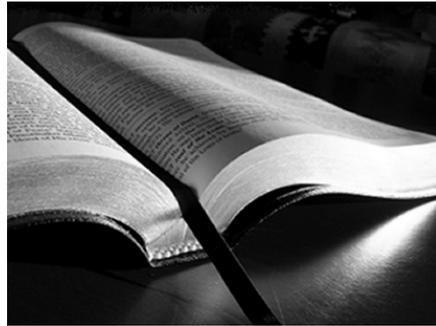


Proverbs



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Supplemental Sources for This Study

"Proverbs" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (vol. 5) by Allen P. **Ross**

"Proverbs" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (OT vol.) by Sid S. **Buzzell**

"Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary" in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* by Derek **Kidner**

"Proverbs" in *The Communicator's Commentary* by David A. **Hubbard**

Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice by Robert L. **Alden**

"Proverbs" in *The NIV Application Commentary* by Paul E. **Koptak**

"Proverbs" in *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms* by Tremper **Longman**

"Proverbs" in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry* by Warren **Wiersbe**

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is found among the Poetic Books of the English Old Testament.¹ Of the five Poetic Books, Proverbs is one of three further categorized as books of Wisdom (Job and Ecclesiastes being the others). According to Wiersbe (p. 387), the words “wise” and “wisdom” are mentioned some 125 times in the book of Proverbs.

The English word “proverbs” is derived from a compound Latin word that literally means “for words” (*pro* = for + *verba* = words), indicative of the way a proverb concentrates many words into a few (*The New Open Bible*). The Hebrew noun translated “proverb” may have as its root the Hebrew verb meaning “to rule.” Accordingly, one has defined proverbs as “wise, concise sayings that are to be used in governing our lives” (Paul Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 156). More likely, the root is the Hebrew verb meaning “to be like.” Accordingly, another has defined a proverb as “a statement that seeks to reveal the true nature of one thing by comparing it to something else” (C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, p. 207). According to Cervantes (cited in Koptak, p. 21), proverbs are “short sentences drawn from long experience.” According to another, a proverb has three qualities: shortness, sense, and salt (Koptak, p. 21). A biblical proverb has been defined as “a concise, memorable saying, usually in poetic form, expressing a generally accepted observation about life as filtered through biblical revelation” (Robert McCabe, “Old Testament Poetic Books” class syllabus, p. 78).

Can you recite some famous English proverbs? How about some biblical ones?

The Author of Proverbs

Like the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs has multiple authors. The primary author of Proverbs (as David is in Psalms) is Solomon (see 1:1, 10:1, and 25:1). This comes as no surprise, as Solomon was renowned for his wisdom (see 1 Kings 3:16-28, 4:29-34, and 10:1-7) and spoke 3,000 proverbs (1 Kings 4:32; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:9).² Most believe that Solomon wrote his proverbs during the middle years of his life (Song of Solomon in his early years, Ecclesiastes in his later years). Two other authors are specifically named: Agur (see 30:1) and King Lemuel (see 31:1). “The wise” (see 22:17 and 24:23) may be a fourth author. The “virtuous woman” passage (31:10-31) may have been penned by a fifth, albeit anonymous, author. Assuming all of the above to be correct, the authorship of Proverbs can be visualized as follows:

¹The English Old Testament can be subdivided as follows: The Law or Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy), History (Joshua-Esther), Poetry (Job-Song of Solomon), and Prophets, both Major (Isaiah-Daniel) and Minor (Hosea-Malachi).

²The book of Proverbs contains less than a thousand of Solomon’s proverbs.

Section	Author
1:1 - 22:16; 25:1 - 29:27	Solomon
22:17 - 24:34	“the wise”
30:1-33	Agur
31:1-9	King Lemuel
31:10-31	anonymous

The Primary Recipients of Proverbs

To whom was the book of Proverbs written? Based on 1:4, it appears that the book was written primarily to young people. “The topics of the book of Proverbs, while appropriate to the broad spectrum of age, are clearly directed to the young, whose surging emotions and untried idealism needed to be tempered by experience” (Bullock, p. 151). More specifically, you will find continual reference to “my son” (see 1:8, 10, 15, 2:1, et. al.). Is Solomon writing to one of his sons (perhaps Rehoboam)? More likely, Solomon is writing to his students. It is believed that Solomon was the headmaster of a school of wise men (the “Preacher” of Ecclesiastes 1:1), and it was typical in that day for a teacher to address a pupil as “son” (Norman Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 206). Hubbard (pp. 26-28) makes the case that Proverbs was written to young Israeli men being groomed for leadership positions. This would explain the book’s focus on wicked and virtuous women without a corresponding focus on wicked and virtuous men.

The Date of Writing

When was the book of Proverbs written? Like Psalms, it was written over an extended period of time and compiled into one volume at a later date. Since we do not know anything about either Agur or King Lemuel, the only chronological marker we have to go by is Solomon, who lived during the 10th century B.C. From 25:1, we know that the book was compiled no earlier than the reign of Hezekiah, who ruled from 729 to 686 B.C.

The Purpose for Writing

Why was the book of Proverbs written? The answer to this question is found in the opening verses of the book. According to 1:2-6, Proverbs was written to impart wisdom. “The purpose of Proverbs is to make us less often foolish and more often wise, or to improve our overall performance in life” (Alden, p. 12).

Wisdom is often equated with intelligence (likewise, wisdom’s contrast—foolishness—is often equated with a lack of intelligence). However, rather than *mental* ability, wisdom has more to do with *moral* ability (likewise, foolishness is more descriptive of *moral*

deficiency, as opposed to *mental* deficiency³). Wisdom, therefore, is more *ethical* than *intellectual*. However, wisdom is rooted in knowledge, as the following chart illustrates:

Knowledge (accumulation of facts) ➡ Understanding (apprehension of facts) ➡ Wisdom (application of facts)

The Hebrew word for wisdom carries the idea of skill. Wisdom, then, has been defined as skillful living. Proverbs may be understood as an instruction manual or play book for life. A proverb is “a moral maxim, a prudent precept, or a sagacious saying. Proverbs are the holy ‘horse sense’ of the Old Testament” (Geisler, p. 207).

The key verse (often referred to as the “motto”) of the book is 1:7, which declares that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (see also Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10, and 15:33). “Wisdom is not simply a matter of the intellect—it is viewing life and self from God’s perspective, which is the only true and valid perspective” (Benware, p. 156). “The blending of moral qualities with intellectual ones came very naturally to the writer, since in his eyes the truly wise man was also righteous and the intelligent one was also godly” (Alden, p. 20). “The Bible’s assessment of a smart person without God is ‘fool’ (1 Cor. 1:20), and the humblest, least literate, untutored, but pious person is, in God’s eyes, truly wise. How reversed we usually have it!” (Alden, p. 22).

Interpreting a Proverb

When interpreting Scripture (or any literature), one must take into account the particular type of literature (or genre) he is seeking to interpret. A common mistake made by interpreters of proverbs is to consider them to be promises. For example, does an apple a day always keep the doctor away? Proverbs are generally, but not invariably, true (one exception, however, would be Proverbs 11:1).⁴ Consider, for instance, Proverbs 22:6. Assuming the traditional interpretation to be correct, is this verse a guarantee that children who are well-trained will never rebel? No. While it is generally true that well-trained children will turn out right, it is not always true. Consider as another example Proverbs 12:21. Proverbs are *principles*, not necessarily *promises*. They are *guidelines*, not necessarily *guarantees*. “Many of the proverbial maxims should be recognized as guidelines, not absolute observations; they are not iron-clad promises. What is stated is generally and usually true, but exceptions are occasionally noted” (Buzzell, p. 904). “The proverbs are general statements and illustrations of timeless truth, which allow for, but do not condone, exceptions to the rule” (*The New Open Bible*). Proverbs are “procedures that we follow, not promises that we claim” (Hubbard, p. 25).

³Speaking of fools, Hubbard states: “Their basic lack is not intelligence quotient, educational opportunity, or positive examples. They are not so much stupid as wicked” (p. 48).

⁴The fundamental reason for this phenomenon is the brevity of a proverb, which brevity would quickly turn into verbosity if all caveats, disclaimers, etc. were included.

