

Proverbs (Part 2)

The Heart of Wisdom Series

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Note: These notes are a summary of info gleaned and shaped from *The Bible Project* and the *ESV Study Bible* with my own observations intermixed.

1. The Heart of Wisdom

*So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a **heart of wisdom**.* – Psalm 90:12

¹⁵ *Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as **wise**,* ¹⁶ *making the most of your time, because the days are evil.* – Ephesians 5:15-16

*Watch over your **heart** with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.* – Proverbs 4:23

2. How do Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Job work together?

‘Proverbs is like a brilliant young teacher; Ecclesiastes is like a sharp middle-aged critic; and Job is like a weathered old man who’s seen a lot. - BP

- They help us to see the ‘rules’ and the ‘exceptions’ to the rules.
- They help us to avoid too simplistic a view of life. - BP

3. What is the book of Proverbs about?

Wise guidance for all aspects of the good life.

‘Proverbs covers a wide array of topics from daily life: diligence and laziness (Prov. 6:6–11); friendship (Prov. 3:27–28; 18:24); speech (Prov. 10:19–21); marriage (Prov. 18:22; 19:14); child rearing (Prov. 22:6); domestic peace (Prov. 15:17; 17:1); work (Prov. 11:1); getting along and good manners (Prov. 23:1–2; 25:16–17; 26:17–19; 27:14); eternity (Prov. 14:32; 23:17–18); and much more. In each of these areas it offers wisdom for realizing the life of the covenant in the details; it shows that “godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:8). - ESV Study Bible

4. What is ‘wisdom’?

Wisdom is the skill of applying truth to everyday situations.

Khokhmah (Hebrew) = mental activity plus action; skill or applied knowledge - BP

5. What is the key to ‘wisdom’?

The fear of the LORD!

The fear of the Lord is the **beginning of knowledge**; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. – Proverbs 1:7

But there is **forgiveness with You**, That You may be feared. – Psalm 130:4

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, On those who **hope for His lovingkindness**. – Psalm 33:18

The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and **keep His commandments**, because this *applies to* every person. – Ecclesiastes 12:13

‘The journey to be wise begins with the ‘fear of the LORD’ (healthy respect for God’s definitions of good and evil or right and wrong). (1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Psalm 25:12) - BP Proverbs 8:13; 14:2; Psalm 31:19; 33:8; 33:18; Psalm 47:2; 76:7; 86:11; 96:4; Psalm 111:10; 112:1; 115:11; 118:4; 128:1; 130:4; 147:11

The ‘fear of the LORD’ is to rest in Jesus (trust God for forgiveness) and hope in God (His promises of lovingkindness) and pursue love (turn from sin and obey His commands to walk in His way).

6. What is a ‘proverb’?

A practical principle of wise living that is frequently true and often observable.

Not a precept or command. Not a promise. But a practical principle of life that is frequently true and observable to most.

See Proverbs 10:27 and 22:6.

7. How is the book of Proverbs structured?

Outline of the Book (The Bible Project)

1:1-9 Introduction

1-9 Wisdom and the Fear of the LORD

- 10 Speeches of a Father to a Son (1:8-19; 2:1-22; 3:1-12; 3:21-35; 4:1-9; 4:10-19; 4:20-27; 5:1-23; 6:1-35; 7:1-27)
- 4 Poems from Lady Wisdom (1:20-33; 3:13-20; Ch. 8; Ch. 9)

10-29 *Collection of Wise Sayings*

- Apply wisdom to every imaginable topic
- Reference work to return to over and over again

30 *Poems of Agur*

- ‘Model Reader of the Proverbs’
- Needs Wisdom
- Sees God’s wisdom in the Scriptures

31 *Poems of Lemuel*

- Guidance for Wise Leadership
- Alphabet Poem about the Wise Woman (lives according the Proverbs)
- ‘Model of Practical Wisdom Living’

8. Who wrote the book of Proverbs?

- Solomon (1:1; 10:1; 1:1-22:16; 25-29)
- ‘The Wise’ (22:17-24:22; 24:23-34)
- Agur (30)
- Lemuel (31)

Author

‘Proverbs itself mentions Solomon (reigned c. 971–931 B.C.) as author or collector of its contents (Prov. 1:1; 10:1), including the proverbs copied by Hezekiah’s men (Prov. 25:1). There are also two batches of sayings from a group called “the wise” (Prov. 22:17–24:22; 24:23–34), and “oracles” from Agur (Prov. 30:1–33) and Lemuel (Prov. 31:1–9). But no author is named for the song in praise of the excellent wife that ends the book (Prov. 31:10–31). – ESV Study Bible

Date

‘In summary, there is nothing that speaks against and much that speaks in favor of dating the materials in Proverbs to the Solomonic era. This does not mean that Solomon personally composed every proverb in the book, and the text does not say that he did. Further, the present form of the book is from a later time than the age of Solomon, but probably no later than Hezekiah.

