

Proverbs

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“My fruit is better than
gold, even pure gold...”

~Wisdom, Proverbs 8:19



Table of Contents

Lesson One: Introduction	2
Lesson Two: Seeking Wisdom	4
Lesson Three: If Wisdom Were a Person	6
Lesson Four: Proverbial People: The Wise and Wicked	8
Lesson Five: Proverbial People: The Simple, Scoffer, and Fool	10
Lesson Six: Proverbial Purity: Sexual Purity	12
Lesson Seven: A Tiny Rudder	14
Lesson Eight: Modeling Modesty	16
Lesson Nine: Self-Control	18
Lesson Ten: Wisely Handling Money	20
Lesson Eleven: A Valuable Reputation	22
Lesson Twelve: The Wisdom of Agur	24
Lesson Thirteen: Wisdom from Mom	26

One: Introduction

Practical. If we were to sum up the proverbs with one word it would have to be practical. There is likely not a book in the Bible that has more day to day knowledge in it. Every proverb is something that we can apply today. Something that can make our life better. Our life in service to God better. It is the source given to us by the Spirit of day to day wisdom.

Even the length of the book lends itself to the day to day practicality. 31 chapters. That roughly equates to one month. If we devote ourselves to reading a chapter a day, we can accomplish the task of reading through the proverbs easily in one month's time. You are encouraged to do just that. This study will encompass three month. Beginning today read a chapter a day. By the end of this study you will have read through the proverbs three times, but gained many times that in understanding.

The Author

The first verse of the Proverbs reads, "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel". Thus a bulk of the proverbs that are in this collection are from King Solomon. Other passages tell us that he was a writer of sayings. I Kings 4:32 explains that Solomon "spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005." Quite the prolific author! It goes on to explain that Solomon surpassed all the wisdom of those of the east and of Egypt and that men came from everywhere to hear the wisdom of Solomon. We are blessed today to have a collection of his inspired proverbs from which we can learn.

Solomon is not the only author in the book of proverbs. Proverbs 30 begins, "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle." Proverbs 31 begins, "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him". Thus we have these two other authors. Some think that these may be pseudonyms for Solomon, but there is little to no evidence for this being the case. There are also these words at Proverbs 25:1, "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed." So, from chapter 25 and on we have some other people involved. Being that the bulk of the book is written by Solomon, we can place the date during his reign from 970-930 BC. Hezekiah reigned beginning circa 729 BC. So it would seem that from the time Solomon recorded the proverbs to the time Hezekiah's scribes transcribed them would have been around 230 years, making the book in its current form by sometime in the late 700's BC.

What is a proverb?

Nailing down what exactly a proverb is can be a difficult task. The challenge is that there are a number of different types of proverbs contained in the Bible. As an overarching

definition we might say that it is a short and concise saying that is poetically or artistically written. Thus they are able to teach in a way that is easy to remember, like a slogan.

An important distinction to make is that some of the proverbs are observational, while others are didactic. The observational proverb is a saying that describes human behavior without making a moral point. (See Proverbs 13:7 and 18:16 for examples.) The didactic proverb, however, makes the observation and also makes an explicit moral point. (See Proverbs 13:6 and 14:1 for examples.) A failure to note this difference can lead to abusing the purpose of the proverbs.

Types of Poetry in Proverbs

Proverbs is full of different types of poetry, all designed to make the proverbs easy to read and remember. Here is a list of different types of poetry that can be found in the book. (List taken from The New American Commentary by Duane A. Garrett)

Admonition: A command or prohibition in proverb or discourse form. (Proverbs 16:3)

Numerical Sayings: A proverb that follows a number pattern. (Proverbs 30:18-19)

Rhetorical Question: A question or series of questions where the answer is understood to be obvious. (Proverbs 30:4)

Wisdom Poem: Many times these are alphabetic acrostics. (Proverbs 31:10-31)

Chiasmus: A poem in pyramid or cross form. (Proverbs 11:19-20)