A Few Notable Features of Proverbs

1. Its topical arrangement. “Proverbs is truly a collection of sayings with no arrangement, outline, order, or progression” (Alden, p. 10). The book of Proverbs bounces back-and-forth between a number of topics. Consequently, the best way to study the book is topically, rather than verse-by-verse.
2. Its practicality. Proverbs is arguably the most practical book in all of the Bible. Bullock (p. 146) says it well: “Many persons who have become overwhelmed by a theoretical approach to Christianity have been able to get a ‘handle’ on the faith by reading the book of Proverbs.”
3. Its poetic structure. As mentioned at the start, Proverbs is one of the Poetic Books in our English Old Testaments. This is because it is written in Hebrew poetic style (it is for this simple reason that reading Proverbs is a much different experience than reading the prosaic style of Genesis). The chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry is its parallelism of thought (unlike English poetry, whose parallelism is seen in its meter and rhyme), with the two lines of a proverb relating to one another, whether antithetically/contrast (as in Proverbs 10:1, 14:34, and 15:1), synonymously/comparison (as in Proverbs 11:25), or the like. Awareness of this fact is a significant help in properly interpreting the Proverbs.

Self Study

In preparation for each lesson, take time to examine the texts in Proverbs that deal with the topic(s) to be studied. See page 1 for each week’s **topic**. At the end of the previous lesson, you will find several **texts** to examine pertaining to the next topic to be studied. As you look up a text, write down the **truth** that text is trying to communicate.

For example, if the **topic** to be studied is “The Tongue,” one of the **texts** given might be 15:1—“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” The **truth** this text is trying to communicate could be worded: *when in a verbally-volatile situation, defuse the tension with tender talk*. As another example, if the **topic** to be studied is “The Home,” one of the **texts** given might be 10:1—“A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.” The **truth** this text is trying to communicate could be worded: *a wise lad makes his dad glad, but a bad lad makes his mom sad*.

For next time:

Topic—The Fool

Texts—1:7, 1:22, 1:25, 1:29, 1:30, 1:31, 1:32, 3:35, 10:8, 10:10, 10:18, 10:21, 10:23, 11:29, 12:15, 12:16, 12:23, 13:16, 14:7, 14:9, 14:16, 15:2, 15:5, 17:10, 17:12, 18:2, 18:6, 18:7, 20:3, 23:9, 26:11, 28:26, 29:11

Topic—The Wise

Texts—1:5, 9:8, 9:9, 10:8, 10:14, 10:19, 11:2, 11:30, 12:15, 12:16, 12:23, 14:16, 15:7, 15:31, 15:33, 16:14, 17:28, 19:20, 21:11, 22:3, 27:12, 29:11

Lesson 2: The Foolish and the Wise

If the book of Proverbs was a drama, its two main characters would undoubtedly be the foolish man and the wise man. The entire book is essentially a contrast between the two.⁵ For every wise virtue extolled in the book, there is a corresponding foolish vice (see Appendix A). Keep in mind that folly and wisdom are not so much *intellectual/mental* concepts as they are *ethical/moral* ones (for example, see 1:3b, 2:7-9, 4:11, and 8:1-8). This lesson is an overview of what the book of Proverbs has to say about the folly of the foolish and the wisdom of the wise.

☹ The Foolish

There are actually 5 different types of fools found in the book of Proverbs (3 are mentioned in 1:22), ranging from the least culpable, the “simple” (KJV) or “naive” (NASB)⁶ to the most culpable, the “scorner” (KJV) or “scoffer” (NASB). See Appendix B. For our purposes, no distinction will be made between them; rather, we will tie all of them into the broad category of “fool.”

What is a fool like? Below is a summation of his characteristics, as found in the book of Proverbs:

The Fool’s Tongue

A fool is known for the misuse of his tongue.

- boisterous (9:13)
- spreads slander (10:18)
- (contrary to James 1:19) slow to hear and quick to speak (18:13, 29:20)
- perverse in his speech (19:1)
- self-destructive (10:14⁷, 14:3, 18:6-7)

⁵“The samples of behaviour which [Proverbs] holds up to view are all assessed by one criterion, which could be summed up in the question, ‘Is this wisdom or folly?’” (Kidner, p. 13).

⁶This fool “is the most pardonable type of fool because his foolishness results from lack of experience. He is not motivated by arrogance or pride, but simply fails to act wisely because of his limited exposure to the world” (Alden, p. 20). He is ignorant of his ignorance (Wiersbe, p. 420).

⁷Commenting on this verse, Hubbard (p. 218) states: “[T]he foolish mouth is close to ‘destruction’ as though it held a lighted cherry bomb between the lips.”

The Fool's Response to Wisdom

A fool does not receive wisdom in its various forms well.

- despises wisdom (1:7, 23:9)
- despises instruction (1:7)
- neglects (1:25a), does not accept (1:30) counsel
- doesn't want (1:25b), doesn't listen to (13:1), hates (9:8, 12:1, 15:12) reproof/rebuke
- hates knowledge (1:22, 1:29)
- doesn't delight in understanding (18:2)
- rejects (15:5), doesn't respond to (17:10, 27:22⁸) discipline
- does not choose to fear the Lord (1:29)

The Fool and His Folks

A fool has a spiteful attitude toward and a detrimental impact upon his parents.

- grieves parents (10:1, 17:21, 25)
- despises mother (15:20)
- destroys father (19:13)

The Fool's Estimation of Himself

A fool is proud.

- way is right in his own eyes (12:15)
- trusts in his own heart (28:26)
- arrogant, proud, haughty (14:16, 21:24)
- exalts self (30:32)

The Fool's Attitude Toward Sin

A fool enjoys sin.

- doing wickedness is like sport to him (10:23)
- it is abominable for him to turn away from evil (13:19)
- mocks at sin (14:9)
- enjoys folly (15:21)
- returns to his folly like a dog to its vomit (26:11)

Other Characteristics of a Fool

- quick-tempered/loses temper (12:16, 14:17, 29, 29:11)
- believes everything he hears (14:15)
- lacks foresight (22:3, 27:12)
- quarrelsome/contentious (20:3, 22:10)

⁸ Wiersbe (p. 423) sheds light upon this proverb: "Women in the ancient world ground grain in a bowl (mortar) using a hard tool (pestle) with which they could crack and pulverize the kernels. The image is clear: no amount of pressure or pain will change a fool and make anything useful out of him."

☺ The Wise

There are many different expressions used throughout the book of Proverbs to convey the concept of wisdom (see the various terms for wisdom under “The Fool’s Response to Wisdom” above). Wisdom is more valuable than wealth (3:14-15, 8:10-11, 19, 16:16, 20:15) and more powerful than physical strength (21:22, cf. 24:5-6). Wisdom leads to quantity of life (3:16a, 4:10, 9:11) and quality of life (3:16b-18, 8:18, 21, 24:4). As Wiersbe (p. 399) puts it: “God wants to add years to our life and life to our years.”

What is a wise person like? Simplistically, he is everything that the fool isn’t and nothing that the fool is. Below is a summation of the wise man’s outstanding characteristics, as found in the book of Proverbs:

The Wise Man’s Tongue

A wise man is known for the proper use of his tongue.

- exercises verbal restraint (10:19, 17:27-28)
- tongue brings healing (12:18)

The Wise Man’s Response to Wisdom

A wise man welcomes wisdom, becoming wiser still.

- hears [wisdom] and increases in learning (1:5a, 9:9, 21:11)
- acquires (1:5b), listens to (12:15), receives (13:10) counsel
- loves (9:8), regards (15:5), listens to (15:31-32), responds to (17:10, 19:25) reproof/rebuke
- receives commands (10:8)
- stores up (10:14), seeks (15:14), acquires (18:15) knowledge
- loves (12:1), accepts (13:1) discipline

The Wise Man and His Folks

A wise man brings joy to his parents. “A wise lad makes his dad glad, but a bad lad makes his mom sad” (10:1, Estell paraphrase). See also 15:20, 23:15-16, 24, 27:11, 29:3.

The Wise Man’s Estimation of Himself

A wise man is humble (11:2).

The Wise Man’s Attitude Toward Sin

A wise man fears the Lord (1:7, 9:10, 15:33), and the fear of the Lord is incompatible with evil (3:7, 16:6).