Genre

The book of Proverbs is wisdom literature and in particular, a collection of wise sayings or proverbs.

Proverbs is the prime example of “Wisdom Literature” in the OT, the other books being Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, together with the wisdom psalms (e.g., Psalm 112). In the NT, James is usually counted as a wisdom book, and parts of Jesus’ teaching belong in this category as well. (See ESV Study Bible, pp. 865–868.) – ESV Study Bible

9. What characters do we see in the book of Proverbs?

- The Wise

righteous, prudent, sensible

- The Simple (Naïve)

lacking sense, lacking understanding

- The Fool

wicked, scoffer, one wise in his own eyes

‘To read Proverbs well, one must have a good grasp of who the character types are and what function they serve in the book.

The most obvious characters in the book are the wise, the fool, and the simple. Proverbs urges its readers to be wise, that is, to embrace God’s covenant and to learn the skill of living out the covenant in everyday situations (cf. Prov. 2:2).

‘The *wise* person has done that (cf. Prov. 10:1); usually Proverbs focuses on the one who has made good progress in that skill, whose example is worth following (cf. Prov. 9:8b).

‘The *fool* is the person steadily opposed to God’s covenant (cf. Prov. 1:7b). The setting of Proverbs assumes there can be fools even among God’s people. There are three Hebrew terms translated “fool” (*kesil*, *’ewil*, *nabal*), with little difference among them. This kind of person resists even the offer of forgiveness found in the covenant (Prov. 14:9; 15:8). These people are dangerous in their influence (Prov. 13:20; 17:12) and cause grief to their parents (Prov. 10:1); but they are not beyond hope (Prov. 8:5).

‘The *simple* is the person who is not firmly committed, either to wisdom or to folly; he is easily misled (cf. Prov. 14:15). His trouble is that he does not apply himself to the discipline needed to gain and grow in wisdom.

‘Proverbs also uses other terms, both positive (e.g., righteous, upright, diligent, understanding, prudent) and negative (e.g., wicked, lazy, lacking sense). These do not designate different groups of people from the wise and the fools; rather, the terms are commonly “co-referential,” i.e., they apply to the same people looked at from different angles. The *righteous* is the one who has

embraced the covenant, seen from the perspective of his faithfulness to God's will; the *wise* is the same person, seen from the perspective of his skill in living out God's will; the *prudent* is the same individual seen as one who carefully plans out his obedience. Likewise, the *wicked* is the one who rejects God's covenant, seen from the angle of his opposition to God; the *fool* is this same person, seen from the angle of the stupid course of life he has chosen. The co-referential use of these terms helps the reader to discern the many-sided fruits of godliness and ungodliness.

'Also, these characters usually serve as idealized portraits: that is, they denote people exemplary for their virtue and wisdom or especially despicable for their evil. The literary name for this is "caricature": portraits of people with features exaggerated for easy identification. The positive figures serve as ideals for the faithful, to guide their conduct and character formation. The negative figures are exaggerated portraits of those who do not embrace the covenant, so the faithful can recognize these traits in themselves and flee them.

'Beyond the co-referential negative terms, there are some gradations: the *scoffer* is worse than a fool (Prov. 21:24), and the person *wise in his own eyes* is almost beyond hope (cf. Prov. 26:12). The difference is one of hardness in unteachability (the great sin in Proverbs). The *simple* is not as far gone as the fool. All of these are what the OT calls "uncircumcised" in heart, and what Christian theology calls "unregenerate." - ESV Study Bible

The Wise = those skilled in crafting the good life

Proverbs 1:3

To receive instruction in **wise** behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;

Proverbs 1:5

A **wise** man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire **wise** counsel,

Proverbs 1:6

To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the **wise** and their riddles.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a **wise** man is he who listens to counsel.

Proverbs 15:31

He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the **wise**.

Proverbs 18:15

The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the **wise** seeks knowledge.

The Righteous = having a right standing before God and in pursuit of right practice

Proverbs 9:9

Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a **righteous** man and he will increase *his* learning.

Proverbs 10:31

The mouth of the **righteous** flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out.

Proverbs 12:3

A man will not be established by wickedness, But the root of the **righteous** will not be moved.

