

Proverbs

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Introduction

All of us have a desire to know more. We want to understand. We look at things sometimes and wonder how they work. We have schools, colleges, universities, technical institutes, and the “school of life” that help teach us things that will aid us in understanding things we want to know about. We use that knowledge to build a better life, to make better decisions, and to aid us in making a living.

However, there is a great deal of difference between knowledge, which is good, and wisdom. Knowledge is having the facts. Wisdom is applying those facts to everyday life. We can have all the knowledge in the world, but without having wisdom on how to apply it effectively to everyday living, it is useless.

The wisest man who ever lived, Solomon left his legacy in the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. He wrote this book (as well as Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon) under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is still just as relevant today as when he wrote it. The book gives us practical insight and guidelines for daily Christian living.

The main theme of the book of Proverbs is the nature of true wisdom. Solomon writes **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”** ([Proverbs 1:7](#)). We see that Solomon starts right where he should – the fear (respect) of the Lord being the foundation of true knowledge and wisdom. He then proceeds to give hundreds of practical examples on how to live a Godly life.

We’ll see that the book covers a variety of topics, including youth and discipline, family life, self-control, resisting temptation, business matters, our speech, knowing God, marriage, seeking the truth, wealth and poverty, immorality, and wisdom.

The word proverb comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to rule or govern”. We are encouraged to use these sayings to help rule and govern our lives in a proper Christian manner.

The bottom line is that knowing God is the key to having wisdom in our lives. We must apply these tenets to our lives on a daily basis. We must not merely read them – we must act on them.

Background

- Written by King Solomon, the 3rd King of Israel and the son of King David and Bathsheba, early in his reign as King.
- God told Solomon He would give him whatever he asked, and he requested wisdom. God was pleased with this, and not only gave him wisdom, but also great riches, power, and a time of peace during his reign as King. ([1 Kings 3:5-14](#)).
- During his reign, Solomon also built the Great Temple at Jerusalem that is spoken about in the New Testament.
- The main purpose of the book was to teach people how to attain wisdom, discipline, a Godly life, and how to do what was right, and just, and fair. It was to show all people how to apply divine wisdom to daily life, as well as giving moral instruction.
- The book uses various items such as poems, stories, and pointed questions to get its message across.
- It is actually divided into 3 distinct sections:

Proverbs 1:1 – 9:18 Wisdom for Young Men

Solomon taught the young men of his day similar to the way a father would give advice to his son. Although many of these opening proverbs are aimed at young men, the principles behind these can be applied to all people, regardless of gender or age.

Proverbs 10:1 – 24:34 Wisdom for All People

Solomon wanted to impart his wisdom to all people, regardless of their age, gender, or position in society. This section gives us all practical wisdom for everyday living, which we need to adhere to and integrate into our lives.

Proverbs 25:1 – 31:1 Wisdom for Leaders

The third section of proverbs is a little more general in nature, but many are directed specifically at the King and those who dealt with the King. We'll find these can be useful for those in leadership positions, or for anyone desiring to be in a leadership position (pastors, deacons, Sunday School teachers, musicians, directors, managers, etc.).

- We must never forget that although Solomon was very wise and very rich, he was still human – and he still made mistakes. He was said to have had over 700 wives and 300 concubines. He married in this way to attain and maintain alliances that added

to his property and his wealth. All of these women came from various religious backgrounds, many of them being pagan. To please them and keep peace, he allowed them to build shrines and temples to these gods where they could worship. As a result of Solomon's sin, a serious phase of idol worship came into Israel and this was also partly the cause for the future break-up of the nation. As one author states, "He is credited with words of deepest wisdom, yet he seemed unable to abide by them."

Themes of Proverbs

Wisdom

God wants His people to be wise. In life, there is the "broad way", portrayed in the NT as the path most of the world takes as they turn away from Christ. There is also the "narrow way", portrayed in the NT as the way that those who follow Christ must walk. The scripture states that there will be few that find this way.

"Enter ye at the strait gate. For wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it."

[\(Matthew 7:13-14\)](#)

In Proverbs, the people who walk these two paths of life are seen throughout the book. The fool is the wicked, stubborn person who ignores or even hates God. The wise person is the one who seeks to know and love God.

Why is this important?

When we choose to follow God, he grants us wisdom. His Holy Word, the Bible, is to be used daily to help us to live right, to have right relationships with each other, and to make decisions in our life that are Godly and right.

Relationships

Proverbs give us advice on developing our relationships with everyone we come into contact with – friends, family, co-workers, and fellow church members. In all of our relationships, we need to ensure we also show love, dedication, and high moral standards – as reflective of the Christ whom we serve.

Why is this important?

To relate to people, and especially each other, we need consistency, tact, and discipline to use the wisdom God gave us. If we don't treat each other according to the wisdom of God, our relationships suffer.

Speech

Words can hurt or build up. Scripture even tells us that our tongue can be used for praise or for cursing. **"But the tongue no man can tame. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father. And therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."** ([James 3:8-9](#))

What we say shows our real attitude toward others. How we talk reveals what we're really like. Our speech is a real test of how wise we have become.

Why is this important?

To be wise in our speech, we must use self-control. To do this effectively, we need God guiding our thoughts and our tongue. Our words should be honest, well-chosen, and full of love.

Work

God is in control of the final outcome of all we do. We are accountable to Him, those who employ us, as well as to each other, to carry out our work daily with diligence, discipline, and moral ethics, and not laziness.

Why is this important?

God evaluates how we live our lives daily. We should always use the gifts and talents He gave us for His glory, not for our own. The scripture tells us **"Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."** ([Titus 2:14](#))

Success

I heard a man say once, *"Success is getting what you want; happiness is enjoying what you get."* There's truth in that statement. We all work hard daily for our living, but money and fame are not the most important aspect in life. God views success as having a good reputation, good moral character, and obedience to Him.

Why is this important?

The scriptures tell us, **"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"** ([Mark 8:36](#)). A

successful relationship with God is ongoing, not just something we put on Sunday morning and take off when we get home from church. In the big scheme of things, nothing is more important than our relationship with God. Everything else will pass away. All of our resources, time, and talents come from God – and we need to use them wisely.

Understanding Proverbs

Proverbs is written in what is known as couplets. These are constructed in 3 different ways that we'll see in our study.

Examples

Contrasting – The meaning and daily application of the proverb comes from the difference or contrast between the two statements of the proverb. The key word in these is “but”. **“The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but He casteth away the substance of the wicked.” (Proverbs 10:3)**

Comparing – The meaning and daily application of these proverbs come from the similarities or comparison between the two statements of the proverb. The key words here are words like “as, so, better, than, like”. **“As vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.” (Proverbs 10:26)**

Complementing – The meaning and daily application of these proverbs comes from the way the second statement complements the first statement. The key word in these proverbs is “and”. **“A gracious woman retaineth honor; and strong men retain riches.” (Proverbs 11:16)**