Other Characteristics of a Wise Man

- slow to anger/doesn’t lose his temper (12:16, 14:29, 17:27, 19:11, 29:11)
- possesses foresight (22:3, 27:12)
- maintains good associations (2:20, 13:20)/avoids bad ones (2:12-19, 7:5, 23:20-21)

Self Study

In preparation for the next study, take time to examine the texts below on Friendships. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—Friendships

Texts—1:10-15, 3:32, 13:20, 14:7, 14:20, 16:19, 17:4, 17:17, 18:24, 19:4, 19:6-7, 20:19, 22:24-25, 23:20-21, 24:21-22, 27:6, 27:17, 28:7, 28:10, 29:24, 29:25

Lesson 3: Friendships

The previous lesson examined the vices that characterize the fool and the corresponding virtues that characterize the wise. One trait that distinguishes the fool from the wise is the associations each maintains. A well-known English proverb is “birds of a feather flock together.” The book of Proverbs puts it this way: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (13:20). Since we become whom we befriend, it behooves us to wisely choose with whom we will and will not associate.

The Foundational Friendship

**“[The LORD] is intimate with the upright”
Proverbs 3:32b (NASB)**

Salvation is a friendship (John 17:3). God is the believer’s Friend (John 15:14), the believer God’s friend (James 2:23; cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8). If it is true that the quality of one’s vertical relationship with God determines the quality of one’s horizontal relationships with men, then one’s friendship with God must be preeminent. Ask yourself . . .

Am I a Friend of God?

- 1. Do I spend time with God (Bible intake & prayer)?**
- 2. Do I stick up for God (David in 1 Samuel 17)?**
- 3. Do I stick with God (Proverbs 17:17b and 18:24b)?**
- 4. Do I love and long for God (Proverbs 17:17a, Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1, and John 15:13)?**
- 5. Do I obey God (John 14:15 and 15:14)?**

Do you value your relationship with God above all other relationships, including your relationship with your family (Matthew 10:34-37, Luke 14:26) and your relationship with your peers (Proverbs 29:25)? Remember, in all things He must have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Are you a friend of God or a friend of the world (James 4:4; cf. 1 John 2:15)?

The Blessing of a Good Friend

**“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.”
Proverbs 13:20a**

Friends are a good thing (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12), provided they are the right kind of friends (Psalm 119:63, Proverbs 2:20). Perhaps the most outstanding example of human friendship in Scripture is the friendship of David & Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1, 3, 20:17, 41, 2 Samuel 1:26). The book of Proverbs extols the virtue of friendship in several texts, painting the following portrait of a good friend:

A Good Friend . . .

- 1. is humble (16:19).**
- 2. loves at all times, even tough times (17:17, 18:24b, 27:10).⁹**
- 3. will set you straight (27:5-6).**
- 4. brings out the best in you (27:17).**

Don't forget: The point is not just having the right kind of friends, but also being the right kind of friend.

The Curse of a Bad Friend

**“but a companion of fools shall be destroyed”
Proverbs 13:20b**

Benjamin Franklin once said: “He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.” Paul said it this way: “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33, NASB). The book of Proverbs is full of warnings about associating with/befriending the wrong kind of people (1:10, 15, 2:12-13, 16, 4:14-15, 5:8, 6:24, 7:5, 14:7, 24:1-2, 29:3b).¹⁰ How ironic that the man who penned so many of these warnings would later fail to heed his own advice (1 Kings 11:1-11)! The Proverbial portrait of the bad friend looks something like this:

⁹ “Foul-weather friends are the only ones worth having” (Hubbard, p. 264). David bemoans the “fair-weather friend” in Psalm 41:9 and 55:12-14.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that virtually all of these texts (or their surrounding contexts) not only warn about associating with the wrong crowd, but also give the reason(s) why, an instructive point for parents of teens.

A Bad Friend . . .

- 1. entices you to join him in evil (1:10-15).**
- 2. will harm you, rather than help you (13:20b).**
- 3. is proud (16:19).**
- 4. gossips about you (20:19).**
- 5. is tempestuous (22:24-25).**
- 6. is rebellious (24:21-22, NIV).**

Simply put, the wise make good friends, the foolish bad friends (see the previous lesson for the characteristics of each).

Addendum

Befriending the Unbeliever: Relational Evangelism

In light of the warnings in Proverbs against associating with/befriending the wicked, a potential dilemma surfaces for the believer in regards to relational evangelism: How does one build a redemptive relationship with an unbeliever (remember, Jesus was a friend of sinners, Luke 7:34), while staying true to the principles presented in this lesson? Admittedly, the believer must perform a biblical “balancing act” in order to fulfill both obligations. Caution is in order. Speaking of the unbeliever, Hubbard states: “Be careful . . . such persons are hot to handle We need to evaluate ourselves for any negative impact they may have on us For our own good we may have to limit our contacts and shun their company completely (p. 54). If you can help such a one, fine! But . . . the risks of being influenced are considerable” (p. 288). The key is the purpose of the relationship. A *redemptive* relationship (a relationship whose purpose is evangelism) is permissible, so long as such a relationship does not have an adverse effect upon the believer. A *recreational* relationship (a relationship whose purpose is fellowship), however, is off limits (2 Corinthians 6:14¹¹).

¹¹Among other things, this verse is testimony to the fact that compromise so often takes place in the context of a relationship (friendship, association, dating relationship, etc.); thus, the need to be very careful about whom you befriend/associate with/date, etc.).

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, take time to examine the texts below on ***Money***. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—Money

Texts—3:9-10, 3:27-28, 6:1-5, 10:2, 10:22, 11:4, 11:15, 11:24-26, 11:28, 13:11, 15:16, 15:17, 15:27, 16:8, 16:19, 17:1, 17:18, 17:23, 19:22, 22:1, 22:2, 22:7, 22:9, 22:26-27, 23:4-5, 28:6, 28:11, 28:16, 28:27, 30:8-9

Lesson 4: Money

“A fool and his money are soon parted.” “A penny saved is a penny earned.” Money is a common theme in proverbial literature. Not surprisingly, the book of Proverbs has a lot to say about it. “The subject of wealth . . . rises to prominence in almost every chapter of Proverbs” (Hubbard, p. 431).

Financial Footings/Monetary Moorings

The book of Proverbs gives the following foundational financial principles:

Foundational Financial Principles in Proverbs

- 1. Money comes from God (10:22a).** He is to be the Master of your money, the Prince of your pocketbook, the God of your gold, the King of your cash, and the Ruler of your riches.
- 2. Glorify God with your money (3:9-10¹²).**
- 3. The rich and the poor are on equal footing before God (22:2).**
- 4. Avoid poverty, but don't seek affluence (30:8-9).**

Notice how God centered all 4 of the above principles are.

A fifth foundational financial principle in Proverbs is . . .

¹²Among other things, verse 9 teaches that our giving to our local church should be based upon our gross, rather than our net income. Verse 10 should be understood in light of the theocratic economy (tangible, temporal, physical blessing for obedience to the covenant, cursing for disobedience). This does not, however, preclude applying it *principally* to the New Testament believer (see Luke 6:38 and 2 Corinthians 9:6). The Lord honors those who honor Him with “their” finances. He may choose to do so tangibly or intangibly, temporally or eternally, physically or spiritually.

5. Money is not the most important thing in life.

wisdom > wealth (3:13-15, 8:10-11, 19, 16:16, 20:15)¹³
righteousness > riches (11:4, 16:8)
love > being loaded (15:17)
meekness > money (16:19)
tranquility > treasure (17:1)
truthfulness > treasure (19:22)
reputation > riches (22:1)
character > cash (28:6)
a good wife > great wealth (31:10)

“The real measure of our wealth is how much we’d be worth if we lost all our money” (John Henry Jowett, cited in Wiersbe, p. 431).

More Monetary Mandates in Proverbs

- ☺ **Be generous** (3:27-28, 11:24a, 25, 26b, 22:9, 28:27a). See also Philippians 4:19.¹⁴
- ☹ **Don’t be stingy** (11:24b, 26a, 28:27b). See also James 2:15-16 and 1 John 3:17.
- ☺ **Accumulate wealth through hard work** (13:11b). See also Ephesians 4:28.
- ☹ **Don’t accumulate wealth improperly** (1:11-13 and 19, 10:2a, 13:11a, 20:17, 21:6, 22:16, 28:8).
- ☹ **Don’t treat others based upon their economic status** (14:20-21). See also James 2:1-13.
- ☹ **Don’t receive bribes** (15:27b, 17:23, 29:4). Don’t give them, either.
- ☹ **Avoid borrowing, if possible** (22:7). See Appendix C. See also Psalm 37:21a.
- ☹ **Don’t trust in wealth** (11:28a, 23:5¹⁵, 27:24a). See also 1 Timothy 6:17.