Proverbs 12:21

No harm befalls the **righteous**, But the wicked are filled with trouble.

Proverbs 15:29

The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the **righteous**.

Proverbs 18:10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The **righteous** runs into it and is safe.

Proverbs 23:24

The father of the **righteous** will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him.

Proverbs 29:7

The **righteous** is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern.

The Prudent = crafty or wisely creative in achieving ends

Proverbs 18:15

The mind of the **prudent** acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

Proverbs 22:3

The **prudent** sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.

The Sensible = (prudent) crafty or wisely creative in achieving ends

Proverbs 14:8

The wisdom of the **sensible** is to understand his way, But the foolishness of fools is deceit.

Proverbs 14:15

The naive believes everything, But the **sensible** man considers his steps.

Proverbs 15:5

A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is

sensible.

The Naïve = simple: not thoughtful and easily misled

Proverbs 1:22

“How long, O **naive** ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge?”

Proverbs 1:32

“For the waywardness of the **naive** will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

Proverbs 14:15

The **naive** believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps.

Proverbs 22:3

The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the **naive** go on, and are punished for it.

The One Lacking Sense = needs ‘heart’: needs a right mind

Proverbs 6:32

The one who commits adultery with a woman is **lacking sense**; He who would destroy himself does it.

Proverbs 12:11

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who pursues worthless *things* **lacks sense**.

The One Lacking Understanding = needs ‘heart’: needs a right mind

Proverbs 9:4

“Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!” To him who **lacks understanding** she says,

Proverbs 10:21

The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for **lack of understanding**.

The Fool = enslaved to wrong choices because of wrong thinking and wrong desires

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; **Fools** despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a **fool** is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Proverbs 14:16

A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a **fool** is arrogant and careless.

Proverbs 15:5

A **fool** rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible.

Proverbs 17:24

Wisdom is in the presence of the one who has understanding, But the eyes of a **fool** are on the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 18:2

A **fool** does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.

Proverbs 19:3

The **foolishness** of man ruins his way, And his heart rages against the Lord.

Proverbs 26:7

Like the legs *which* are useless to the lame, So is a proverb in the mouth of **fools**.

Proverbs 28:26

He who trusts in his own heart is a **fool**, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.

The Wicked = increasingly guilty before the law and content in that guilt

Proverbs 9:7

He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a **wicked** man *gets* insults for himself.

Proverbs 10:23

Doing **wickedness** is like sport to a fool, And *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.

Proverbs 11:18

The **wicked** earns deceptive wages, But he who sows righteousness *gets* a true reward.

Proverbs 12:5

The thoughts of the righteous are just, *But* the counsels of the **wicked** are deceitful.

Proverbs 15:8

The sacrifice of the **wicked** is an abomination to the Lord, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Proverbs 21:4

Haughty eyes and a proud heart, The lamp of the **wicked**, is sin.

Proverbs 28:4

Those who forsake the law praise the **wicked**, But those who keep the law strive with them.

The Scoffer = ‘scorner; mocker’: those who immediately dismiss the negative evaluations/constructive criticism of others

Proverbs 9:8

Do not reprove a **scoffer**, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you.

Proverbs 13:1

A wise son *accepts his* father’s discipline, But a **scoffer** does not listen to rebuke.

Proverbs 21:24

“Proud,” “Haughty,” “**Scoffer**,” are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.

The One Wise in His Own Eyes

Proverbs 3:7

Do not be wise in your **own eyes**; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

Proverbs 26:12

Do you see a man wise in his **own eyes**? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 28:11

The rich man is wise in his **own eyes**, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.

10. How is Christ seen in the book of Proverbs?

Wisdom Personified!

‘It would appear, however, that Proverbs 8 played a role in the way NT authors described Christ. Paul’s “*before* all things” (Col. 1:17) seems to draw on Proverbs 8:23–26, with its repeated “before.” Wisdom in Proverbs 8 seems to be a personality—indeed, it seems to be what rationality would be if it were a person—by which God made the world. This is like Psalms 33:6, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made.” The NT authors further expand this idea in texts such as John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16–17; and Hebrews 1:3, 10–12, all of which insist that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of that divine person through whom God made the world. – ESV Study Bible

11. How does the book of Proverbs fit in with Christ-exalting, gospel-centered living?

- Fools and Simpletons = Rest in Jesus
- Fear of the LORD = Hope in God
- Wise Living = Pursuit of Love

The Bible Project Summary

Purpose of Proverbs

‘The book of Proverbs contains sayings and riddles featuring wisdom, applied knowledge that helps every person develop practical skills to live well in God's world. = Pursue Love

Fear of the Lord

‘The journey to wisdom begins with fear of the Lord, a reverential and healthy respect of Him. Only then can we embrace a moral mindset. = Hope in God

Generational Insight

‘Ten speeches from a father and four poems from lady wisdom show us that Proverbs is God's own invitation to learn wisdom from previous generations.

