

Wisdom Literature

Proverbs

Introduction: “The purpose of Proverbs is to impart wisdom, or skill for living. More specifically, they highlight practical wisdom, discernment, self-discipline, and moral courage. This ‘instructional poetry’ is written in short, pithy maxims focusing on one’s relationship to God and others— money, morals, speech, industry, honesty, etc. The message is that a life of wisdom and righteousness should preempt a life of foolishness and unrighteousness.” Anders

Fee and Stuart, in their book *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* said this about the Proverbs: “Proverbial wisdom concentrates mostly on practical attitudes and behavior in everyday life. As a generalization, one can say that Proverbs teaches ‘old-fashion basic values.’”

Dominick Hernandez, in his book *Proverbs: Pathways to Wisdom* says: “In the book of Proverbs, the human life is likened to a path. During this life journey, we all eventually reach a point at which we make a decision concerning the spiritual trajectory that we will follow in life. Without delay, Proverbs compels us to answer the following question: ‘During this lifetime, will I travel in the course of the fear of the Lord exhibited by practical wisdom, or will I walk in the way of wrongdoing, which will lead to my downfall?’ These distinct routes are presented at the beginning of Proverbs in which a father—frequently joined by the mother—repeatedly addresses his son, trying to convince him to choose the way of wisdom based upon the Fear of the LORD over the way of folly or wrongdoing.”
Listen—

“The Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and go not forsake the law of your mother... My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent... My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path.”

Proverbs 1-9 contain many similar calls to embrace wisdom and the fear of the Lord culminating in the personification of wisdom in chapters 8 & 9 calling out to all who would love life and see good days.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you.” Prov 9:10-11

Proverbs 10-30 are filled with what we most often think of as proverbs— short, pithy adages expressing or pointing to the way of wisdom.

Proverbs 31:10-31 Conclude the Proverbs with a poem about wisdom.

Important point: Not all proverbs are statements of absolute fact or truth, but rather general principles based on careful observation of the human experience.

Example: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This is demonstrably not a universal fact.

I. Universally True and Applicable-

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.” Prov 3:5,6

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.” Prov 9:10

“There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death.” Prov 14:12

II. Funny proverbs- Smoke to the eyes and vinegar to the teeth, a tooth ache or a foot out of joint so is the lazy man to the one who sends him on a task.

III. Lessons from insects and animals- Prov 30:24-28

- a. The Ant
- b. Rock badgers
- c. Locust
- d. Gecko or Lizard

IV. Proverbs 31:10

“Begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As we continue to read we realize the second verse begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This acrostic pattern continues for the twenty-two verses of the poem until the sequence is complete. An acrostic is an unmistakable indicator that the poet is purposely employing an aesthetic device to provide a design and increase the enjoyment of the reading experience. Thus as per the author’s request, the reader of the poem should be concerned with its beauty. The contents of the poem cannot be considered apart from its aesthetic devices, meaning that it is not right of the reader to switch the beauty of an acrostic into an idealized checklist that is only applicable to women readers.

1. She is depicted as speaking wisdom
2. She is depicted as working hard
- 3 She is depicted as being committed to the family unit

“By reading the book of proverbs slowly, attentively, and entirely, readers are able to pick up on the imagery in the woman of valor poem that is repeatedly mentioned throughout the rest of the book. The motifs of wise speech, working hard, and family blessing. This is where wisdom depicted by the woman leads.

Proverbs Wisdom

Proverbs 18:17 **“In a law suit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.”**

How many times over the years have I seen this proverb lived out right before my eyes? A person comes to see me and wants to talk about the problems they are having with another person in the church, or the difficulties they are having in a relationship, perhaps in their marriage. You listen, they seem so sincere and convincing and you find yourself fully buying into their perspective on that particular person. In your heart you might even harbor suspicion and distrust toward that individual now. Then you run into the other person out in the community or perhaps they come in to see you for some pastoral counselling and you end up hearing the other side of the story. Then you realize— you’ve been dupped. After a few of these you know from experience the truth of this proverb. Today, I try to never pass a judgement until I’ve heard both sides of the story.

Proverbs 20:29 **“The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.”**

This proverb, although perhaps not its original application, reminds me of the words of the Apostle, John, who, when speaking of the “young men” said, “I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” (1Jn 2:14) The glory of young men is their strength, but not merely their physical strength, for that strength varies from man to man, but it’s their spiritual strength that matters most. That’s the strength the Scriptures honor, and that strength is tied to their commitment to the word of God. It is a truly glorious thing to see young men filled with God’s word and overcoming the evil one. It’s also a beautiful thing to see the gray-haired old man, or, “you fathers,” as John calls them in the same passage, who “*have known* him who is from the beginning.” Just as the glory of young men is their spiritual strength, so the glory of old men is their wisdom that has come from *having known* him.

Proverbs 26:17 **“Like one who grabs a stray dog by the ears is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own.”**

This is one of the proverbs I’ve loved since first reading it years and years ago. The picture is one that is so vivid it can bring on an adrenaline rush just by reading it. It paints the picture of something that no one in their right mind would ever do. Someone must have done it though, and the thing you could be sure of is they’d never do it again. It’s the same kind of thing when we jump into someone else’s dispute or quarrel. This is so relevant in the quarrelsome culture we find ourselves in today. Especially the online culture. There have been many times when seeing a debate (quarrel) online, I’ve been tempted to jump right into the thick of it, and I must confess, there are times when I’ve succumbed to the temptation. But every time, without fail, I find that I might as well have grabbed a dog by its ears. It never ends well. So, having done that just a few days ago, I’m thankful to be reminded once again by this great bit of wisdom.