Two paths

The Book of Wisdom is part of the biblical wisdom tradition, which includes the Books of Sirach, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Running through the wisdom tradition is the image of the two ways or paths: the way of justice (or righteousness) and the way of wickedness.

Taking offense

The biblical wisdom tradition presents people as choosing either the path of justice or the path of wickedness. This passage from the Book of Wisdom is an example of how people act given the path they’ve chosen (it doesn’t refer to a specific situation).

Those who’ve chosen the way of wickedness plan to attack a person who’s chosen the way of justice (v.12a). This just person has warned them of their bad behavior (v.12b). He is a living reminder of the goodness and justice they’ve rejected (v.14).

The suffering just one

In the wisdom tradition the just are sometimes portrayed as having to endure the wrongdoing inflicted upon them by evildoers. The just persevere because they believe that God’s justice will prevail. Such people are so close to God the author calls them sons of God (v.18).

Jesus’ followers were initially so shocked by his crucifixion that they struggled to keep believing in him. Their faith was strengthened as they reflected on passages like this one.
Multiple failures

Jesus pauses his public ministry to teach his disciples privately. Capernaum is Peter's hometown, and Jesus frequently stayed there. Jesus speaks once again about his forthcoming suffering. His disciples fail to understand him, are too scared to ask Jesus to explain what he said. They then talk about something that contradicts him.

Criteria for greatness

As Jesus instructs his followers on what true discipleship requires, he turns conventional wisdom on its head. People often make themselves feel important by trying to dominate others or look better than them in some way. People also admire and even envy those who have power or influence.

Jesus defines “greatness” very differently than his disciples seem to have. Truly great people love and care for others instead of trying to dominate them or compete with them for power or prestige.

The model child

Jesus wants his disciples to stop being concerned about their own status and instead concern themselves with the needs and well-being of others (v.35). In order to teach his disciples how to be in the world, he draws their attention to a child.

Because children are utterly dependent on others, they represent the weakest and most vulnerable people in society. Such people are easily ignored because they have no power or influence and can neither harm nor enhance a person’s social status.

Welcoming God

Jesus unequivocally aligns himself with those who are marginalized and ignored. Anyone who claims to follow Jesus must, therefore, love and serve weaker and more vulnerable members of society.

Because Jesus, as God's Son, represents the One who sent him, those who serve others ultimately serve God. God has modeled such selfless love by submitting to the human condition in the person of his Son, who then suffered and died for others.