Solomon's dream, God gave him a tremendous offer. He could choose any gift he wanted! I wonder what you would choose.

Make a list of all the possible 'blank cheque' gifts the group can possibly think of, for example, tremendous wealth, superhuman power, to live forever, perfect health, political influence, worldwide fame, artistic talent, enormous strength, unfading good looks. (Ask the class to think of some of the powers that the superheroes possess. This might extend the list even further!)

Which gift would each child choose and why? Which gifts would do the world the greatest good? Are there possible dangers lurking within some of these gifts?

Now focus on the gift that Solomon chose - namely the ability to know the right thing to do and to know the difference between right and wrong (1 Kings 3:9). Why does the class think God said that this was the best gift of all (vv. 10-11)? Now Solomon had had his own personal experience of God, which changed him completely. It influenced the rest of his life and, even though he did not often 'see' God like this again, he knew that God was always there.

Talking about the story

Collect a series of fun and challenging activities which the class can go round and experience. Each one should have nothing to do with how knowledgeable a person is academically but much to do with other skills and even common sense. There are some good examples of these alternative measures of how gifted we are in the board game Cranium™. With these activities, you can open the way to talk about the fact that being clever or wise is much more than just knowing things. Here are some ideas:

- Using some small sugar packets (such as those available from a cafe), bend your arm back and place a packet on your elbow. Now swiftly move your forearm down and try to catch the packet in the same hand. Continue adding more packets until you can't catch any more!
- In pairs, try acting out particular phrases for your partner to guess, such as zero gravity, walking the plank, making a cake, playing a sport, lighting a match.
- Try signing your name with both hands simultaneously.
- Try keeping three tissues afloat in the air. Start by throwing them into the air and then use one hand to pull them up each time they fall. You must not let any touch the ground. How long can you keep them all in the air?
- Raise your right hand and point in the air, tracing three imaginary squares, while counting to twelve (each number corresponding to a corner). Now raise your left hand and trace four triangles in the air, while counting to twelve. Now raise both hands. With your right hand trace squares and with the left hand triangles, and don't forget to count to twelve!
- Bring both hands up in front of you. Now, with your left hand, point your index finger forward; with your right hand, raise your thumb in the air. Switch thumb and forefinger positions between hands. Do this as quickly as you can.

The gift Solomon chose was wisdom. This is not a word that is so familiar to children today (and even maybe some adults!) and it is not the same as knowledge.

- Put up on a sheet of paper two columns - one headed 'knowing about things' and the other 'being wise about things'. How are these two different? Write up ideas from the class as you talk about the two phrases. When faced with a problem, how is wisdom needed and when is knowledge helpful?

Solomon himself wrote a lot about the difference, which is recorded in the Book of Proverbs and also Ecclesiastes. Read what is written in 1 Kings 4:29-34. Solomon had so much wisdom that he became world famous and so had power, influence and wealth too in the end, just as God had promised. He once wrote: 'All wisdom comes from the Lord, and so do common sense and understanding' (Proverbs 2:6). He writes more about wisdom in Proverbs 3:13-18.

- After the dream, there were two more occasions when Solomon had an experience of God being really close and not hidden. The second one was when he had finished building the temple on the day it was dedicated (see 1 Kings 8:10-13 in particular). Solomon prayed an inspiring prayer following this.

Solomon was indeed a very great and wise king, but being wise doesn't mean that you always act wisely yourself and sadly that was true for Solomon. The third time God appeared to Solomon was to warn him that he shouldn't get mixed up with worshipping idols (see 1 Kings 9:2-9) but clearly Solomon didn't listen. Alongside the worship of the true God, he set up statues to the gods of the countries from which some of his wives came (see 1 Kings 11:3-8) and this was his downfall.

I wonder why he wasn't so wise in the end. Is it easier perhaps to be wise for other people than for yourself?

Playing with the story

Make your own selections from the Book of Proverbs about families, friends and life, printing them out for yourself using <http://www.biblegateway.com/>. Which ones do the children like best?

Now ask them to choose one or two each and create their own illustrated versions of the words to make a display or possibly put together as their own book of Solomon's wisdom.

Reading these might also inspire the children themselves to come up with their own wise sayings. Can they decide on their top ten pieces of wise advice that they would want to pass on to others and then write or illustrate them on some decorated card?

Reflecting on the story

When we pray for other situations and other people, it is usually wisdom that we ask for, not more knowledge. In a time of reflection, use the proverbs that they have written out and illustrated. Put them together in the middle of your circle and encourage each member of the class to pick out one



(not their own, if possible) and turn it into a wish or a prayer for other people.

Further ideas for discussion and ways to develop the theme

A Reflective Question:

If you could choose one wise saying to pass on to the next generation, what would it be?

Discussion starters

A word to the wise: how is wisdom different from knowledge? Can you work out a definition of each that makes the difference clear?

Wise up: who do you know who you would describe as a wise person? What are the qualities of someone who is regarded as wise? Is it just to do with what they say?

More can become wise: how do you think people get to be wise? We don't have lessons in wisdom in school, so how do we achieve it? Is wisdom the same as common sense?

Wizz-dom: is it only those who are older and who have had lots of life experience who can be truly wise? Or can people acquire it quicker than that?

OtherWise?: the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. What would you say is the foundation to being wise?

Activities

Riches, long-life or wisdom? Which would you choose? Read what happened when King Solomon was given this very choice in 1 Kings 3:1-15.

Solomon went on to write lots of his wisdom down. The Book of Proverbs in the Bible is attributed to him. Dip into this Bible book and read out loud some of its gems of wisdom. Can you find ones you like best?

Can you create your own wise person and foolish person sayings? Use this template:

'Those who are wise... but foolish people...'

Relate your sayings to everyday life - at home, school, work, on holiday, in celebrations and even at Christmas!