

Introduction

Thank you for registering your church and downloading our resources. We hope they prove helpful. We will contact you afterwards for feedback, since your input can help shape future material and we love to hear comments and stories of how it was received by both children and adults!

About *Back to School with God Sunday*

Back to School with God Sunday provides an opportunity for churches to pray for and support young people and the local school community at the start of a new school year. It aims to:

- Raise awareness of **prayer for schools** in general, and **local school communities** in particular
- **Support and encourage Christian pupils and staff** in their daily life at school, letting them know they are valued and prayed for by the local church
- Challenge Christian pupils and staff to **live out their faith** in their school, and particularly to support any Christian witness there (such as an SU Group or similar).

We hope that your church will want to continue to pray for schools all year round. If your church hasn't already registered to pray for a local school, we invite you to do so online at prayforschools.org, selecting which area of the UK you live in.

2017 Theme

The theme of our 2017 *Back to School with God Sunday* service is 'Be Wise', exploring the Bible story of Solomon in **1 Kings 3:1-16**. The teaching is broken up into three sections as follows, each with a suggested introductory all-age activity:

1. A WISE KING who KNOWS GOD
2. A WISE KING who KNOWS HIMSELF!
3. A WISE KING who PLEASURES GOD.

Although activities and prayers relate to children, young people and school staff, the teaching is applied to all ages. The challenge is for each of us to follow Solomon's example to BE WISE, seeking God for the wisdom only he can give.

All-age Service

The service (pages 3 to 10) includes Bible readings, activities, prayers and a sermon outline. There are accompanying PowerPoint slides and a bookmark of the memory verse, as well as publicity materials and activities for children which can be used as follow-up materials for a kids' club or Sunday School. More than enough material is provided for a morning church service: select the options that work best for your congregation and adapt accordingly.

Accompanying Resources

The following FREE resources accompany this All-age Service Outline.

Publicity:

- **BSG 2017 A4 Poster.** A blank A4 poster for overprinting with your own service details. This can also be printed 2-up to provide invitation flyers for the service.

Resources for use within the service:

- **BSG 2017 Sermon PPT.** A set of PowerPoint slides to accompany the service. Feel free to change or edit these to suit your own situation.
- **BSG 2017 Dramatized Bible Passage.** A version of the Bible text which uses mime and different voices to bring the narrative alive.
- **BSG 2017 Trying to Live God's Way PPT.** A PowerPoint presentation set to music which illustrates the contrast between what people say, and what God says.
- **BSG 2017 Prayers.** Prayers which feature in the All-age service, ready to print for each person taking part.

Supporting resources:

- **BSG 2017 Bookmark.** A printable bookmark to hand out to your congregation. If desired, bookmarks can be ordered at a cost of 3p per bookmark by emailing pray@suscotland.org.uk well ahead of the service, allowing time for postage. An invoice will be sent with your bookmarks, which will be printed onto an A4 sheet, ready to cut.
- **BSG 2017 Children's Activities.** A selection of crafts and activities for further exploration of the Bible story,
- **BSG 2017 Follow-up Ideas.** Different ideas on how to maintain a year-round focus on praying and serving your local school community.

Before the service

- If you aren't the church leader, speak to the minister, leader or elders about the possibility of holding a *Back to School with God* service.
- Decide when you want to hold the service. We suggest the end of August or the beginning of September, but the service can be held on any Sunday around the start of a new school year.
- Look through the *All-age Service* and select what you want to include, for the length of service you want to hold. Approximate timings are given for each activity. You don't need to include everything!
- We recommend that you involve children and young people in the service wherever possible. If you would like to invite children, young people and adults from the school community to take part in leading prayers, reading the Bible, or sharing a testimony, invite them in plenty of time and support them in what you are asking them to do. Some preparation prior to the service will be needed.

PPT Slide 1

Welcome

2 mins

A warm welcome to our Back to School with God Sunday service at the start of this new school year. It is an exciting time of change for our children, young people, and school staff.