Parental Exhortation: A discourse where a parent teaches a child. (Proverbs 1:8-19)

Wisdom Personified: A discourse where wisdom is presented as a person. (Proverbs 1:20-33)

Example Story: A discourse where a brief story is told for explanation. (Proverbs 24:30-34)

Confession: When the writer reveals his personal experience. (Proverbs 4:3-9)

Patterns in Proverbs

The proverbs are arranged in various patterns. Below are some of those patterns. (List taken from The New American Commentary by Duane A. Garrett)

Monocolon: A single, short sentence. (Proverbs 24:26)

Couplet: This comes in the form of parallelism (Proverbs 19:5), progression (Proverbs 17:8), and proverbial merismus (Proverbs 15:9).

Tricolon: A set of three statements that are commonly in 1+2 form (Proverbs 22:29) or 1+1+1 form (Proverbs 25:13)

Quatrain: A set of four statements that follow various forms such as *aabb* (Proverbs 24:5-6) or *abac* (Proverbs 21:25-26).

Hexad: A set of six statements following various forms. (Proverbs 30:29-30)

Two: Seeking Wisdom

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8). It is with these words that the instruction begins as the writer tries to instill the love of wisdom in his son. Solomon has a strong desire for his son to be wise as he was wise. It is going to take Solomon making the time to instruct and a desire in his son to listen. Wisdom is to be desired and valued above all else. What can we learn from the opening chapters about our search for wisdom?

The Introduction - Proverbs 1:1-7

How would you sum up this section of the book?

What does Solomon say he is trying to accomplish through Proverbs?

What will wise men do? What of foolish men?

What is the beginning of knowledge? _____

The Child’s Choice - Proverbs 1:8-19

What choice does the child have to make with regard to who instructs him?

How is the good choice described by Solomon?

How does he describe the poor choice?

What is the end result of the poor choice? _____

Pursuing Wisdom - Chapters 2-3

How would you sum up these two chapters? _____

Where does Solomon say wisdom comes from? _____

What are some good outcomes of acquiring wisdom?

What will happen to our walk in this life if we are wise and acknowledge God?

What does it mean to be “wise in your own eyes”?

What does the Lord do, as a father, since He loves us?

The Benefits of Wisdom - Chapter 4

What had Solomon’s father done for him?

How did Solomon’s father say he should treat wisdom? (verses 5-9)

How would his son’s life be better if he acquired wisdom?

What is meant by the statements at verses 25-27? Where else is this found in the Bible?

What flows from the heart and what does this mean?

Three: If Wisdom Were a Person

Personification. This is when something that is inanimate is given the qualities of a human. Think Aesop's fables. This can come in the form of talking animals or even talking tools. Think Handy Manny. While these types of personification are relatively common in media today, the book of Proverbs uses a type of personification that is less known. An intangible quality is spoken of as a person. Namely wisdom. In the book on a number of occasions wisdom is spoken of as though it were a woman. What does this woman teach?

Wisdom Shouts in the Streets - Proverbs 1:20-33

Why do you think wisdom is having to shout?

What had people done when wisdom called? Why do you think that is?

What will wisdom do when calamity befalls them? Why?

When will they turn to wisdom? What will happen when they turn to her?

Does this mean God does not give a second chance with wisdom? Why or why not?

What will happen to the one who has not listened to wisdom?

What about the one who has listened?

The Ancient Lady - Proverbs 8

What woman is wisdom being set against from the preceding chapter? _____

Why does wisdom say that the sons of men should accept her?

Who does wisdom dwell with? What does this mean?

How is the fear of the Lord described by wisdom?

How long has wisdom existed?

What happens to those that sin against lady wisdom? _____

Wisdom Calls - Proverbs 9

Why do you think wisdom is calling now instead of shouting? Who is she calling to?

What will happen if a person listens to the calling of lady wisdom?

What other woman is spoken of in this chapter? Who is she likened to?

