

Lesson 9 / August 2, 2009

The Wealth of Wisdom

for use as

STEP 1 
Lesson 9
Focus:

God's wisdom is
priceless and
attainable.

Lesson 9
Bible Basis:

Proverbs 3:13–18; 4:1–9

Students will discuss how to gain godly wisdom and how much better it is than worldly wisdom.

OPENING STORY [read it aloud to your class, or make copies and pass it around]:

CONGRESS QUESTIONS SOTOMAYOR'S QUALIFICATIONS
 WASHINGTON—Sonia Sotomayor, President Obama's nominee for the Supreme Court and the first Hispanic female candidate ever presented to Congress, has undergone vigorous examination by senators and representatives alike—as should be expected for someone who will wield exceptional judicial power.

Of course, whenever a Supreme Court nominee is put on the table, he or she must be ready for any of their even slightly careless words to be brought into the spotlight. In one such statement in her past, Sotomayor seemed to imply that a “wise Latina” who was a judge might come to better judicial decisions than a white, male counterpart. She was implying that the experiences of an Hispanic female in our culture might give her insights that might pass others by—and because of those insights, be better able to make sound decisions. Sotomayor's critics are saying, then, that she'd bring a personal bias to the bench that would be inappropriate for any judge—especially a judge of the highest court of appeals in the land.

When questioned about this, Sotomayor responded assertively to the charges of some congressmen that her experience would taint her ability to judge impartially. She continued to insist that she would act without bias as some senators kept bringing up words from her past speeches that expressed similar sentiments.

“My record shows that at no point or time have I ever permitted my personal views or sympathies to influence the outcome of a case,” said Sotomayor as she continued to be grilled by Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama. (Sessions is the top-ranking Republican on the committee who is heading up these confirmation hearings.) He was one of her most vocal critics.

Observers said that Sotomayor, who is 55, remained very “judge-like” in her responses—assertive while not making any sort of insinuations against her interrogators. She listened attentively and took notes as others spoke. She would often lean into her microphone for emphasis, and

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made liberal use of respectful hand gestures.

In regard to the “wise Latina” comments, spoken in 2001, Sotomayor expressed regret for her comments. She called the remark “a rhetorical flourish that fell flat.”

“It was bad because it left an impression that I believed that life experiences commanded a result in a case, but that’s clearly not what I do as a judge,” Sotomayor said.

She also surprisingly set herself apart from Obama, who said that the key to choosing a good person for the appeals court is to determine “what is in the judge’s heart.”

“I wouldn’t approach the issue of judging in the way the president does,” she said. “Judges can’t rely on what’s in their heart. They don’t determine the law. Congress makes the laws. The job of a judge is to apply the law.”

Critics remained unconvinced.

“I am very troubled that you would repeatedly over a decade or more make statements” like the one in 2001, Sessions said.

And Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said Sotomayor’s answers Tuesday seemed to contradict her previous comments. “That’s what we’re trying to figure out—who are we getting here?” he said.

“People all over the country are tired of courts imposing their will against one group or another without justification,” said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, questioning how Sotomayor approached some of the cases in her past.

Still, she remained steadfast in defending her ability to remain impartial.

“I want to state upfront, unequivocally and without doubt: I do not believe that any racial, ethnic, or gender group has an advantage in sound judging,” Sotomayor said. “I do believe that every person has an equal opportunity to be a good and wise judge, regardless of their background or life experiences.”

Obama named Sotomayor to replace Justice David Souter, who retired in June. President George H. W. Bush appointed Souter, but Souter frequently sided with the court’s more liberal element.

Today’s lesson is about wisdom, particularly the wisdom that can only come from God.

Most people would agree that wisdom is somehow tied into life’s experiences. Some of the wisest people we know have gone through some extraordinarily difficult trials in life.

On the other hand, we probably all know people who think themselves wise, but they still haven’t experienced very much in life. We may listen patiently to them, as they wax on and on about their extraordinary perceptions of the way things are—knowing that eventually, such a person may be in for a rude awakening.

But is it true, as Judge Sotomayor may have implied a few years ago, that only certain types of experiences (such as those a “wise Latina” might experience in urban settings) produce a kind of wisdom that can-

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not be gained by any other means?

Now form small groups and have the class discuss the following:

- ▶ Describe a personal experience from which you gained an extraordinary amount of wisdom.
- ▶ What do you see as the relationship between life experiences and wisdom?
- ▶ Are there certain types of life experiences that produce more wisdom than others? Explain.
- ▶ Are you more likely to gain wisdom during times of peace and prosperity than you are during times of difficult and adversity? Explain.
- ▶ What can prevent you from gaining wisdom from either type of circumstance?
- ▶ How can two people with almost identical life experiences (such as both of them suddenly losing a person close to them) become different—one developing great depth of character, the other becoming pessimistic and cynical?
- ▶ In what ways can the same life experience result in either worldly wisdom or the type of wisdom that comes from God?
- ▶ What sets heavenly wisdom apart from worldly wisdom? (See James 3:13–18.)

Now take a look at some proverbs that will show us how to glean godly wisdom from almost any life experience.

(When you are finished with the questions, go on to Step 2 in your *Adult Teacher's Guide*, where you read the Scripture and begin to discuss it.)

News Source:

[http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090714/ap_on_go_su_co/us_sotomayor_senate]

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STEP 4 

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IF YOU TRULY WANT TO BE WISE

Most people would agree that there is a direct link between life experiences and the acquisition of wisdom. But merely experiencing the ups and downs of life is no guarantee that one will become wise from them.

The message of Proverbs tells us that it is how we respond to life's experiences that determines whether or not wisdom will be gained. Many people would probably concede that they learned more from the difficult times they went through than from times of success and prosperity. But again, mere suffering will not result in wisdom either—it's how we respond to those losses that will either make us more godly, or more bitter and less Christlike.

The essence of godly wisdom is acknowledging what God already knows to be plainly and painfully obvious. If we have sinned, God wants us to acknowledge our wrongdoing and pursue reconciliation from those we may have alienated. If we have made a mistake, He wants us to acknowledge responsibility for the mistake, to learn from it, and consult with Him and His Word about ways of preventing ourselves from making the same mistake in the future.

If we are to gain godly wisdom from life experiences, we must honestly interpret what happened and learn from it.

[Activity]

Return to the groups you had in Step 1 and discuss these questions:

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- ▶ Consider your answer to Question 1 in Step 1—how might your life be different now if you had responded to that particular experience in such a way that no wisdom was gained?
- ▶ Describe one of your most embarrassing or costly mistakes. What did you learn from that mistake?
- ▶ How did you prevent yourself from making the same mistake again (or did you repeat the mistake)?
- ▶ Describe one of your most fruitful successes. What did you do right?
- ▶ How was your particular giftedness tied into that success?
- ▶ Did you repeat that “win” from what you learned? How?
- ▶ What wisdom do you think God wants you to find today in your current life experiences—something that is plainly obvious to Him but perhaps not to you?
- ▶ How will such an acknowledgement virtually guarantee more wisdom for you?

Close the class in prayer, asking God to give every participant the type of wisdom they need to sort through the choices that life presents to them, sometimes on an hourly basis. Be sure to praise God for giving wisdom to those who ask for it. As Scripture says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

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