Optional: address the children: I wonder if you have a new pair of shoes, or a new pencil case? Or perhaps you have a new teacher, and new class mates? Who has started school for the very first time?

Here at church, we want to assure you of our prayers as you make a return to school. We are all going Back to School **with God**.

Verse 10 of Psalm 143 says this, in the Good News Bible:

You are my God; teach me to do your will.

Be good to me, and guide me on a straight path.

We come to worship God, who is with us no matter where we go; who can teach us his ways, and guide us as we go forward into a new school year. Let's pray.

Opening prayer (own words)

4 mins

Hymn or song (own choice)

4 mins

Bible reading: 1 Kings 3:1-16

4 mins

You may wish to consider the options below:

- Read from the New International Version in three sections (verses 1-3, verses 4-9, verses 10-16) and allow the story to unfold as you bring each teaching point.
- Use different voices to read the passage, as in *BSG 2017 Dramatized Bible Passage*.
- Watch it on the *Superbook* DVD: King Solomon's dream. The DVD is available to purchase from Christian retailers, or stream online from us-en.superbook.cbn.com/video/king-solomon-asks-wisdom.

Teaching Point 1: A WISE KING who KNOWS God

7 mins

I wonder how you came to be in church today? What is your story? Many of us are here because we were brought along by, or have come with, our friends or family. We have grown to know God and love him through others telling us about him.

In 1 Kings 3: 1-3 we hear Solomon's story.

Bible Reading 1: 1 Kings 3:1-3

There is no temple – or church – for Solomon to worship God in. However, Solomon had watched how his father, King David, trusted in God throughout his life; in the good times, in the bad times. He had listened when David sang about God's goodness, his great love, his patience and mercy. We can read David's songs today in the book of the Bible called Psalms.

As a boy, Solomon would have listened to stories of God keeping promises, loving the outcast, being patient with the foolish. He would have learned that God was a holy God to be listened to and obeyed. From his father, Solomon learned faith and trust in God. **PPT Slide 2** In verse 3 we read, '*Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David.*' So, Solomon knew God – he showed his love for the Lord, trusted him and walked in God's ways, just as his father had done before him.

PPT Slide 3 '*EXCEPT THAT he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.*' (verse 3)

Solomon was worshipping God, but he was also copying the behaviour of those who didn't love God! Solomon knew God; but he didn't always do things God's way. He was *learning* to be king. He had to learn that God's ways needed to be at the centre of his life, every day. Learning is what all of us do, especially those of us who are at school. God wants each one of us to learn what He is like, to get to know Him, to trust Him and learn to live His way; when at home with our family – and in school with our friends and teachers.

Sometimes Solomon did what other people who didn't love God were doing. We face that challenge too, don't we? All of us face pressures to live the way others do – particularly those of us who are at school. God challenges us to live a different way. Let's think about that for a few moments.

Choosing God's Way PowerPoint: *Download and play BSG 2017 Choosing God's Way PowerPoint, which is a visual reminder of what God says in contrast to what people say. The slide set is animated and set to music, and should run by itself as a Slideshow.*

*(Alternatively, those without PowerPoint might choose to invite a few people in the congregation, young and old, to share **in one sentence** their challenges of living God's way.)*

Further on, in verse 15 of our Bible passage, we are told that Solomon chooses to follow God and worship Him with honour, praise and glory before the ark of the Lord's covenant. He is a WISE KING who KNOWS GOD. He chooses **not** to compromise and do what others are doing. He worships God where God has instructed; he is doing things God's way at last. Let's pray that all of us – at home, work, and at school – choose God's ways too. Why don't we stop and pray together now, asking for God's help to do that?

Prayer

1 min or 5 mins

You may wish to consider one of the options below:

- **Read Psalm 143:10** (GNB) aloud together as a prayer (**PPT Slide 4**):

You are my God;
Teach me to do your will.
Be good to me,
And guide me on a straight path.
Amen.

