

Slide 1

The Book of Proverbs

Introduction

1. What is a proverb?
2. A proverb is a short, traditional piece of wisdom which teaches us a lesson about life or a practical rule of thumb.
3. There are a number of proverbs in English with which many of us are familiar.

Slide 2

I. Well Known Proverbs

A. ACTIONS AND EFFORT

1. **Actions speak louder than words:** What a person actually does matters more than what they say.
2. **The early bird catches the worm:** Arriving early or acting fast gives you an advantage.
3. **Practice makes perfect:** Doing something repeatedly is the best way to master it.
4. **Rome wasn't built in a day:** Great and complex tasks take time and patience to complete.
5. **Where there's a will, there's a way:** Strong determination will help you find a solution to any problem.

Slide 3

B. CAUTION AND WISDOM

1. **Don't judge a book by its cover:** Do not form an opinion about someone or something based only on outward appearance.

2. **Look before you leap:** Carefully think about the risks before taking action.
3. **Don't put all your eggs in one basket:** Do not risk everything you have on a single venture or opportunity.
4. **A stitch in time saves nine:** Fixing a small problem immediately stops it from turning into a massive headache later.
5. **Curiosity killed the cat:** Being overly nosy or inquisitive can lead to danger.

Slide 4

C. CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIPS

1. **Honesty is the best policy:** Telling the truth is always better than lying.
2. **Birds of a feather flock together:** People who are alike or share similar interests tend to spend time together.
3. **The grass is always greener on the other side:** Other people's lives or situations always appear to look better than your own.
4. **No man is an island:** People cannot live well when they are completely isolated from others; everyone needs help and community.

Slide 5

D. ACCEPTANCE AND PERSPECTIVE

1. **Every cloud has a silver lining:** Every difficult or sad situation has a hopeful or positive side to it.
2. **It's no use crying over spilled milk:** There is no point in wasting time or being upset over something that has already happened and cannot be undone.
3. **Better late than never:** Doing something late is still better than not doing it at all

Slide 6

II. Aspects To Consider In Our Study

A. GOD'S DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

1. Our modern culture considers a person successful if he or she has material wealth, is famous or is enjoying the pleasures of life.

 “. . . take your ease, eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19).
2. The Bible, however, sets forth an entirely different measure of success.
 - a. Success is found in living wisely in the fear of the Lord.
 - b. To live wisely is to live beautifully—that is, to live a life that counts.
3. The book of Proverbs is the one book in the Old Testament which provides us with practical advice on how to live godly lives in the midst of a changing world.

Slide 7

B. THE UNIQUENESS OF BIBLICAL PROVERBS

1. The collecting of proverbs is not unique to the Bible
2. Solomon was not the only man in the ancient world who took interest in wise sayings (cf. 1 Kings 4:30-31).

“Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations.” (1 Kings 4:30–31, NASB95)

- a. The Egyptians and Babylonians, among others, had wise men who spoke and collected proverbs.
 - b. These proverbs have similarities to those in the Bible.
 - c. Even those outside God’s chosen people recognized many aspects of God’s moral order.
 - d. It may even be that Solomon incorporated some of the sayings of other cultures into the biblical book of Proverbs (cf. 1 Kings 4:30-34)
2. The biblical proverbs are unique:

- a. They are grounded in covenant relation with the LORD God: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7a).
 - 1) Solomon doesn’t merely offer clever sayings that provide useful advice on how to enjoy worldly success.
 - 2) Instead, he teaches that true wisdom and success are rooted in having a right relationship with God, who is the Source of all wisdom.
 - 3) The wisdom of the world may appear to be similar to the godly wisdom, but when we look more closely, we find there are essential differences .
 - 4) “The wisdom of their wise men will perish” (Isaiah 29:14).
- b. The biblical proverbs are divinely inspired and infallible (2 Timothy 3:16).