¹³Wisdom does, however, lead to wealth (3:16, 8:18, 21, 24:4; cf. Solomon in 1 Kings 3:11-13, as well as Matthew 6:33). The book of Proverbs, as the rest of Scripture, does not disparage wealth per se. The problem is not having wealth, but wealth having you. Are you using the wealth God has given you wisely? What are you doing with your money and what is your money doing to you?

¹⁴The significance of this verse in relation to generosity is that God promised to meet the material needs of the Philippian believers in light of their generosity toward Paul in fulfillment of the mission (4:10-18).

¹⁵Money does talk—it says “bye-bye.”

- ⊗ **Don't strive to be rich** (23:4a, 28:20b, 22). See also 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
- ⊗ **Be very wary of co-signing** (6:1-5, 17:18, 20:16, 22:26-27, 27:13).

Appendix C: "The Debt Trap"

Here's what overspending your income by \$80 a month (and putting it on your charge card and not paying off any of the debt) will add to your total indebtedness in 5 years at 18% annual interest:

Year	Debt Addition	Interest	Total Debt
1	\$960	\$173	\$1,133
2	\$960	\$377	\$2,470
3	\$960	\$617	\$4,047
4	\$960	\$901	\$5,908
5	\$960	\$1,236	\$8,104

Here's what it will cost to repay that debt in the next 5 years at \$203.17 a month.

Year	Interest	Total Debt
6	\$1,350	\$6,912
7	\$1,142	\$5,616
8	\$894	\$4,072
9	\$582	\$2,216
10	\$222	0

Interest first 5 years = \$3,304

Interest last 5 years = \$4,190

Total interest = \$7,494

Total principal = \$4,800

Lesson 5: Proverbs Potpourri 1

WISDOM

Wisdom is the theme of Proverbs (for more on this, see under “The Purpose for Writing” in Lesson 1). According to 1:7, 9:10, and 15:33, only a saved person is truly knowledgeable, understanding, and wise. “[Wisdom] is viewing life and self from God’s perspective, which is the only true and valid perspective” (Paul Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 156). There are two (and only two) kinds of wisdom—worldly wisdom/man’s wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 1:20 and 2:5-6; cf. James 3:15) and divine wisdom (see 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 2:7; cf. James 3:17). At the moment of salvation, God imparts true wisdom (see Proverbs 2:6 and 2 Timothy 3:15), radically altering one’s mind set, allowing him to grasp for the very first time ultimate REALity.

PROVERBS 3:5-6

This passage (based on the KJV’s translation of it) is often claimed as a promise (remember, however, that proverbs are not promises per se) for divine direction. However, this is debatable (not the truth of divine direction, but whether Proverbs 3:5-6 is directly teaching such a truth; i.e., this is a translational and/or interpretational issue/debate, not a truth one). The principle being taught in these verses is this: those who follow God’s way, rather than their own, can expect to experience smooth or successful paths in life (He will make one’s path straight—so NASB and NIV). Cf. Proverbs 11:5. See also Appendix D. While this verse may not directly teach divine direction, the principle it does teach certainly applies to divine direction, as God will direct those who lean wholly on Him (through obedience to His will as revealed in His Word) into such paths.

PROVERBS 4:23

To the Jew, “heart” stood for the immaterial component of man’s nature, particularly his mind. To “keep” one’s heart means to guard it. Do not allow ungodly thoughts to invade and thereby conquer/captivate your heart. Guard your ear and eye gates in particular. Be extremely wary of the medium of mass media (TV, radio, magazines, movies, videos, DVDs, Internet, etc.)!

THE X, X+1 FORMULA IN PROVERBS

The x, x+1 formula is used in Proverbs in 6:16-19, 30:15b-16, 18-19, 21-23, 24-28, and 29-31. It is used to emphasize the final item on the list. For example, God hates¹⁶ all of the things listed in 6:16-19, but He especially hates the last one on the list: one who sows seeds of strife among brothers.

PROVERBS 6:30-31

This is a passage that gives situational ethicists a fit. According to this passage, a man who steals food is liable to punishment, even if his motive is relatively benign (to satisfy his hunger). Lawful ends cannot be satisfied through unlawful means/the end does not justify the means/"it is never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right" (Bob Jones, Sr.).

COVERING UP SIN?

Several verses in Proverbs extol the virtue of covering up sin (10:12, 17:9). However, 28:13 portrays it as a vice. Which is it? 28:13 is talking about seeking to conceal personal sin (from God and from others who have a right to know), something which should never be done. 10:12 and 17:9 are talking about concealing the sin of others, something which should be done (within biblical parameters), as opposed to "digging it up" (16:27). Hubbard (pp. 261-262) puts it this way: "Like a stubborn dog, hatred digs up every possible bone of contention, worries it with relish, parades it around in its snarling snout, and drops it messily on the carpet where it causes nothing but consternation. Love, on the other hand, like a prudent squirrel, hides the morsels of scandal in a secret place where the light of exposure never reaches." Koptak (p. 293) likens this covering to a bandage that covers a physical wound. If you become privy to the sin of another, the loving thing to do is to not disseminate the details of it any further, except to those who have a right to know (those part of the problem and/or part of the solution, i.e., those whom God has given the responsibility to deal with it, such as parents, pastors, the police, etc.).

¹⁶ Commenting on 6:16, Longman (p. 174) writes: "Needless to say, this is very strong language. It is hard to imagine a more definitive way to express God's displeasure than with these two sayings."

FALSE WEIGHTS & MEASUREMENTS

Several verses in Proverbs extol the virtue of a “just” balance/ weight/scale or measure and bemoan the vice of a “false” one (11:1, 16:11, 20:10, 23; cf. Leviticus 19:35-36 and Deuteronomy 25:13-16). An unscrupulous merchant could cheat a customer (or vice versa) by “tipping the scales” in his favor. If the standard weight (usually a stone) placed on one side of the scale was more or less than standard, either the merchant or the customer would be cheated. The same could be done with a measuring basket which held more or less than the standard.

PROVERBS 11:30

There is some question as to the proper translation of this verse. The Septuagint (an ancient translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek) translates the second half as antithetical to the first half: “he who takes away lives is violent.” Most translations, however, translate it synonymously. At issue: Is this verse directly dealing with witnessing/personal evangelism? (please note: what we are discussing here is a translational and/or interpretational issue, not a truth one, as leading people to Christ is certainly a wise thing) Most commentators don’t think so (Israel didn’t have a missionary mandate). For example, Buzzell (p. 930) states: “Wins souls in verse 30 does not mean soul-winning or evangelism. Since ‘win’ is literally ‘attract or take,’ the idea may be that a righteous person attracts others to wisdom.” The first half of the verse may be interpreted to mean that a righteous person has a life-giving influence on others, while the second half may be interpreted (somewhat synonymously with the first half) to mean that a wise person influences others to be wise. This truth, that the godly influence others for good, can certainly be applied to witnessing/personal evangelism.

PROVERBS 12:21 & JOB

If this verse is a promise, rather than a general principle, Job’s friends were right! However, proverbs are not promises per se. Job was an exception to the general rule.

EVERYTHING THE UNBELIEVER DOES IS SINFUL

According to Proverbs 15:8a and 21:27a, the sacrifice of a wicked person is abominable to God. According to 21:27b, it is especially so if offered with evil intent. The reason why even the most noble of acts (or the most seemingly innocent—see 21:4) of an unbeliever is repulsive to God (see also Isaiah 64:6) is because it is not done with the right motive, to glorify God (see Romans 14:23).¹⁷

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, take time to examine the texts below on ***Pride/Humility***. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—Pride/Humility

Texts—6:16-17, 8:13, 11:2, 15:25, 15:33, 16:5, 16:18, 18:12, 21:4, 22:4, 25:6-7, 26:12, 27:2, 28:25, 29:23, 30:13, 30:32

¹⁷ The Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 16, section 7) states in this regard: “Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands; and of good use both to themselves and others: yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God.”

Lesson 6: Pride/Humility

The goal of the book of Proverbs is to make one wise (see 1:2-6). The only way such a goal can be attained is if the reader is willing to receive wisdom (compare “The Fool’s Response to Wisdom” with “The Wise Man’s Response to Wisdom” in Lesson 2).¹⁸ The number one prerequisite of teachability is humility. Not surprisingly, the book of Proverbs makes pride/humility one of its major themes.

What is Pride?