- Invite children and school staff to come forward to **name their school and light a candle** (or a battery tea light which they can hold). Explain that they are like lights for God in their school. With the candles lit, pray for the children and the leaders of each school to be wise, to know right from wrong, to know that they can talk to God and ask him for what they need.

Activity 1: Decision Challenge

5 mins

(Adapted from Scripture Union's Lightlive resources (scriptureunion.org.uk/lightlive))

Before the service, prepare several boxes of objects. The objects could be anything from the useless to the useful, such as a cabbage, a big bar of chocolate, a bin bag.

Invite a primary aged child to choose between two gifts. Offer them a gift (a bag of sweets or a chocolate bar) and say they can have this as a prize – or they can have what is in the box. You will give a clue as to what is in the box, but it will be a riddle they need to solve. Clues might be:

- **Cabbage:** the object in the box is round and green and is eaten by millions around the world.
- **Chocolate:** the object in the box can be runny, messy, and often disappears quickly.
- **Bin bag:** the object in the box is black, shiny, strong, and lasts almost for ever.

Allow them to ask the rest of the children – and the rest of the church family – for help to solve the clue. If they choose the box, give them what is in it (you may also want to be kind and give them the sweets or biscuit as well for their effort!).

Explain they needed to come to a decision. Was it easy? Maybe not! They didn't have all the information, and people were telling them to do different things. Sometimes this happens when we need to make decisions too. In our Bible story, Solomon was asked by God to make a decision. Let's find out what happened.

Teaching Point 2: A WISE KING who KNOWS HIMSELF!

8 mins

Bible Reading 2: 1 Kings 3:4-9

We read in verse 5, *'the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you!'* **PPT Slide 5**

As you listened to the Bible reading, I wonder if your mind went to a kind of Genie in a lamp scenario... 'I can grant you 3 wishes!'

This is not a made-up story of genies inside magical lamps. Here is an account of someone who has a relationship with God and wants to please God and bless others more than anything. It is not random, it is not based on rubbing a lamp...it's about a God of grace and love, deepening his relationship with Solomon.

Wow! What a chance for Solomon to ask for something amazing! And we aren't talking here about some vague wish that might or might not come true. This was God asking him what he wanted! God was *more than* able to answer.

PPT Slide 6 Solomon knew who he was – a young king. Imagine writing 'King Solomon' on your new pencil case or Facebook profile, or hearing 'King Solomon' called when your teacher takes the register. How important you would feel!

But did you notice how Solomon identifies himself in the passage? Three times when talking to God he identifies himself not as 'the king', but as 'your servant'. Yes, King Solomon calls himself a *servant*. How can that be? What does he mean?

Back in history, a king was very powerful. A king could have anything he wanted, and do anything he pleased. Yet here Solomon is showing that although he *is* a King, he knows that there is a greater King who is far more powerful. **Click PPT Slide 6 to animate** Before **that** King, Solomon is only a servant. That King is God.

Solomon is a WISE KING who doesn't just know God; HE KNOWS HIMSELF. Solomon isn't full of his own importance, even though he is a king. He realises he is *'only a little child, and doesn't know how to rule.'* (v.7). **Click PPT Slide 6 to animate** He is humble before God. He recognises he needs help. He knows that God is God, and that he is not.

PPT Slide 7 So, in answer to God's question, (v 9) *Solomon says to God, 'I want to be wise! I want to know how to tell wrong from right.'*

Why? Not so that everyone will say what a great king he is, but so that he can tell right from wrong and rule his country well. He wants things which are right to be praised and things which are wrong to be stopped. He wants those being mistreated to be helped, and those doing good to be encouraged. He wants to think the way

God thinks and to see the world the way that God sees it. Solomon wants to be the best king he can be – a servant king who has God as his King.

PPT Slide 8 If God were to say to us today, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you!' what would your answer be? What would my answer be? Would we be like Solomon, and not pray to be rich or successful, but to be wise – to know right from wrong? That's a great prayer!

Song

4 mins

You might like to choose one of the following, available to view on YouTube.