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;” (2 Timothy 3:16, NASB95)

 - 1) Earthly wisdom is a fallible mix of truth and error.
 - 2) God’s wisdom can be fully relied upon because it is inerrant.
- 3. Most importantly, the book of Proverbs looks beyond Solomon to Christ, who is greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:38, 42).

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.”” (Matthew 12:38, NASB95)

“The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:42, NASB95)

 - a. While Solomon failed to live according to the wisdom God gave him, Jesus is Wisdom personified (Proverbs 8:22-31; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; Colossians 2:3).

“... but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:24, NASB95)

“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,” (1 Corinthians 1:30, NASB95)

“... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
(Colossians 2:3, NASB95)

- b. It is in relation to Jesus Christ that we as Christians are able to live according to the wisdom about which Solomon writes.

Slide 9

C. PROVERBS AND THE REST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The book of Proverbs holds a special place in the Bible as the pinnacle of wisdom literature.
2. Proverbs assumes and builds upon the precepts of the law and the admonitions of the prophets but goes beyond them in training the reader to live wisely in a very practical 'how to' way.
3. Derek Kidner in his commentary on the Proverbs writes, “There are details of character small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadsides of the prophets, and yet decisive in personal dealings. Proverbs moves in this realm.”¹
4. Reading the historical narratives in the light of Proverbs helps us to identify wise and foolish men and women to learn from the outcomes of their lives.

Slide 5

D. CHALLENGES IN STUDYING PROVERBS

1. *It is difficult to do a consecutive study or exposition of some sections of Proverbs.*

¹ Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), p. 13.

- a. Chapters 1 - 9 and chapter 31 contain extended developments of particular ideas and need to be studied consecutively.
 - b. The proverbs and sayings in chapters 10 - 30 are shorter and tend to jump from subject to subject.
 - c. The content of these chapters needs to be covered topically rather than going verse by verse.
2. *The book of Proverbs contains maxims, which are not the same as promises.*
- a. There is a tendency to misread the book of Proverbs as a book of promises:
 - 1) If you raise your children correctly, they will be godly and never rebel (22:6).

“Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6, NASB95)
 - 2) If you work hard, you will be rich (10:4).

“Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.” (Proverbs 10:4, NASB95)
 - 3) If you act wisely, you will live to a ripe old age (3:2).

“For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.” (Proverbs 3:2, NASB95)
 - b. The reality, however, is that . . .
 - 1) Some godly people have troubled kids, and some ungodly people have wonderful children (Ezekiel 18:5-18).
 - 2) Some hard-working Christians struggle to make ends meet.
 - 3) Fools sometimes win the lottery.
 - 4) Some godly individuals die at an early age an incurable illness or a tragic accident.
 - 5) Some who abuse substances defy the odds and live to a ripe old age.

- c. The maxims of the book of Proverbs express general principles of how God runs the world.
 - 1) Those who live wisely are generally blessed with success in parenting and finances and with long life.
 - 2) The foolish, on the other hand, can generally expect trouble in this life because of their defiance of God's principles of wisdom.
 - 3) The exceptional cases do not nullify the wisdom of these sayings.
- 3. *The book of Proverbs is primarily addressed to men.*
 - a. Some have been troubled because sons are repeatedly addressed in Proverbs with little reference to daughters.
 - b. While men and women are spiritually equal (Galatians 3:28), God has assigned different roles to men and women.
 - c. Men are to be the leaders in the home and in the church (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:12-13; 3:1-7).
 - d. The subordinate role of women is not demeaning, but rather women are like Christ, who willingly submitted to the headship of his Father (1 Corinthians 11:3).
 - e. Proverbs is written to young men as leaders in the covenant community and in their homes.
 - f. The LORD addresses wives and daughters through their husbands, sons, and rulers under whose headship they fall.
 - g. Therefore, the truths in Proverbs apply equally to women.

Slide 6

E. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IS FOR EVERYONE

- 1. Proverbs is written to prepare *a young person* for the challenges and opportunities of responsible adulthood.
- 2. Proverbs instructs *parents* in how to train their children (Proverbs 1:8).

