

Wisdom 101: Proverbs

Lesson #1 – Learning the Language of Wisdom Literature

Do you have a favorite Biblical proverb? If so, write it below and share it with the person next to you. Do you have a favorite “common sense” saying that might not be a verse of scripture but is still wise? Write it below and share it with the person next to you.

Defining Characteristics of a Proverb

1. It is a generally true principle that depends on circumstance and application.

“A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.”

– Proverbs 10:1

Can you think of any circumstances where that might not be true?

“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” – Proverbs 22:6

Can you think of examples where that would not be true?

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.” – Proverbs 26:4-5

Do these statements contradict each other? Why or why not?

2. It requires application to make the knowledge contained in the saying effective.

“Like the legs which are useless to the lame, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools. Like a thorn which is in the hand of a drunkard, so is a proverb in the mouth of fools.”

– Proverbs 26:7, 9

What does this tell us about the way we use Proverbs?

“A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word.” – Proverbs 15:23

What does this tell us about the way we should use Proverbs?

Read the description of the woman in Proverbs 31. She works with her hands, wakes up early, prepares food for her family and household, considers a field and buys it, plants a vineyard, makes clothes, helps the needy, and is praised at the gates.

In order to be worthy, do we have to do all those things every day? How should we apply this principle?

When reading Proverbs, be on the lookout for...

Parallelism

- This term refers to the correspondence between two statements in a poetic line. While the statements may seem nearly identical, the second one often expands on the principle stated in the first.
- “Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and he who speaks right is loved.”
– Proverbs 16:13

Opposites

- This format shows the same principle from differing perspectives. Sometimes the actions of two different individuals are described to show the truth of a statement.
- “He who profits illicitly troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live.”
– Proverbs 15:27

“Better Than” Statements

- This is a kind of structure that compares the value of two different things. This is often used to illustrate the difference between wisdom and folly.
- “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth. Favor is *better than* silver and gold.” – Proverbs 22:1

Imagery

- This feature is found throughout Proverbs, as an object or person is used to symbolize something else. One of the images throughout the book is the symbol of Proverbs as a “Wise Woman.”
- “Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy one to those who send him.” – Proverbs 10:26

Metaphorical Statements

- This particular type of metaphor takes a name, virtue, or characteristic of one object and applies it to another. Often, this kind of proverb is used to take a lesson from the world of nature and apply it to human life.
- “Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net in the sight of any bird.” – Psalm 1:17