The Good Life

‘Read hundreds of sayings that apply wisdom and fear of the Lord to every subject imaginable. They offer formulas for success but are not promises.

Godly Woman

‘A woman of noble character models someone who takes God's wisdom found in Proverbs and translates it into practical decisions for success in everyday life. = Resting in Jesus

12. What should we keep in mind as we read and seek to understand and apply the book of Proverbs?

- Comparison = *broad principle pictured?*
- Context = *covenant of grace, wise fear of the LORD, other proverbs*
- Concreteness = *specific situations with general application*
- Contradictions = *apply to appropriate situations*
- Consequences = *probabilities not promises*

‘The book of Proverbs is what the title implies—a collection or anthology of individual proverbs. In addition to being teachers and authority figures, the wise men of ancient cultures were literary craftsmen—careful observers of the human condition and masters of a particular kind of discourse (the proverb).

‘The first nine chapters of the book are wisdom poems that extend over several verses, urging the reader to pursue wisdom. The proverbs proper—the concise, memorable statement of two or three lines—begin in Proverbs 10:1.

‘A proverb works by making a *comparison*, and leaving it to the reader to work out how the proverb applies to different situations, following current cultural conventions. In English, “You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink” is regularly applied to human relationships rather than ranching, and the competent reader knows this.

‘One question in reading Proverbs concerns *context*, namely, *is there any?* The Purpose, Occasion, and Background section has already argued that the covenant provides the theological context (hence God’s grace and Israel’s life in the land are always assumed); likewise, one can easily recognize subsistence agriculture (living from one crop to the next) as the basic cultural context (hence wealth and poverty are understood in that setting). There is also literary context: chapters 1–9 provide the ideals and motivation for pursuing wisdom, giving the right frame of mind in which to read the one-sentence proverbs. Additionally, chapters 1–9 are composed of coherent paragraphs in which the individual verses have their meaning. But do paragraphs occur in chapters 10–31 (besides the acrostic poem, Prov. 31:10–31)? It appears that in many cases they do, and so in reading the individual one-sentence proverbs, one must take account of their possible location in a paragraph context. The notes aim to apply this principle.

‘A feature of wisdom literature is its *concreteness*: i.e., the principle is often given in terms of a specific circumstance or a specific person, rather than in terms of a generalization about people (plural). The false balance, contrasted with the just weight (Prov. 11:1), is a particular instance of the difference between swindling and honesty in one’s work ethic and commercial dealings. A father speaks to his son, recalling his own boyhood (Prov. 4:1–4), as a specific parent speaking to a particular child (rather than to one’s children or to children in general). The idea is not to exclude, say, fathers speaking to daughters (or mothers speaking to sons and daughters); rather, by reflecting on a specific instance the wise reader will perceive the application to his or her own situation (making the appropriate adaptations).

‘In some cases individual proverbs seem to supply *contradictions*; the best example is Proverbs 26:4–5, admonishing not to answer a fool, and then to answer a fool. These are only contradictory if it is forgotten that they are proverbs, and not laws: the successive verses apply in different situations (see ESV Study Bible note on Prov. 25:28–26:12). Most languages have the same phenomenon: English has “Many hands make light work” and “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” At first sight these seem contradictory, but wisdom includes competence in matching the proverb to the right situation.

‘Proverbs of necessity focus on *consequences*, and this raises the question of whether they are “promises.” Proverbs by nature deal with general truths, and are not meant to cover every conceivable situation. Consider the English proverb, “Short cuts make long delays”; the very form of the proverb forbids adding qualifiers, whether of frequency (often, usually, four times out of five) or of conditions (except in cases where . . .); these would lessen the memorability of the sentence. The competent reader knows that the force of the proverb is not statistical, but behavioral—in the case of the English proverb cited, to urge due caution. In biblical proverbs, the consequences generally make God’s basic attitude clear, and thus commend or discourage behavior.

‘Proverbs often seem to be mere observations about life, but their deeper meanings will reveal themselves if the following grid is applied:

1. What *virtue* does this proverb commend?
 2. What *vice* does it hold up for disapproval?
 3. What *value* does it affirm?
- ESV Study Bible