- **Did you ever talk to God above?** Steve Oliver: youtu.be/9J6waHy1I9U.
- **Pray at all times** by Nick & Becky Drake, from the album *God is Here*. Available to buy from Christian retailers or online from Amazon. See youtube.com/watch?v=8f2GKo5eA6E.
- **Make me wise:** Trin Kins Tuscaloosa - youtu.be/LQfvPWTvQSM.

Children's Activity 2: Wise or Not Wise?

3 mins

(Adapted from Scripture Union's Lightlive resources (scriptureunion.org.uk/lightlive))

Explain that you will make a statement and the children must decide whether an action is 'Wise' or 'Not Wise'. By way of response, choose one of the following:

- Explain to the children that the LEFT-HAND side of the church or venue is WISE and the RIGHT- HAND is NOT WISE. When you make a statement, the children choose whether it is something wise, or not wise, and move accordingly.
- Ask the children to put up their left hand, then their right hand (to check they know which is which!) Explain that when you make a statement, they should put up their LEFT HAND if they think it is WISE, and their RIGHT HAND if they think it is NOT WISE.

Statements:

- Washing your hands after playing football. **WISE** – or UNWISE?
- Staying up all night and getting no sleep. WISE – or **UNWISE**?
- Taking something that doesn't belong to you. WISE – or **UNWISE**?
- Looking both ways before you cross the road. **WISE** – or UNWISE?
- Eating a whole packet of biscuits all at once. WISE – or **UNWISE**?
- Ignoring your homework and pretending it got lost. WISE – or **UNWISE**?
- Saying 'sorry' when you do something wrong. **WISE** – or UNWISE?

Teaching Point 3: A WISE KING who PLEASES GOD

6 mins

Bible Reading 3: 1 Kings 3:10-15

How do we know when someone is pleased? They might give us a big smile, or a hug, or say 'Well done!'. At school, we might get a 'smiley face' sticker, a 'treat', a homework voucher or be allowed to do something special. God was pleased with what Solomon asked for. How did Solomon know God was pleased? The Bible tells us! **PPT Slide 9** Verse 10 says, 'the Lord was **pleased** that Solomon had asked for wisdom.' Because he asked for that and not a long life, or riches, or anything selfish, God gave him the wisdom he asked for as well as many other good things. In the rest of the chapter we find out how he was able to solve a very tricky problem – one he could not have worked out without God's help. God did indeed make Solomon very wise. He was not just a WISE KING, but a WISE KING who PLEASED GOD.

But what is wisdom? **PPT Slide 10** We talk about knowledge – knowing a lot of things; but wisdom is something different! Solomon asked God for wisdom, that he would know how to tell wrong from right. For Solomon, wisdom was knowing the right thing to do and doing it. Solomon wanted to please God and follow his ways.

When it comes to what it means to be wise, Proverbs 9:10 gives us a big clue: **Click PPT Slide 10 to animate**

'Wisdom begins with respect for the Lord. And understanding begins with knowing God, the Holy One.' (International Children's Bible)

PPT Slide 11 Wisdom begins with knowing God and realising HE is God and we are not. The wisdom of Solomon comes not from a chance meeting with a genie, or a quick Google search. It doesn't come from listening to a blogger, reading an encyclopaedia or asking the best teacher you have ever had. It is the result of meeting and getting to know the living God!

What might wisdom look like in the classroom tomorrow? If I have wisdom from God, does it mean that I have better marks than anyone else? Will I become much cleverer than I was before? Perhaps not! Will I always know how to answer the teacher when she asks a hard question? Will it mean getting 100% in all my exams? Does God's wisdom put me at the top of the class? No, it doesn't promise that!

God answered Solomon's prayer and gave him so much wisdom that he was able to share it with us. Some of Solomon's wise sayings are written down for us in the book of the Bible called Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is proof that God answered Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Solomon was therefore a WISE king who PLEASED GOD, who realised that even though he was a king, he couldn't live properly without **God** being in charge.