In Romans 12:3, Paul writes: “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Pride is a mindset (“think”) that makes one think more highly (or lowly—a false humility¹⁹) about self than he should. The middle letter of pride is “I.” A proud person has an “I” problem (cf. Satan in Isaiah 14:13-14, as well as Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:30). The corrective is to think soberly, or soundly, about self, i.e., to view self from God’s perspective as revealed in His Word. Galatians 6:3 states: “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” In and of ourselves, we are nothing²⁰; God is everything (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). The only reason we are anything is because of God’s grace (1 Corinthians 15:8-10, Ephesians 3:8, et. al.). Because of God, we are something. Let us put ourselves in our proper place and God in His proper place; let us keep things in their proper perspective; let us give credit to Whom credit is due (1 Corinthians 4:7).²¹ Pride is not acknowledgment of ability, but failure to acknowledge the proper source of ability (for an All-Star athlete to say, “I’m really not all that good at baseball, basketball, etc.” would be laughable).

¹⁸ “It is a commonplace that the wise know what they do not know” (Koptak, p. 67).

¹⁹ “Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak” (John Piper). Humility is not seen in self-flagellation, but in self-forgetfulness. “Humility is unconscious self-forgetfulness” (W. H. Griffith-Thomas). Remember, it’s impossible to be proud of your humility.

²⁰ “Many years ago the great Bible teacher William R. Newell was concluding a conference in China for China Inland Mission, and as he left he said to the mission’s leader, ‘Oh, do pray for me that I shall be nothing!’ The director responded with a twinkle in his eye, ‘Newell, you are nothing! Take it by faith!’” (R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, p. 27).

²¹ “No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time” (James Denney, cited in Wiersbe, p. 462). “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Primary Principles on Pride in Proverbs

1. God hates pride (6:16-17, 8:13, 16:5a). God will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11).
2. God judges pride severely (15:25a, 16:5b, 18, 18:12a). For a vivid Old Testament example of this truth, see Nebuchadnezzar & Belshazzar in Daniel 4 & 5 (see especially 4:17, 25-26, 30-32, 35, 37, and 5:20-23). For a vivid New Testament example, see Herod in Acts 12:21-23.
3. Pride leads to dishonor (11:2a, 29:23a); humility leads to honor (15:33b, 18:12b, 22:4, 29:23b). The way up is down. See also Matthew 23:12//Luke 14:11, 18:14, James 4:10, and 1 Peter 5:6. Humiliation leads to exaltation. See Philippians 2:5-11.

Other Principles on Pride in Proverbs

- Don't be wise (3:7, 26:12, 28:11), right (12:15, 21:2), or pure (30:12) in your own eyes. Don't trust in your own heart (28:26; cf. Jeremiah 17:9), but trust in the Lord with all your heart (3:5).
- Humility and wisdom go hand-in-hand (11:2), as does pride and folly (14:16).
- Associate with humble people, not proud people (16:19).
- Pride produces strife (13:10, 28:25). Conversely, humility produces unity (see Philippians 2:2-4).
- Don't "toot your own horn" (27:2; cf. Matthew 6:2). Avoid self-advancement (25:6-7; cf. Luke 14:7-11) and self-exaltation (12:9, 25:27b, 30:32).
- How you respond to praise is a litmus test of your humility or lack thereof (27:21).
- Humbly acknowledge your dependence on God (27:1). See also James 4:15-16.

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, take time to examine the texts below on ***Laziness/Industriousness***. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—Laziness/Industriousness

Texts—6:6-11, 10:4-5, 26, 12:11, 24, 27, 13:4, 14:23, 15:19, 16:26, 18:9, 19:15, 24, 20:4, 13, 21:25, 22:13, 24:30-34, 26:13-16, 28:19

Lesson 7: Laziness/Industriousness

“I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours” (Jerome K. Jerome). Unfortunately, work is not a spectator sport. Actually, work is a good thing (the “Protestant work ethic”). Contrary to what some think, work is not part of the Curse; rather, arduous work is (see Genesis 2:15 and 3:17-19).²² Industriousness, however, does not come naturally. All of us are lazy by (sin) nature. The book of Proverbs recognizes this fact and seeks to change it.

Meet Mr. “Lazy Bones”

The book of Proverbs speaks of the lazy man at least 17 times²³ (Wiersbe, p. 426), calling him by many different names: “**sluggard**” (6:6 and 10:26), “**slothful**” (12:24), and “**idle**”²⁴ (19:15). According to Proverbs:

- A lazy man sleeps too much (6:9-10, 10:5b, 24:33, 26:14²⁵).
- A lazy man is irritating (10:26).
- A lazy man talks about working instead of working (14:23).
- A lazy man makes excuses to get out of working (20:4a, 22:13, 26:13).
- A lazy man is senseless (24:30²⁶). It truly is “crazy to be lazy”!
- A lazy man is oblivious to his condition (26:16).
- A lazy man follows “empty pursuits” instead of working (28:19; cf. 12:11b).

²²Before the Fall, work was a “natural inclination”; after the Fall, it became a “deliberate intention” (Hubbard, p. 416).

²³“The quantity of proverbs on laziness and hard work is surprising” (Longman, p. 561).

²⁴“The busy man is troubled with but one devil; the idle man by a thousand” (Spanish proverb). “The devil tempts all other men, but idle men tempt the devil” (Turkish proverb). “An idle brain is the devil’s workshop” (English proverb).

²⁵As this verse illustrates, there is a vast difference between “waking up” and “getting up.” Is the “snooze” button on your alarm clock worn from overuse?

²⁶Commenting on this verse, Hubbard (p. 383) states: “The parallel between ‘[slothful]’ and ‘[void of understanding]’ makes clear that the laziness in view was not the result of a weak back but a hollow brain.”

A Lesson from the Ant

Proverbs 6:6-8 exhorts the sluggard (and, by extension, us) to observe (for the purpose of imitating) the industry of the ant. Two lessons can be learned from the ant. First, **be a self-starter** (v. 7). The ant doesn't need to have someone "standing over" it to keep it busy. Being a self-starter involves "overcoming initial inertia." In our natural state, we rarely, if ever, feel like working (fortunately, we have lots of extrinsic motivation—hunger, paycheck, etc.). It is at this point that we must say "no" to our feelings, engage our will, and get going.²⁷ Second, **"make hay while the sun shines,"** i.e., work hard while the window of opportunity is open, so that when it closes, you will not be left destitute (v. 8; see also 10:5a).

Other Lessons

- Laziness leads to poverty and hunger (6:11²⁸, 10:4a, 12:27a, 13:4a, 14:23b, 19:15b, 24:20:4b, 24:34, 26:15) industriousness to plenty (10:4b, 12:11a, 13:4b, 14:23a, 28:19a).
- The industrious will rule over the lazy (12:24).
- Hunger breeds industriousness (16:26). See also 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

A Final Lesson

In 24:30-34, "the wise" (the author of this section of the book—see Lesson 1) tells of passing by the property of a lazy man (v. 30) and noticing its run-down condition (v. 31). His next words are instructive: "Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction" (v. 32). The book of Proverbs has given us a picture of the lazy man. As we have gazed upon it, may we too receive instruction. It's crazy to be lazy (v. 30)!

Self Study

In preparation for next week's lesson, take time to examine the texts below on *The Tongue*. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—The Tongue

Texts—4:24, 6:16-17, 19, 8:13, 10:18, 19, 20, 31, 32, 11:9, 11, 13, 12:13, 18, 19, 22, 25, 13:3, 15:1, 4, 23, 28, 16:24, 27, 28, 17:9, 27, 28, 18:2, 7, 8, 13, 21, 19:5, 9, 20:19, 25, 21:23, 25:11, 15, 26:20, 22, 28, 29:5, 20

²⁷For example, one of the best cures for depression is work.

²⁸According to Hubbard (p. 100), the Hebrew noun in this verse translated "armed man" could also be translated "beggar."

Lesson 8: The Tongue

According to Proverbs 4:23, 10:20, 16:23, and 17:20, as well as Matthew 12:34b, what you say is indicative of who you are. If you are wise, your tongue will be virtuous. If you are foolish, your tongue will be vicious (characterized by vice). There is “no clearer test for distinguishing the wise from the fool than the litmus of speech” (Hubbard, p. 215).

Lying vs. Truth Telling

God hates lying (6:16-19 and 12:22a). Consequently, He judges it severely (19:5 and 9). So, don't lie (4:24 and 30:8a). A subset of lying mentioned in Proverbs is flattery (2:16, 7:21, 26:28b, and 29:5), “saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back” (R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 133). A flatterer is one who pats you on the back only to locate a soft spot in which to stick a knife (Wiersbe, p. 444). Though God hates lying, He delights in truth telling (12:22b). A wise man is a truthful man (8:6-9).