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction And do not forsake your mother’s

teaching;" (Proverbs 1:8, NASB95)

3. Proverbs offers the basics of wisdom to those who are *young and naive* (Proverbs 1:4).

"To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,"
(Proverbs 1:4, NASB95)

4. Proverbs deepens the understanding of those who are *already wise* (Proverbs 1:5).

"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding
will acquire wise counsel," (Proverbs 1:5, NASB95)

5. Proverbs exposes *the fool* and identifies the outcome of his or her arrogant rebellion (Proverbs 1:7b, 32).

"Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7, NASB95)

"For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of
fools will destroy them." (Proverbs 1:32, NASB95)

III. Background and Summary

Slide 7

A. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON (1A)

1. Proverb defined.
 - a. Hebrew word translated 'proverbs' essentially means 'similitude' or 'likeness.'
 - b. 'A short witty saying that gives you a standard by which you might judge your life.'²
 - c. 'A comparison, an object lesson, a simple illustration, or a parable which

² Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs Audio Series*, from www.believerschapeldallas.org.

exposes a fundamental reality about life.’³

2. The objective of the book of Proverbs is to enable us to live successfully in relationship to God in the world He has created.
3. Though this book is entitled ‘Proverbs’, the short pithy sayings do not begin until chapter 10.
4. Chapters 1-9 are an extended appeal for the reader to seek wisdom.

Slide 8

B. AUTHORSHIP (1B)

1. This book is titled ‘The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.’
 - a. It is appropriate that Solomon be named as the primary author of this book because he was the wisest man on earth (1 Kings 3:12; 4:29-34).
 - b. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32), of which fewer than one-third are recorded.
 - c. Solomon’s proverbs make up the core of the book (10:1-22:16; 25:1-29:27).
 - d. Solomon is also, most likely, the author of the introductory discourses (chapters 1-9).
2. A careful examination of Proverbs reveals, however, that Solomon is not the only contributor.
 - a. Proverbs 25:1 begins a collection of Solomon’s sayings which were transcribed by men of Hezekiah who lived around 700 B.C. (250 years after Solomon).
 - b. Proverbs 30:1 contains the heading “the words of Agur the son of Jakeh.”
 - c. Proverbs 31:1 begins with these words “the words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him.”
3. There is a bit of irony we may take away from this book.

³ Ibid.

- a. In his later years, Solomon himself did not consistently pursue the wisdom we find taught in Proverbs.
- b. The result was that his life was ravaged by foolishness (1 Kings 11).
 1. The lesson we take from this is that 'Spiritual success today does not guarantee spiritual success tomorrow.'⁴

Slide 9

C. SETTING

1. The home, where father and mother are instructing their beloved son (Proverbs 1:8).

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction And do not forsake your mother’s teaching;” (Proverbs 1:8, NASB95)
2. The palace, where a young man is being prepared for the responsibilities of leadership (Proverbs 31:1).

“The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him:” (Proverbs 31:1, NASB95)

Slide 10

D. DIVISIONS

1. Prologue (1:1-7)
2. A tenfold call to pursue wisdom (1:8-9:18)
3. The proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)
4. Sayings of the wise (22:17-24:34)
5. More proverbs of Solomon (the Hezekiah collection) (25:1-29:27)
6. The words of Agur (30:1-33)

⁴ Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, p. 36.

7. The words of King Lemuel (or rather, of his mother) (31:1-9)
8. An acrostic of wifely excellence (31:10-31)

Conclusion

1. As we conclude tonight, I want to leave you with two verses from Proverbs on wisdom:

“The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.” (**Proverbs 4:7, NASB95**)

“Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding;”
(**Proverbs 2:2, NASB95**)

2. As we continue through this study, let me encourage you to seek the wisdom of God.
3. Remember, what James wrote, “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5, NASB95).