



THE STORY Sermon Study Guide

Week 5: Wisdom, Worship and Lament Sally Agostino

31 August 2025

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This week we take a journey through the rich landscape of Old Testament wisdom literature. These books are filled with many treasures, and in this study we will touch on just a few from Proverbs, Lamentations and Psalms. Together, we'll explore how these writings invite us to bring our whole selves before God; offering not only our praise and gratitude, but also our honest questions, doubts and lament.

Proverbs: Applied Wisdom for Daily Life Read Proverbs 1:1-7

Proverbs teaches us that wise choices lead to good outcomes, but it's important to remember that this is a book of probability, not promises. Our job is to seek after Godly wisdom, humbly align our lives with God's design, and trust Him with the outcome.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *chokmah*. This is more than just intellectual knowledge; it's applied knowledge. It's wisdom that shows up in the way we live. The Proverbs invite us to pursue this kind of wisdom as a lifelong journey.

1. How does it help to know Proverbs are about probabilities, not promises?
2. What's one area of your life where you need more *chokmah*—applied wisdom rather than just head-knowledge? How might you seek God's guidance in that area?



Lamentations: Order from Chaos

Read Lamentations 3

If Proverbs teaches us to live wisely, Lamentations shows us how to grieve wisely. Written after the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, Lamentations is a memorial to pain. The anonymous author lived through exile and captivity, yet created something beautiful from the wreckage—carefully structured acrostic poems that bring order to chaos. A picture of what God does.

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22–23).

These verses, often memorised and quoted in isolation, sit in the middle of deep grief and questioning. The anguish that surrounds them can seem overwhelming, but not to God. He welcomes our honest cries and does not ask us to hide our brokenness. In fact, it is in the act of lament that we often discover new hope and healing. By bringing our pain to God, we create space for Him to meet us, comfort us, and begin the work of restoration.

1. Have you ever experienced God bringing a sense of order or meaning into a season of chaos?
2. Why do you think we’re more comfortable with hopeful verses like “new mercies every morning” than we are with the lament that surrounds them?

Psalms: Prescriptive Liturgy

Read Psalm 22:1-10

The Psalms weren’t just written for personal quiet time. They’re “prescriptive liturgy,” offering us a framework for prayer that is honest, raw and real. They teach us that God is not looking for polished words or perfect emotions, but invites us to bring our whole selves—joy, anger, doubt and praise—into His presence.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.” (Psalm 22:1-2)

Have you ever dared to pray like that? To simply tell God how you feel, even without asking Him to fix it?

We often turn to the Psalms for words of comfort or praise, but nearly a third of the Psalter consists of lament. These first lines of Psalm 22 show us that even Jesus used



the Psalms as a vocabulary for raw honesty with His Father. And what's remarkable is how God welcomes these prayers. He not only allows but *invites* them, because lament is not the end of faith—it is a doorway to deeper faith.

1. Writer Anne Lamott, says her prayers often fall into three categories: *thank you, thank you, thank you; I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry; or help me, help me, help me*. Do your prayers ever sound like that? How could the prescriptive liturgy of the Psalms help to expand your prayer life?
2. How do you respond to the idea that God welcomes our doubts and questions?
3. What would it look like for you to pray with David's level of honesty as seen in Psalm 22? What fears, doubts or hurts have you been hesitant to bring to God?

Read Psalm 22:11-31

David starts Psalm 22 with honest emotion. He tells God exactly how he feels, acknowledges God's past faithfulness, then contrasts it with his current experience of abandonment. This isn't "polite society" prayer. This is bringing your whole self to God—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and remarkably, God who inspired this book of Scripture, made room for these honest, painful words.

It's only after David has poured out his heart in verses 1-10 that we see his words turn to petition and, finally, to praise. Scholars suggest that Psalm 22 may have been written in two parts: lament in the moment of pain, and later praise after resolution came. Whether or not that's the case, the structure shows us it's okay to linger in lament before moving toward celebration.

1. How was emotion typically handled in your family growing up? Was there an imbalance between silencing your feelings or being ruled by them? How might this affect how you relate to God?
2. The Psalms teach us that part of the human experience is doubt and pain. Honest faith says, "God, I don't understand, but I'm trusting you in the mystery." Can you think of a current situation where you're still in the mystery? How might honest lament help you process this season?
3. How comfortable are you sharing your struggles and doubts with other believers? What holds you back from bringing your "whole self" to Christian community? And how might your small group, family or friendships be different if everyone felt permission to share honestly about both struggles and celebrations?



Optional Activity

Invite group members to reflect on a personal or communal situation of struggle and try praying using Psalm 22 as a template:

- **Verses 1-10:** Start with honest emotion. Tell God exactly how you feel about a current struggle, without trying to fix it or make it sound spiritual.
- **Verse 11:** Move to simple, broad requests: "Don't be far from me. Help me."
- **Verses 22-31:** If you're not ready for praise yet, that's okay. End by acknowledging God's sovereignty and expressing trust, even in the mystery.

Suggested Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of wisdom literature—for Proverbs that teach us to apply your ways and wisdom to our lives; for Lamentations that show us how to grieve in times of chaos; and for Psalms that give us an honest framework of prayer for every season of life.

We confess that we sometimes prefer to bring only our "acceptable" selves to you — the grateful, faithful, put-together parts. Help us to learn from David's example and bring our whole selves to you—our doubts, fears, anger and questions alongside our praise and gratitude.

Thank you that lament is not the end of faith but a doorway to deeper relationship with you. Give us courage to be honest with you and with one another. In the mystery and in the clarity, in the pain and in the joy, we trust that you are good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bible Reading Plan & Resources

As we engage in this sermon series and reflect on 'The Story' of God's redemptive pursuit of humanity, we invite you to practise the discipline of regular Bible reading. You may like to use the [NewHope Bible Reading Plan](#) which has been developed to accompany each sermon over the next 12-weeks. Get a physical copy at church, download a digital copy from our website or follow NewHope in the Bible App for daily updates.

There are also many other wonderful ways to engage with Scripture and you can find a collection of resources, such as books, apps, courses, and more at newhope.net.au/the-story.