Compare and contrast verses 4-6 with verses 14-16.

Four: The Wise and Wicked

There are a number of proverbial people that are mentioned in the book. We have already looked at a couple of them: Lady Wisdom and the woman of folly, the harlot. In this lesson we will examine a couple more proverbial people. The wise man (or righteous man) and the wicked man. Part of explaining to his son about acquiring wisdom involves getting his son to see the stark contrast between the life of the wise man and the life of the wicked man. Just as the picture is bright of the wise, it is equally bleak of the wicked.

The Wise Man

What does Proverbs 1:5 say of the wise man? What does this mean?

What will this allow the wise man to do according to Proverbs 1:6?

What kind of person is the wise man according to Proverbs 6:6-11?

What does a wise man do according to Proverbs 8:33, 9:8-9, and 10:8?

What effect does the wise man have on others according to Proverbs 10:1 and 13:20?

What does a wise man do according to Proverbs 11:30? How so?

What effect does a wise woman have on her house according to Proverbs 14:1?

What quality does a wise man have according to Proverbs 24:5-6? How does he act?

The Wicked Man

What do wicked men try to do according to Proverbs 1:10?

How does Proverbs 6:12-19 describe the wicked man? What use is he?

How does the Lord treat the wicked and the righteous differently per Proverbs 10:3?

How will the wicked be seen and remembered by others according to Proverbs 10:7?

What happens to the lifespan of the wicked per Proverbs 10:27? How so?

How is the life of the wicked characterized at Proverbs 12:21?

What does Proverbs 13:25 mean? How is this so?

How does God regard the service of the wicked according to Proverbs 15:8-9?

What enemy has the wicked person made according to Proverbs 3:33? _____

What will ultimately happen to the wicked person according to Proverbs 2:22?

Five: The Simple, Scoffer, and Fool

Continuing on with the proverbial people, tonight we look at three more. The Simple (or naive), the scoffer (or scorner) and the fool. The book of proverbs deals with these three people at length, none of which we want to be. Yet if we find ourself in one of these classifications, we can certainly do something about it! Proverbs helps us identify the problem and offers solution to the issue. May we all read and make correction where necessary so we are considered wise by God!

The Simple

What does Proverbs 1:4 say is the purpose for the naive? Who is usually naive?

Do you think it is acceptable to be naive at some stage in life? What stages?

What is the state of some of the naive per Proverbs 1:22?

What will ultimately happen to the one persistent in naiveté per Proverbs 1:32?

How is the woman of folly naive? (Proverbs 9:13)

How is Solomon essentially describing the naive one at Proverbs 14:15?

What is the ultimate destination of naiveté per Proverbs 14:18? How so?

What is one way of wising up? (Proverbs 19:25; 21:11) What happens to them at 22:3; 27:12?

The Scoffer

What does it mean to scoff? _____

How does the scoffer feel about his scoffing? (Proverbs 1:22) _____

What happens when one tries to change a scoffer per Proverbs 9:7-8?

How do you think Proverbs 9:7-8 might relate to Matthew 7:6?

What does a scoffer do according to Proverbs 14:6? Can you think of examples today?

What other monickers characterize the scoffer per Proverbs 21:24?

How does God see the scoffer per Proverbs 24:9? _____

The Fool

What does a fool think of wisdom according to Proverbs 1:7?

How are fools described at Proverbs 1:32? Why do you think they are this way?

How does a fool see wickedness at Proverbs 10:23? What does this mean?

What comparison is being made at Proverbs 13:16?

What effect can the fool have on others according to Proverbs 14:7?

Do fools learn from their consequences according to Proverbs 17:10? Why not?

What is really the motivation of the fool according to Proverbs 18:2?