So, what will God-pleasing wisdom look like in the classroom, or where we work or spend our time? Let's find out!

Activity 3: Wisdom is...

3 mins

Print the following on strips of paper (or material). Ask volunteers to read them out in turn, either standing where they are in the congregation, or coming out the front. Afterwards they can be stuck onto a strip of wallpaper (or sewn onto a piece of cloth).

- Wisdom is... trusting in God
- Wisdom is... being a good friend
- Wisdom is... reading the Bible
- Wisdom is... including others
- Wisdom is... listening
- Wisdom is... talking to God
- Wisdom is... giving your best
- Wisdom is... making good choices
- Wisdom is... telling the truth
- Wisdom is... asking God for help
- Wisdom is... saying thank you
- Wisdom is... loving God

And so, Solomon goes down in history as one of the wisest Kings who ever lived – but he pointed to another King, a king who would come later, who was both perfect and wise: King Jesus. What a servant king Jesus was! Jesus got it right every time; there was not a thought or a word out of place as he obeyed his Father each day. We are glad that our friendship with God doesn't rely on us being wise all the time, but rather, putting our trust in King Jesus.

By asking God for help to be wise, Solomon did the wisest thing. We would be wise to do the same. At this point we are going to pause and take time to pray for each other as we go back to our homes and families and as we go out into our world tomorrow, whether that's school, work or at home. These prayers are based on the wise advice God gave Solomon and are found in the Bible book called Proverbs.

Prayers

3 mins

We suggest that representatives of the church family are involved in reading the Bible verses and saying these prayers, for example, children, young people, school staff, parents, grandparents. They can be given out in advance, and are reproduced separately as BSG 2017 Prayers.

Child Wise children make their fathers proud of them; foolish ones bring their mothers grief. Proverbs 10:1

Heavenly Father, thank you for our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Thank you for their love and care. Forgive us when we cause trouble, don't listen, and disobey. Please help us to be wise by listening to them and by wanting to make them proud.

Teenager Sensible people accept good advice. People who talk foolishly will come to ruin. Proverbs 10:8

Lord God, thank you for our teachers and older people who can offer us good advice. Help us, God, to be willing to listen and learn from others, and not always think that we know best.

Child **Never say anything that isn't true. Have nothing to do with lies and misleading words. Proverbs 4:24**

Father God, please forgive us when we tell lies. Help us to be trustworthy and honest people who always tell the truth.

Teenager **It is foolish to speak scornfully of others. If you are smart, you will keep quiet. Proverbs 11:12**

Father God, we ask forgiveness for the way we sometimes put others down and make fun of them. May the way we speak to others at school and at home always reflect your love and kindness.

Child **If you want people to like you, forgive them when they wrong you. Remembering wrongs can break up a friendship. Proverbs 17:9**

Thank you, God, that through Jesus you always forgive us when we do wrong. Help us to remember this and forgive others in the same way you forgive us.

Adult **An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins. Proverbs 29:22**

Father God, please help us to be peacemakers wherever we are – in our classroom, in the staff room, in the office, factory, or in our street with our next-door-neighbours.

All: **Amen.**

Summary

In our *Back to School with God Sunday* service we have explored the story of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-16. Solomon is a WISE KING who KNOWS GOD, who KNOWS HIMSELF and who PLEASES GOD. The challenge is for each of us as we go back to school, into work and into our homes, to follow Solomon's example to BE WISE, seeking God for the wisdom only he can give.

PPT Slide 12 If you are a parent, teacher, or work in a school, do check out the website of Christian Values in Education. CVE is a partner charity of Scripture Union and is the only support and networking organisation for Christian teachers, chaplains and parents. It aims to give wise advice and lots of practical advice.

Hymn or Song and Benediction (own choice)

4 mins

You may wish to thank those who were involved in leading today's service, and offer a bookmark (*BSG 2017 Bookmark*) for those who wish to commit to praying for individual school children or staff over the coming year.