Gossiping vs. Concealing

A talebearer (11:13a, 20:19a, and 26:20)/whisperer (16:28b)/backbiter (25:23) is a fool (10:18b); therefore, stay away from such a person (20:19b). “Gossip involves saying behind a person's back what you would never say to his or her face” (R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 133). A gossip “reveals secrets” (11:13a and 20:19a)/“repeats a matter” (17:9b), bringing about “strife” (16:28a and 26:20)/“an angry countenance” (25:23), resulting in the separation of even the most intimate of friends (16:28b and 17:9b). Rather than foolishly sharing potentially-damaging information about another person with someone who does not have a right to know, the wise man “conceals” the information (11:13b and 17:9a). Note: Just as it “takes two to tango,” so it takes two to gossip. Don't listen to gossip. If you do, you are a “wicked doer” (17:4a).

Boisterous vs. Verbal Restraint

A real test of wisdom is not so much what you do say, but what you don't say. Rather than being “loud” (7:11)/“clamorous” (9:13), we should be “slow to speak” (James 1:19). A wise man “refrains his lips” (10:19b)/“spares his words” (17:27a)/“holds his peace” (17:28a)/“shuts his lips” (17:28b) because he knows that “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” (10:19a, KJV)/“when there are many words, transgression is unavoidable” (10:19a, NASB). Because the wise man, with the Lord's help (Psalm 141:3; cf. James 3:8), “keeps [or guards] his mouth” (13:3a and 21:23a), he “keeps [or preserves] his life” (13:3a) and “keeps [or guards] his soul from troubles” (21:23b). The fool, on the other hand, “opens wide his lips” and, as a result, “shall have destruction” (13:3b). “If thou desire to be held wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue” (Quarles). “Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they

want to say something” (source unknown). A closed mouth gathers no fruit. “Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving wordy evidence to the fact” (George Eliot). “One of my school teachers used to say, ‘Empty barrels make the most noise,’ and she was right. Too often ... those who talk the most have the least to say” (Wiersbe, pp. 445-446). “See” your words before you say them; weigh them before you say them (15:28, NIV); “contemplate before you communicate” (Charles Wood); “taste” your words before you say them because you may end up eating them.

Constructive vs. Destructive

Proverbs 18:21 says that “death and life are in the power of the tongue.” “Never underestimate the power of words. For every word in Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf*, 125 people died in World War II” (Wiersbe, p. 439). Our speech should build others up (10:11a, 12:18b, 25b, 15:4a, and 16:24, as well as Ephesians 4:29 and Colossians 4:6a), not tear them down (10:11b, 11:9a, 12:18a, 15:4b, 26:28, and 29:5). “The Royal British Navy has a regulation which reads, ‘No officer shall speak discouragingly to another officer in the discharge of his duties’” (Wiersbe, p. 443). The English proverb, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is simply not true.

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, take time to examine the texts below on ***The Home***. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—The Home

Texts—1:8, 3:11-12, 4:3-4, 6:20, 10:1, 12:4, 13:1, 24, 15:20, 17:6, 21, 25, 18:22, 19:13, 14, 18, 20:7, 22:6, 15, 23:13-14, 22, 24-25, 28:7, 29:3, 15, 17, 30:17

Lesson 9: The Home

“A wise lad makes his dad glad, but a bad lad makes his mom sad” (10:1, Estell paraphrase). See also 15:20a, 17:21, 25, 23:24-25, 28:7, and 29:3a. A good wife is a “crown,” a bad wife a curse (12:4). As these verses show, the home can be a burden or it can be a blessing. The key is the character of each family member. According to the book of Proverbs, if each family member is wise, the home should be a happy, harmonious place.

The Wise Child

According to Proverbs, a wise child does two things . . .

1. He accepts parental instruction in its various forms (1:8, 6:20, 13:1, 15:5, 23:22a). This is the obedience of Ephesians 6:1.
2. He respects his or her parents (15:20b, 19:26, 20:20, 23:22b, 30:11²⁹, 17³⁰). This is the honor of Ephesians 6:2.

The Wise Wife

We will deal with the wise wife and mother more extensively in a future lesson (“The Virtuous Woman,” 31:10-31). Wives are a good thing (18:22), especially if they are wise (19:14b). The book of Proverbs cautions wives about being contentious (19:13b, 21:9, 19, 25:24, 27:15). Solomon likely had lots of firsthand experience with this (cf. 1 Kings 11:3)!

The Wise Father

In Proverbs, the wise father is characterized by two corresponding traits³¹. First, the wise father verbally instructs his children (speaking). This can be inferred from the references regarding parental instruction above (see first point under “The Wise Child”). Though this can include formal instruction (the Greek model), Solomon probably has in mind informal

²⁹Among others things, this verse shows that the mere absence of vice (“curses”) is not enough. There must also be the presence of virtue (“bless”). See also Psalm 109:17.

³⁰ Commenting on this verse, Wiersbe (p. 460) writes: “The child who looks at his or her parents with contempt and disrespect will one day be treated like an unburied corpse, and to be left unburied was a great reproach in Israel.”

³¹Though these traits are also true of the wise mother (see, for example, 1:8 and 6:20), fathers are primarily responsible for the verbal and physical instruction of children (cf. Ephesians 6:4).

instruction (the Jewish model). See Deuteronomy 6:6-9. This would include both “doctrine”³² and “instruction in righteousness” and “reproof” and “correction” (2 Timothy 3:16). To be truly wise, such teaching must be God-/Christ-centered (9:10; cf. Colossians 2:8, as well as under “wisdom” in Lesson 5). Verbal reproof is proof that a father truly loves his child (3:11-12). Second, the wise father physically instructs his children (spanking). Corporal discipline is not an option; it is an obligation. Physical reproof is proof that a father truly loves his child (13:24). Corporal discipline is necessary because sin has a death grip on children (22:15³³, 19:18b³⁴, 23:13-14). “Lax parenting is a virtual death sentence” (Hubbard, p. 305). Failure to physically discipline a child brings grief (29:15), but doing so brings delight (29:17³⁵).

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, take time to examine the texts below on ***The Wicked Woman***. As you look up a text, record the truth that text is trying to communicate.

Topic—The Wicked Woman

Texts—2:16-19, 5:3-6, 8-11, 6:24-29, 7:5-27, 9:13-18, 22:14, 23:27-28, 29:3b

³²“The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. . . . every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that next to making his own calling and election sure, this is the end for which he is kept alive by God—this is his task on earth” (Robert Dabney). The Puritans considered the home to be a “seminary.”

³³The Hebrew verb translated “bound” in this verse is the same verb used in Joshua 2:18 and 21 to describe the tying of the cord of scarlet thread in Rahab’s window.

³⁴The Hebrew literally reads: “the causing of his death” (Hubbard, p. 305).

³⁵Commenting on this verse, Hubbard states: “The pain, patience, and persistence of raising children will bring the highest possible payoff” (p. 453).

Lesson 10: The Wicked Woman

No study of the book of Proverbs would be complete without giving due consideration to a topic that is as prevalent in the book as any other, the wicked woman.³⁶ As in our day, one of the harsh realities of the day in which Solomon lived was the threat of unscrupulous women (unscrupulous men were equally a threat—see, for example, 2:12-15; however, since Solomon was writing to young men, the wicked woman was his greater concern). Solomon's words of warning are no less relevant (perhaps even more so) today than they were then: be wary of wicked women! Wise is the man who heeds his advice.

Profile of the Wicked Woman³⁷

The book of Proverbs refers to the wicked woman as “strange”³⁸ (2:16, 5:20, 6:24b), “evil” (6:24a), an “adulteress” (6:26b), and “foolish” (9:13). According to Proverbs:

- The wicked woman is a flatterer (2:16, 6:24, 7:5, 21). Her speech is sweet and smooth (5:3). See her flattery in action in 7:15.
- The wicked woman is unfaithful (2:17). See her unfaithfulness in action in 7:19.
- The wicked woman is a predator (6:26b, 7:12b, 23:28a). She is the aggressor.
- The wicked woman dresses the part (7:10b). One's character may be reflected in one's clothing.
- The wicked woman is cunning (7:10b).
- The wicked woman is boisterous (7:11a, 9:13a). She is verbally aggressive, rather than verbally reticent (1 Peter 3:4).
- The wicked woman is rebellious (7:11a).
- The wicked woman is out of place (7:11b), contra 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5.
- The wicked woman is foolish (9:13), just like those who are ensnared by her (9:16).³⁹
- The wicked woman is destructive (2:18-19, 5:4-5, 9-11, 6:26a, 7:22-23, 26-27, 9:18, 22:14, 23:27, 29:3b). She destroys lives and families. The pleasure she offers (9:17)

³⁶Longman (p. 576) states that the avoidance of immoral women “if judged by sheer quantity of teaching, is the most important point that the book makes to the young men who are the explicit recipients.”