Sin: Sexual Purity

One of the quickest ways to destroy one's life is through sexual immorality. Young people are ruined by this sin as it leads to disease, unexpected pregnancies and emotional damage that is often not realized fully until years later. Married people destroy their marriages and families through falling victim to the sin. But there are definitely solutions that help us avoid falling prey to this sin. The book of Proverbs says wisdom is the answer. That is, understanding that the lies of Satan are just that, lies. The wisdom of God instructs us in the way to go and reveals sexual impurity for the terrible life-destroyer that it is.

Proverbs 5

How is the speech of an adulteress described?

What does verse 4 mean?

How would you describe his son at this point? Fool, Scoffer, or naive?

What then is Solomon trying to do with his words? What is he competing against?

What strategy does Solomon give for avoiding falling victim to her?

What are some things that will happen to the one that falls victim to her?

What does Solomon have to say about the idea of "sowing wild oats"? Why is this ironic?

What should a person be satisfied with?

Proverbs 6:20-35

What does a person need to do to protect themselves from adultery?

What do verses 27-28 mean?

How does one fall victim to the adulteress?

How is a thief different from an adulterer?

What is likely to happen to the adulterer?

Proverbs 7

Why does the man in Proverbs 7 mess up? _____

How would you describe this woman?

What does this tell us about the danger to the man?

What metaphors are used to describe the victim?

Does the adulteress do this as a one time thing? _____

What is the end destination of the path of adultery?

Seven: A Tiny Rudder

James writes the following at 3:4-5: “Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.” The tongue is indeed a great danger. Thus it is no surprise that the book of practicality has much to say about the tongue. Just as James 3 offers much wisdom with regard to controlling the tongue, so does the book of Proverbs.

The Mouth of God

What comes from the mouth of God? (Proverbs 2:6)

How is the mouth of God different from the mouth of man?

We repeatedly see statements like “keep my words” found at Proverbs 7:1. What is being indicated by this statement with relation to the mouth of God?

The Poor Use of the Tongue

We have already seen the idea of the wicked man being worthless. Proverbs 6:12 says that the worthless, wicked man walks about with a perverse mouth. What do you think is meant by these men being “worthless”?

Who is worse off than a fool according to Proverbs 29:20? How so?

What two types of tongue are discussed at Proverbs 26:28? What is their motivation?

What is meant by Proverbs 26:22?

What do you think Proverbs 20:17 means?

The Good Use of the Tongue

List some ways that the tongue is a benefit to the wise as found in Proverbs 10:11-21.

What is the difference for others in a wise man's words per Proverbs 11:9 and 12:6?

What does a wise tongue accomplish and what legacy does it leave per Proverbs 12:18-19?

What does the tongue of the wise man do for him according to Proverbs 13:2? How so?

List some benefits of having a wise tongue as found in Proverbs 15.

Where is the repository for the wise tongue according to Proverbs 16:23?

What power does a tongue have according to Proverbs 18:20-21? How so?

Eight: Modeling Modesty

A great source of controversy today is found in the topic of modesty. Some believe that everything made in the last several decades is immodest to wear. Others basically believe that there is hardly anything immodest and that the sin is really in the eye of the beholder. Both sides make some valid points. We should not excuse the observer of sin due to the actions of others. We also must note that there has definitely been a progression toward immodesty in recent decades. The proverbs gives us some things to consider regarding the topic.

It Starts with Heart

What does Proverbs 4:23 mean?

How do you think this applies to the topic of modesty?

What role do you think the saint has in watching over the hearts of others?

Have you noticed any proverbs that may speak to this role? What of other passages?

Categories of Dress

What does Proverbs 7:10 have to say about the woman's dress?

Who is this woman and what is the state of her heart?

What can we discern about some types of dress from this passage?

What woman is being considered in Proverbs 31? _____

What is different about this woman's clothing per verses 25 and 30?

How do you think her spiritual clothing manifests itself in her physical appearance?

What is the source of praise for this woman?

Wasted Beauty

What do you think is meant by "discretion" at Proverbs 11:22?

What is this beautiful woman lacking discretion like?

What do you think that means?

Are there limits to where physical appearance can carry us in this world? What are they?

