



Proverbs are divided into three parts. Chapters 1-9 contain 10 speeches about virtue, integrity, and generosity. Chapters 10-29 are a collection of wise sayings about life. Chapters 30-31 explore fearing the Lord, personified by Lady Wisdom.

Key Themes

- Fear of the Lord
- Wisdom in God's good world

Proverbs 1:1-9: Introducing Solomon's Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord

The book of Proverbs has been designed with a short introduction in 1:1-9 that starts by linking the book to King Solomon, son of David. Remember the story in I Kings 3 in which Solomon asked God for wisdom to lead Israel well? God honored his request, and Solomon became known as the wisest man and teacher in the ancient world. In I Kings 4:29-33, we're told that he wrote thousands of proverbs and poems and that he collected knowledge about plants and animals. Solomon became the fountainhead of Israel's wisdom literature, a group of texts that explore what it looks like to live well in God's good world. Not all

the material in this book is written by him personally, but Israel's wisdom tradition began with him.

The introduction goes on to say that by reading this book, you will gain wisdom. For most of us, this word simply means "knowledge," but the Hebrew word *chokhmah* means more than just mental activity. It refers primarily to practical knowledge, and it would be better translated with the word's "skill" or "applied knowledge." This is why artists and craftsmen in Israel were said to have *chokhmah*, that is skill (Exodus 31:3). This purpose of this book is to help you develop a set of practical skills for living well in God's good world.

The introduction also links with another foundational idea in this book. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 1:7, Prov.9:10). The word fear is not about terror. Rather, it refers to a sense of reverence and awe before God, which makes clear our small place in the universe. It's a moral mindset that recognizes that we are not God and don't get to make up what's right and wrong for ourselves. The fear of the Lord is a posture of humility before God, embracing his definition of good and evil even when it's difficult or inconvenient.

Proverbs 1-9: Poems From a Father and Lady Wisdom

This introduction leads us into the first main section of the book (Chapters 1-9), which doesn't contain any proverbs at all. Instead, we found 10 speeches from a father to a son. The father tells the son that he should listen to wisdom

and cultivate the fear of the Lord. This will require a life of virtue, integrity, and generosity, all of which will lead to success and peace. The father warns the son about folly and evil, about shortsighted, selfish decisions and pride. All of these will lead to ruin and shame. Therefore, the son should make the pursuit of wisdom and the fear of the Lord his highest goals. This way of thinking forms the moral logic of the entire book.

These speeches clue us in to what biblical wisdom literature is and how it's different from other parts of the Bible. While it does explore how to live well in God's world, wisdom is neither law nor prophecy. Rather, wisdom is the accumulated insight of God's people through the generations. It is all about how to live in a way that honors God and others. Through the book of Proverbs, these human words about wisdom have become God's word and wisdom to his people.

This connects to another key theme in chapters 1-9, the words of Lady Wisdom. There are four poems where wisdom is personified as a woman calling out to humanity to pay attention to her and to seek her out. Wisdom says that she is woven into the very fabric of the universe. Whenever people are making wise decisions, they're relying on her. Whenever someone is generous, has sexual integrity, or upholding justice, they're drawing on wisdom. These Lady Wisdom poems are a creative, poetic way of exploring the idea that we live in a moral universe and that goodness and justice are objective realities that we ignore at our own peril. To fear the Lord and live wisely is to live along with the grain of this universe.

Together, these twin sets of speeches from the father and Lady Wisdom make a powerful claim about the book of Proverbs. This book doesn't simply offer good advice. It is an invitation from God to learn human and divine wisdom from previous generations of God's people.

Proverbs 10–29: The Collection of Ancient Sayings

In chapters 10–29, we finally come to the collections of Proverbs. Here are hundreds of ancient sayings that apply wisdom and the fear of the Lord to every life topic you can imagine, including family, work, community life, friendship, sex, marriage, money, anger, forgiveness, alcohol, and debt. These Proverbs are short and easy to memorize. This section of the book is meant to become like a reference work to which you return time after time for the rest of your life.

This raises an important issue in reading this book. Proverbs are, by nature, about probabilities. If a person fears the Lord and makes wise, moral choices, things will likely go well for them. If a person doesn't fear the Lord and acts foolishly, their life will more likely turn out poorly. Both of these statements are often true, but not always. Therefore, the proverbs are not promises or guaranteed formulas for success.

Proverbs by their nature focus on the general rule and not the numerous exceptions to the rule. The biblical wisdom books are not ignorant about this. In fact, these exceptions to the moral rule are what the books of Job and Ecclesiastes are all about. Life is too complex for formulas, which is why we need all these books of accumulated wisdom to get to the bigger picture.