³⁷To say that a wicked woman is x, y, and z does not necessarily imply that the woman who does x, y, or z is a wicked woman in the highly pejorative sense in which we are using it here.

³⁸Likely due to the wicked character typical of the women from the nations surrounding Israel, the designation “stranger” or “foreigner” took on immoral connotations.

³⁹“There is something about sexual immorality that anesthetizes our judgment” (Hubbard, p. 114). “Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the observation that when lust takes control, ‘At this moment God ... loses all reality Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God’” (R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 27).

pales in comparison to the pain she inflicts (9:18). She is a one-way dead-end street.

The Folly of Adultery (6:27-29, 32-35)

This is a passage that every man should commit to memory and meditate upon/mull over on a regular basis. Adultery is like playing with fire. If you play with fire, you will get burnt (vs. 27-29). A controlled fire is one thing, while one out of control is quite another. Adultery is senseless (v. 32a). Adultery is destructive (v. 32b). Adultery leaves lasting “scars” (v. 33). Adultery can put one’s life in jeopardy (vs. 34-35).

Protection from the Wicked Woman

Proverbs, being the practical book that it is, gives men several pointers (some explicit, others implicit) for protecting themselves against the allure and advances of the wicked woman, such as:

- Stay as far away from the wicked woman as possible (5:8, 7:8, 25). See also Romans 13:14 and James 1:14. Don’t get close enough to get caught in her web.⁴⁰
- Heed the warnings of Scripture (5:12-13, 6:20-23, 7:1-4, 24). Notice the context of these verses. Listen to wisdom’s voice.
- Have a healthy physical relationship with your wife (5:15-19⁴¹). See also 1 Corinthians 7:5.
- Never let your guard down. The wicked woman is a smooth talker (5:3), cunning (7:10b), and on the prowl (6:26b, 7:12b, 23:28a). Don’t fall for her “sweet nothings” (2:16, 7:5, 15, 21). Be on heightened alert at night (7:9) and when away from your spouse (7:19).
- Remember that Someone is watching (5:21). Notice the context of this verse.
- Don’t fixate on her physical appearance (6:25). See also Job 31:1.
- Flee, if need be (2 Timothy 2:22). Be like Joseph in Genesis 39:7-12, not like the man in Proverbs 7.

Self Study

In preparation for next lesson, on ***The Virtuous Woman***, please read Proverbs 31:10-31.

⁴⁰ “During more than forty years of ministry, I’ve listened to many sad stories from people who have indulged in sexual sin and suffered greatly; in almost every instance, the people deliberately put themselves into the place of temptation and danger ... We can’t help being tempted, but we can certainly help tempting ourselves” (Wiersbe, pp. 411-412).

⁴¹ Commenting on this passage, Wiersbe (p. 408) states: “Solomon compares enjoying married love to drinking pure water from a fresh well, but committing sexual sin is like drinking polluted water from the gutter or sewer.” Think also of a river staying within its banks vs. one overflowing its banks.

Lesson 11: The Virtuous Woman

Proverbs 31:10-31

Arguably, the most well known and beloved part of the book of Proverbs is its final 22 verses, an anonymously-written poem on the “virtuous woman” (as the KJV calls her). This poem is a fitting conclusion to the book of Proverbs in that the virtuous woman is the embodiment of the virtues the writers of Proverbs have been extolling (compare v. 10b with 8:11a).⁴² The poem is also a refreshing conclusion to the book, especially in light of the unpleasant, but necessary focus on the wicked woman earlier in the book (see chapters 5-7, as well as Lesson 10 on the “Wicked Woman”). A unique feature of this poem is its acrostic structure. The first word in each of the 22 verses begins with a successive consonant of the Hebrew alphabet.⁴³ To what degree is the virtuous woman to be imitated? Longman (p. 540) quips: “Indeed, the qualities and abilities of this woman make one wonder whether the proper answer to the opening question, ‘A noble woman, who can find?’ is ‘No one, because she doesn’t exist.’” Kidner (p. 184) cautions: “This lady’s standard is not implied to be within the reach of all, for it presupposes unusual gifts and material resources.” These things (talents and treasures) aside, the Proverbs 31 woman is a model for all of us⁴⁴, whose character (the NIV calls her “a wife of noble character”) we would do well to imitate. Notice several things about this woman:

- She is “virtuous” (KJV) or “excellent” (v. 10a, NASB), a cut above. She excels in character (see also verse 29). The same Hebrew adjective is used in reference to Ruth in Ruth 3:11.⁴⁵ See also Proverbs 12:4a. This Hebrew adjective literally refers to physical strength (cf. Ecclesiastes 10:10). In reference to this woman, it is used metaphorically to indicate her strength of character (see v. 25).
- She is a gem, rare and valuable (v. 10), a precious treasure from the Lord (19:14). A good wife is more valuable than great wealth.

⁴²Hubbard (p. 486) writes: “The sages, wise men that they were, found no better way to conclude their canon of wisdom than with . . . the striking portrait of an excellent woman.”

⁴³A similar phenomenon is found in Psalm 119 and Lamentations 1-4. “The acrostic poem connotes completeness by emphasizing that this woman’s qualities go from A through Z, from beginning to end, she is a most excellent woman. The point is that her virtuous character has been thoroughly presented” (Robert McCabe, Old Testament Poetic Books class notes, p. 82). Wiersbe (p. 433) suggests that the acrostic form was used to aid in memorizing the passage.

⁴⁴ It has been previously noted that 1) the book of Proverbs was written primarily to young men and that, 2) accordingly, much is written about wicked women, while little is said about wicked men and that 3) this phenomenon should not be construed to imply that men are not as wicked as women. By the same token, because the book says much about the virtuous woman, but little about the virtuous man, it should not be inferred that women are more virtuous than men. While the virtuous man does not get a lot of ink in Proverbs, he does show up elsewhere in Scripture (see especially Psalm 112, which, interestingly, like Proverbs 31:10-31, is also in the form of an acrostic).

⁴⁵ Interestingly, in the Hebrew Old Testament canon, the book of Ruth comes directly after the book of Proverbs.

- She is trustworthy (v. 11a), especially with the checkbook (v. 11b). Her character and competence inspires her husband's complete confidence.
- She is an asset (cf. 12:4a), rather than a liability (cf. 12:4b), to her husband (v. 12). She makes her hubby happy. She brings him notoriety (v. 23⁴⁶). Behind every great man is a great woman!
- She is "handy." She makes clothing (vs. 13⁴⁷ and 19), for herself (v. 22⁴⁸), for her household (v. 21), and for profit (v. 24). She cooks for her household (v. 15), going to great lengths in the process (vs. 14 & 15a).
- She is industrious. She gets up early (v. 15) and stays up late (v. 18b). Her work is not just a duty, but a delight (v. 13b). She works hard (v. 17⁴⁹). She is not lazy (v. 27b).
- She is entrepreneurial (vs. 16 & 24).
- She is compassionate (v. 20⁵⁰; see also Deuteronomy 15:11). She doesn't just feel sorry for the less fortunate (pity), but takes action to relieve their plight (compassion). Though some may be all heart and no hands, she is not.
- She is well prepared for the future (vs. 21⁵¹ and 25b).
- Her speech is sweet (v. 26).
- She is praiseworthy (vs. 28-31), both at home (vs. 28-29) and abroad (v. 31). Her "influence spreads far beyond her home, though it is centered there" (Kidner, p. 50).
- She is inwardly beautiful (v. 30). Cf. 1 Peter 3:3-5. By way of contrast, see 11:22.

⁴⁶The "gates" (cf. Ruth 4:1) was the political and judicial center of the ancient city, analogous to today's courthouse.

⁴⁷"Wool" was the raw material used to make warm clothing for winter, "flax" to make cool clothing for summer (Hubbard, p. 480).