What do you think good physical appearance can do for us when coupled with discretion?

How much of the modesty issue do you think comes down to being clothed spiritually?

Nine: Self-Control

In reality the main message of the book comes down to self-control. We have examined self-control with regard to the tongue, dress, and sexuality. This lesson will consider what goes into our mouths, our demeanor, and how we busy ourselves. The saint must have their body under control. Not that we will never fail, but our goal should be to bring ourselves into subjection. As Paul says at I Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

Emotions

What do you think it means for our emotions to be out of control?

What are some ways that this might manifest itself?

How is the fool and the wise man different according to Proverbs 12:16?

Is it okay to be angry at times according to Proverbs 14:35?

How must we be with regard to anger according to Proverbs 14:29, 15:18, and 16:32?

What are some benefits of being of this demeanor?

What happens to the hot-tempered person per Proverbs 19:19 and 29:22?

What should we do with regard to angry people according to Proverbs 22:24-25? Why?

Consumption

What does Proverbs 20:1 have to say about alcohol?

What happens to those who love to consume according to Proverbs 21:17?

What do we learn about the dangers of alcohol at Proverbs 23:31-32?

What happens to the gluttonous according to Proverbs 23:21? What is gluttony?

How should a saint be with regard to those with out of control appetites according to Proverbs 23:20 and 28:7?

Busyness

What are some things that Proverbs 6 has to say about the sluggard? What example should we follow?

How do other people see the lazy man according to Proverbs 10:26?

How is the lazy man pictured at Proverbs 12:27, 19:24, and 22:13?

What is one of the main problems with laziness according to Proverbs 20:4?

What is the state of the lazy man's heart according to Proverbs 26:16?

Ten: Wisely Handling Money

Mishandling money brings many to ruin. Marriages and families are destroyed by the leaders of those units abusing money. It is sad because we are so blessed by God in having our daily needs met. We must remember that we are but stewards of the blessings of God. As with all stewardship, we want to be faithful stewards. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 explains that our Master will expect us to give account on the last day. This is true of spiritual blessings as well as physical. What do the proverbs teach us about handling money?

Work Hard - Proverbs 13:4

What does the sluggard do according to this proverb?

What does it mean to be diligent? What is the outcome?

What can you find in the New Testament about working?

What do you think is meant by “made fat” or “prosper”?

Avoid Debt - Proverbs 22:7

What happens to the borrower? What about the lender?

How are both of these states problematic?

What is the only thing that the borrower can do to solve the problem once indebted?

How do you view the real world application of this proverb?

Manage Money Carefully - Proverbs 27:23

What does this passage say? What would happen if the livestock owner failed in this?

Since our wealth and income is not measured in herds, how does this apply to us?

What will happen if we do not apply this principle to our income?

What strategies can you think of to accomplish this task?

Save - Proverbs 21:20

What does the wise person do? What about the foolish man?

Why would we need to save since the Lord tells us to be concerned for our **daily** needs? (Matthew 6)

What does a good man do according to Proverbs 13:22?

What are some strategies you can think of to accomplish this goal today?

Eleven: A Valuable Reputation

“Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good **repute** in the sight of God and man.” (Proverbs 3:4) The reputation of a saint must be considered in all that we do. If we are to be effective for the Lord we must be people of good repute. Of course, good repute as far as the Lord is concerned, not necessarily in the ways that many in the world would have us believe that we achieve a good reputation. Solomon explains in detail the value of a good reputation and its benefits at Proverbs 22. We should always think about how our actions will affect those that are around us lest we be a hindrance to the Lord’s work.

A Good Name for All - Proverbs 22:1-2

How much should a good name be valued? Why is it worth this?

What is meant by “favor”?

Can a rich or poor man have a good or bad name? How so?

Is our reputation out of our control?

A Reputation from Youth - Proverbs 22:6, 15

When do we start building a name for ourselves?

What responsibility then does a parent have in their child’s reputation?