Proverbs 2 Commentary

Promises to those who seek wisdom. (1-9)

Those who earnestly seek heavenly wisdom will never complain that they have lost their labor; and the freeness of the gift does not do away the necessity of our diligence, John 6:27. Let them seek, and they shall find it; let them ask, and it shall be given to them. observe who are thus favored. They are the righteous, on whom the image of God is renewed, which consists in righteousness. If we depend upon God, and seek to him for wisdom, he will enable us to keep the paths of judgment.

John 6:27 *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. for on him God the father has set his seal."*

We must closely attend to the word of God, for that is the word of wisdom, which is able to make us wise unto salvation (vv. 1-2).

1. We must be convinced that the words of God are the fountain and standard of wisdom and understanding, and that we need not desire to be wiser than they will make us. We must incline our ear and apply our hearts to them, as to wisdom or understanding itself. Many wise things may be found in human compositions, but divine revelation, and true religion built upon it, are all wisdom.
2. We must, accordingly, receive the word of God with all readiness of mind, and bid it welcome, even the commandments as well as the promises, without

murmuring or disputing. Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.

3. We must hide them with us, as we do our treasures, which we are afraid of being robbed of. We must not only receive, but retain, the word of God, and lodge it in our hearts, that it may be always ready to us.
4. We must incline our ear to them; we must lay hold on all opportunities of hearing the word of God, and listen to it with attention and seriousness, as those that are afraid of letting it slip.
5. We must apply our hearts to them, else inclining the ear to them will stand us in no stead.

We must be much in prayer, (v.3). We must cry after knowledge, as one that is ready to perish for hunger begs hard for bread. Faint desires will not prevail; we must be importunate, as those that know the worth of knowledge and our own want of it. We must cry, as newborn babes, after the sincere milk of the Word. (1 Peter 2:2). We must lift our voice for understanding lift it up to heaven; thence these good and perfect gifts must be expected, (James 1:17, Job 38:34.) we must give our voice to understanding (so the word is), speak for it, vote for it, submit the tongue to the command of wisdom. We must consecrate our voice to it; having applied our heart to it, we must employ our voice in seeking it. Solomon prayed for wisdom and so obtained it.

We must be willing to take pains (v. 4); we must seek it as silver, preferring it far before all the wealth of this world, and laboring in search of it as those who dig in the mines, who undergo great toil and run great hazards, with indefatigable industry and invincible constancy and

resolution, in pursuit of the ore; or as those who will be rich rise up early, and sit up late, and turn every stone to get money and fill their treasures. Thus, diligent must we be in the use of the means of knowledge, following on to know the Lord.

**What success we may hope for in the use of these means.
Our labor shall not be in vain.**

1. We shall know how to maintain our acquaintance and communion with God: "Thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord (v. 5), that is, thou shalt know how to worship him aright, shalt be led into the meaning and mystery of every ordinance and be enabled to answer the end of its institution." Thou shalt find the knowledge of God, which is necessary to our fearing him aright. It concerns us to understand how much it is our interest to know God, and to evidence it by agreeable affections towards him and adorations of him.
2. We shall know how to conduct ourselves aright towards all men (v.9): "Thou shalt understand, by the word of god, righteousness, and judgment, and equity, shalt learn those principles of justice, and charity, and fair dealing, which shall guide and govern thee in the whole course of thy conversation, shall make thee fit for every relation, every business, and faithful to every trust. It shall give thee not only a right notion of justice, but a disposition to practice it, and to render to all their due; for those that do not do justly do not rightly understand it." This will lead them in every good path, for the scripture will make the man of God

perfect. Those who have the best knowledge know their duty. (Psalm 111:10).

What ground we have to hope for this success in our pursuits of wisdom, we must take our encouragement herein from God only (vv. 6-8).

1. God has wisdom to bestow, (v.6). the Lord not only is wise himself, but he gives wisdom, and that is more than the wisest men in the world can do, for it is god's prerogative to open the understanding. All the wisdom that is in any creature is his gift, his free gift, and he gives it liberally has given it to many and is still giving it; to him let us apply for it. (James 1:5 KJV) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."
2. He has blessed the world with a revelation of his will. Out of his mouth, by the law and the prophets, by the written word and by his ministers, both which are his mouth to the children of men, come knowledge and understanding, such a discovery of truth and good as, if we admit and receive the impressions of it, will make us truly knowing and intelligent. It is both an engagement and encouragement to search after wisdom that we have the scriptures to search, in which we may find it if we seek it diligently.
3. He has particularly provided those good men, who are sincerely disposed to do his will, shall have that knowledge and that understanding which are necessary for them, John 7:17. Let them seek wisdom