

# Old Testament Genre: Poetry

By Joshua Williams

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

Read Psalm 1:1–3 and then read the comments related to Psalm 1:3 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How is the blessed man like a tree?

### Assignment Two

Read Isaiah 1:2–3 and then read the comments related to Isaiah 1:3 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What did God's people not know or understand?

### Assignment Three

Read Proverbs 5:1–6 and then read the comments related to Proverbs 5:3–6 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Why is the adulteress so attractive at first but should still be avoided?

## Scripture to Memorize

*Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. Proverbs 1:5–6*

## Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will interpret poetry properly according to its use of language.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

Jordan's friend Evan is pretty hostile to Christianity. One day they had this conversation:

Evan: You can't trust the Bible. Let me show you. Do you think God is a rock?

Jordan: No, of course not.

Evan: Well, the Bible says that God is a rock. What, you don't believe the Bible?

Jordan knew that the Bible doesn't mean that God is an actual rock. But how could he explain that the Bible is speaking the truth but doesn't mean what Evan thinks it does?

### Poetry Uses Figurative Language

Read Psalm 1:1–3 out loud.

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 1. blessed.** The word *blessed* here means “to be content, satisfied, and successful.” **walks not in the counsel.** He does not behave the way the wicked think he should. **stand in the way.** He cannot be found behaving like sinners do. **sits.** The verse has shown the person in a range of positions: walking, standing, and sitting. Including all these reinforces the idea that the blessed man does not associate himself with the behavior or the attitudes of the wicked anytime or anywhere.

**Verse 2. law of the LORD.** That is, what God has taught and commanded.

**Verse 3. planted.** The tree has deep roots near a continuous source of water. **in its season.** The tree produces its fruit at the right time so that the fruit is lush and healthy. **does not wither.** Its leaves do not dry out and fall off. **he prospers.** He succeeds at what he tries to do.

Two poetic figures of speech occur in these verses. The first involves repetition where different activities are combined together to represent a complete picture. Walking, standing, and sitting—combining all these activities indicates that the blessed person does not associate with the wicked in any of their actions or attitudes.

The second involves a comparison between the blessed man and a healthy tree. A healthy tree is a successful tree. It produces fruit when it is supposed to and stays green and lush. A blessed man is the same way because he also succeeds at what he attempts to do.

#### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on how the blessed man is like a tree.

#### Discussion Question

How would the psalm be different if it did not poetically compare the blessed man to a tree? Would it be as interesting? Would it be as easy to remember?

## Poetry Addresses the Emotions

Read Isaiah 1:2–3 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 2. O heavens, . . . O earth.** The heavens and earth are treated as though they were people who could hear and listen. **Children.** Refers to Israel as God’s people. **reared and brought up.** God took care of Israel in ways they could not take care of themselves. **rebelled.** Israel rebelled against God by disobeying Him and by following other gods.

**Verse 3. master’s crib.** The crib, or manger, is the place where the donkey would be fed. **does not know . . . do not understand.** The point is that even unintelligent animals like oxen and donkeys know who owns them and takes care of them, but God’s people do not recognize God as the One who is their Father and has cared for them.

### Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on what God’s people did not know or understand.

### Discussion Question

Isaiah 1:2–3 could be restated as follows: “God says, ‘Let me tell you how Israel has acted wickedly. Even though I have taken care of them, they don’t recognize Me as their caretaker.’” What is missing from this restatement that is found in the verses themselves? What difference does the figurative language make?

## Poetry Uses Similar Expressions to Communicate Truth

Read Proverbs 5:1–6 out loud.

### Studying the Passage

**Verse 2. discretion . . . knowledge.** In other words, the one who accepts this teaching will know what is really going on and will speak knowledgably instead of foolishly.

**Verse 3. lips . . . drip honey.** Honey is a sweet food, a good treat in the ancient world. The verse says “her speech” as a way of referring to the way she speaks. Hearing her speak is like eating dessert. **smoother than oil.** This oil used in biblical times was for taking care of hair, skin and odor. Words that are smoother than oil are flattering or charming words.

**Verse 4. bitter as wormwood.** Wormwood is a bitter-tasting plant in the Middle East, the kind you want to spit out immediately. **Sharp . . . two-edged sword.** The sword was used for stabbing and slashing. Its sharp edges were intended to hurt people.

**Verse 5. Her feet . . . death.** If a man follows her, she will lead him to his destruction, symbolized here as death. **Sheol.** Sheol often refers to the grave where the dead are laid.

**Verse 6. ponder.** This term means “to give any attention to.” **Her ways wander.** In other words, her conduct is dangerous because at any moment it can result in her destruction.

### Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on why the adulteress is so attractive at first but should be avoided.

### On Your Own

In the space below, write under the two headings. For Proverbs 5:1–6, divide each verse into two parts. Under one heading, paraphrase the first part of the verse in your own words. Under the other heading, paraphrase the second part of the verse in your own words. When everyone is finished, the group can compare answers to the Scripture passage and make changes where needed.

**First Half of Verse Says. . .**

**Second Half of Verse Says. . .**

### Discussion Question

Did you notice that both parts of the verse seem to get across the same basic point? Since both parts are getting at the same basic point, how should this affect the way a person interprets verses such as these?

### Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

**Since Last Week**

5 minutes

**Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

**Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

**Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## At Home: Nail It Down

Poetry in the Bible has several characteristics.

1. Poetry uses figurative language. It is important to recognize that poetry often uses words in a way that is not literal. The blessed man in Psalm 1:1–3 is not a tree, but he can be compared to a healthy tree because he accomplishes what he intends to accomplish.

In order to be able to interpret poetry properly, one must recognize the figure of speech and discover how it is being used. Figurative language occurs in poetry to help people remember it.

2. Poetry addresses the emotions. Something powerful can be lost when restating poetry in plain, literal language. Isaiah 1:2–3 uses several figures of speech to point out how outrageous and ridiculous it is that Israel has abandoned their God who has cared for them. One task of interpreting poetry is finding out its tone: Is it funny? serious? sad? outraged?

3. Poetry uses similar expressions to communicate a central truth. Proverbs 5:3 talks about the charm of an adulterous woman. She charms with her words. The passage describes her words from two different perspectives: they are sweet like honey and smooth like oil. Using similar expressions allows a person to see different aspects of the same truth. Another task of interpreting poetry in the Bible is finding out the central point and how the similar expressions reveal different aspects of that central point.

Disciples who adore and follow Jesus highly value His written Word. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they continually draw out its truth. Learning to interpret poetic passages correctly is one element in adsorbing the brilliance of God.

### Follow up Question

*How does poetry in the Bible use language?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.