Why is it so important for parents to act in this way as far as their child’s reputation?

A Good Name through Proper Love - Proverbs 22:4, 11

What does verse 4 say we should love?

What are the benefits of this? How does this apply to my reputation?

What does verse 11 say that we should love?

How will this person's speech be? What of his reputation?

A Good Name through Proper Works - Proverbs 22:3, 9, 13-16

If we are to have a good name, what should we do with regard to evil?

If we are to have a good name, how should we treat those who are in need?

What does laziness do to our name?

What does sexual immorality do to our name?

How much of a part do you think our actions play in the reputation we have? Is it ever acceptable to have a bad reputation with the people of the world?

Twelve: The Wisdom of Agur

Proverbs 30 begins, “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal”. With this chapter we shift authors to Agur. We do not have any other information about who this Agur is, biblical or extra-biblical. However, one thing we can know for sure is that the Holy Spirit recognized this man as a wise man as He recorded his words for us. Agur gives us some perspective on the value of wisdom and the limits of it for the human. While we can be very wise from reading proverbs, we are still human.

The Limits of the Human - Proverbs 30:1-6

Why do you think Agur calls himself “stupid”?

What do you think is meant by verse 4? What do you think is the answer to the questions?

What quality do the words of God have? What will they do for us?

What warning are we given with regard to the words of God?

Agur’s Prayer - Proverbs 30:7-9

How would you sum up what Agur is praying for? _____

What is the danger that Agur has observed? Do you think this is a common problem?

What makes contentment easier according to Agur?

The Lowly - Proverbs 30:10-14

Who does the world consider lowly? How should those be treated by the wise?

Who are actually lowly?

What do you think is the problem with these lowly people becoming righteous?

Numerical Sayings - Proverbs 30:15-31

How do you think verses 15-17 may relate to the previous discussion of contentment?

What is the contrast being made between the four wonderful things of verses 18-19 and the adulterous woman of verse 20?

What is so bad about the the four things the earth cannot bear from verses 21-23?

What can we learn from the four exceedingly wise things of verses 24-28?

What is the lesson of the four stately marching things of verses 29-31?

Do you see any tie between the numerical sayings and verses 32-33?

Thirteen: Wisdom from Mom

Admittedly the book of Proverbs is a very male book. Not that the same lessons do not apply to females, but it is addressed to males. This is of course due to the instructional nature of the first 24 chapters from Solomon to his sons. Beginning with chapter 25 through the words of Agur in chapter 30 things become more generic. However, with chapter 31 we find the following: "The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him". With this chapter we find teaching specific to the woman and her children.

Three Kingly Lessons - Proverbs 31:2-9

What do you think Lemuel's mother is trying to say in verse 2?

What is the first lesson she teaches her son? What does this mean?

Can you think of two previous rulers or leaders that had great problems due to this?

What is the second lesson that she teaches her son?

Are there times when use of this substance were appropriate? If so, how does she define them?

What is the final of the three preliminary lessons she teaches?

What then is the responsibility of a ruler? How does this compare with Romans 13?

The Godly Woman Chiasmus and Acrostic

Read the listed verses and write the part of the verse that aligns with its corresponding verse marked by the corresponding letter. (eg. What part of verse “A” corresponds with “a”?)

A (verse 10a) _____

B (verse 10b) _____

C (verses 11-12) _____

D (verses 13-19) _____

E (verse 20a) _____

F (verse 20b) _____

G (verse 21a) _____

H (verse 21b) _____

I (verse 22a) _____

J (verse 22b) _____

K (verse 23) _____

j (verse 24a) _____

i (verse 24b) _____

h (verse 25a) _____

g (verse 25b) _____

f (verse 26a) _____

e (verse 26b) _____

d (verse 27) _____

c (verses 28-29) _____

b (verse 30a) _____

a (verse 30b) _____

What do you think the “point” for King Lemuel is from this chiasmus?

What does verse 31 give as the conclusion Lemuel should draw?