⁴⁸The fact that her clothing was "silk and purple" (cf. Esther 8:15 and the rich man in Luke 16:19), as well as the fact that she had servants (v. 15), indicates that her family was well off. Purple dye was very expensive, requiring 8,000 mollusks to produce one gram (Hubbard, p. 483). In light of New Testament verses such as 1 Timothy 2:9, the virtuous woman's wealthy wardrobe is not necessarily normative for today.

⁴⁹Girding the loins "means to get ready to fight or work hard by wrapping the tunic tightly around the torso so it won't interfere with bodily movement" (Hubbard, p. 481).

⁵⁰Koptak (p. 676) points out an interesting contrast between verses 19 and 20: "The woman's hand 'holds the distaff,' but she also 'extends' her hands to the poor (31:19a, 20b). Her palms take hold of the spindle and open themselves to the needy (31:19b, 20a). The wordplay creates a contrast between the hands that close on her tools of production but open to share of her rewards with the poor."

⁵¹"Scarlet" in verse 21 is more likely "double." Both Hebrew words have the same consonants. Contextually, "double" fits much better. "The bright color would not guarantee warmth; the double thickness would" (Hubbard, p. 482).

Lesson 12: Proverbs Potpourri 2

BE TEACHABLE

One of the dominant themes throughout the book of Proverbs is the need to be teachable. Time and time again, we are exhorted to hear/listen to (1:5, 8, 33, 2:2a, 4:1a, 10, 20b, 5:1b, 7, 13, 7:24a, 8:6, 32-34, 12:15, 13:1, 15:31, 32, 19:20, 22:17a, 23:12b, 19), receive (2:1, 4:10, 10:8, 19:20), apply our hearts to (2:2b, 22:17b, 23:12a), and give our attention to (4:1b, 20a, 5:1a, 7:24b) wisdom.

GOD HATES SIN

Another common theme in Proverbs is the fact that God hates sin (see, for example, the vice list in 6:16-19). Sin is abominable to God. Sins that receive God's censure in the book of Proverbs include pride (6:17, 8:13, 16:5), lying (6:17, 19, 12:22), murder (6:17), spreading strife among brothers (6:19), dishonesty (11:1, 20:10, 23), and injustice (17:15). See also 3:32 ("the devious," NASB), 6:18a (a heart that devises wicked plans), 6:18b (feet that run rapidly to evil), 8:7 (wickedness), 8:13 ("the evil way" and "the perverted mouth," NASB), 11:20 ("the perverse in heart," NASB), 15:8 & 21:27 (the sacrifice of the wicked), 15:9 (the way of the wicked), and 15:26 (the thoughts of the wicked). Because God hates sin, we should too (see 8:13, Psalm 97:10, Amos 5:15, and Romans 12:9).

SIN IS SELF DESTRUCTIVE

Yet another common theme in Proverbs is the self-destructive nature of sin. Sin destroys the sinner. See 1:18-19, 32, 5:22, 6:32, 8:36, 11:3, 5-6, 17, 19, 12:13, 13:6, 15:27, 17:13, 18:7, 19:3, 23:29-35, and 29:6. The wicked literally dig their own graves (26:27 and 28:10)!

“MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES” (Thomas à Kempis)

Man’s best-laid plans are ultimately at God’s mercy. The book of Proverbs teaches this truth in 16:1, 9, 19:21, and 21:31 (cf. 27:1). See also James 4:13-17. These verses are not prohibiting proper planning (see Luke 14:28-32), but “atheistic” planning, planning as if God is not part of the equation.

PROVERBS 16:4

On the surface, this verse seems to be impugning God’s character, implying He created some men for the purpose of destroying them. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11) and that He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). How, then, is this verse to be understood? First of all, according to Ross (p. 1003), the Hebrew verb translated “made” may be defined as “to work out, bring about, accomplish” (so NIV). Secondly, instead of the Hebrew word translated “himself,” the actual word may be the Hebrew word meaning “answer.” Thus, the point of the verse may be that God sees to it that everyone receives what he has coming to him. As Ross (p. 1003) states: “The point is that God ensures that everyone’s actions and their consequences correspond In God’s order there is just retribution for every act, for every act includes its answer or consequence.” Hubbard (p. 235) takes the same approach to this verse.

THE “LOT”

Both 16:33 and 18:18 make mention of the “lot.” The lot was a stone or clay object with a “yes” and “no” side (Hubbard, p. 237) used on occasion (Proverbs itself stresses counsel over casting lots—see 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6) in Bible days to determine God’s will in a matter (see, for example, Acts 1:23-26). Is the lot (or the “fleece”) for today? No. God is no longer giving special revelation. Though an argument from silence, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of the lot in the New Testament Epistles. In order to determine God’s will today, our only recourse is Scripture.

PROVERBS 18:24

This verse is often viewed as an exhortation to friendliness. However, it may be just the opposite, warning about the danger of having too many friends (so NASB and NIV). The Hebrew of the first half of the verse is “very cryptic” (Kidner, p. 131). Consequently, there is debate regarding its proper translation and, therefore, interpretation. Some believe the verse should begin “a man of,” others “there are,” the Hebrew words being very similar. There is also debate as to what the verb is, whether the verb for “ruin” (so NASB and NIV) or the verb for “be friendly” (so KJV and NKJV). Another possibility is that the verb is the former, but doesn’t mean “ruin,” but “chatter.” Assuming the NASB/NIV to be correct, the point of the verse seems to be that the most important thing in friendship is quality, not quantity. As Hubbard (p. 265) states: “Superficial friendships cannot be counted on and should be avoided, since what we really need are not more casual acquaintances who have no stake in our welfare but a few, perhaps only one, true friend to stand by us through thick and thin.” The second half of the verse seems to confirm this interpretation, being parallel with the first half of the verse in keeping with the parallelism characteristic of Hebrew poetry.

PROVERBS 22:6

There are several possible interpretations of this verse. The key issue is one’s understanding of “the way he should go.” The traditional interpretation views it as the way of wisdom extolled throughout the book of Proverbs. If so, one must remember that this is “an accurate principle,” not “an absolute promise” (Hubbard, p. 304). Interestingly, the Hebrew verb translated “train” is *hanak*, which means to “initiate” or “dedicate,” from which the Jews get “Hanukkah,” the name of their feast celebrating the rededication of the Temple after its defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C. (Hubbard, p. 304). Consequently, some translate the verb as “start.” A more recent understanding of “the way he should go” is the child’s individual aptitudes, such as vocation, personality, capabilities, interests, etc., the aptitude for sin and self-will excepted (see 14:12).

MOVING THE “ANCIENT LANDMARK”

Both 22:28 and 23:10 warn against moving the “ancient landmark,” a prohibition against dishonesty, the ancient landmark being a stone that served as the boundary marker between adjacent properties (see Deuteronomy 19:14, 27:17). “How easily one’s property might shrink over the course of hundreds of years, especially if a dishonest neighbor was inclined to nudge boundary markers in his favor” (Alden, p. 167).

HEAPING HEAT ON HIS HEAD

One of the most unusual idioms in all of the Bible is found in 25:22 (Paul quotes it in Romans 12:20). By treating an enemy favorably you will “heap coals of fire upon his head.” Several explanations have been given for this idiom. The most common is that it is metaphorical for the searing shame, the pangs of conscience the enemy feels when treated so well by one he has treated so poorly (so Kidner, Alden, and Ross). Hubbard (p. 402) offers a second possibility: giving a parched person water (25:21), relieving the fever of thirst, is like raking (another possible rendering of the Hebrew verb) burning coals from his head. Buzzell (p. 961) offers a few other explanations: supplying an enemy whose fire has run out with a pan of live coals to carry home on his head to restart his fire OR based on an Egyptian ritual in which the penitent would carry a pan of burning coals on his head, showing kindness to one’s enemy will cause him to repent of his enmity.

PROVERBS 29:18

Based on the KJV’s “vision” and “perish,” this verse is often misinterpreted as a plea for having a vision for missions or the like. However, “vision” refers to revelation (so NIV), vision being one of the forms special revelation took in the Old Testament (see 1 Samuel 3:1). The Hebrew verb translated “perish” by the KJV is better translated “unrestrained” (so NASB & NIV; in Numbers 5:18, it describes the letting down of the hair; in Exodus 32:25, it describes the loosing of moral restraint). God’s Word is a restraining influence in a sinful society. “The nation that ignores God’s Word can expect spiritual and political anarchy” (Alden, p. 202).