

of Proverbs. Over this weekend you could look up the words 'tongue', 'lips' and 'speech' in a concordance to see what wisdom the book has to bear on this sensitive matter!

2. Some Christians have made a habit of reading a chapter of this book a day, covering it every month. What about it?
3. If you wanted to look into the book in greater detail, Derek Kidner's commentary on *Proverbs*, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (IVP)*, would be an invaluable addition to your bookshelf. Linking Proverbs to the other rich wisdom literature of the Bible is his *Wisdom to Live By (IVP)*.

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 40: The Book of Proverbs (A whole book study)

Wisdom literature, a type of writing found in the Bible, was common throughout Old Testament times. Either it consisted of instruction for a successful life (as in Proverbs) or else considered the perplexities of human existence. Ecclesiastes and the book of Job belong to the latter type.

It is generally agreed that Solomon did not write the whole book of Proverbs. Rather, there were a number of writers, whose collections of what are often just common-sense sayings go to make up the book as we have it. They used a number of poetic devices to aid memorization e.g. riddles, parables or comparisons. Much of this however is sadly lost in the process of translation from the Hebrew.

Day 1. Acquiring wisdom

Proverbs 1:1-7; 3:5-6

To start you thinking about proverbs in general make a list of some modern-day ones. How would you describe these proverbs? Upon what are they founded? Does God have any place in them? Then turn to Proverbs 1:1-7.

1. What reasons for studying Proverbs are stated here? Yet what should be the starting point, undergirding the pursuit of all knowledge and indeed life itself?

Note: You may sometimes think that Proverbs is nothing more than good worldly wisdom. But time and again you will encounter God's perspective on life slipping in.

2. As you read Proverbs 3:5-6, which are well-known verses, try to put them in your own words. In what ways have you relied on your own understanding? What caused that self-reliance? How would God's perspective have altered the situation?

Through the day try to memorize Proverbs 3:5-6, remembering that wisdom is not something gained overnight. Pray that you may always consciously acknowledge God and his will in every decision and situation.

Wisdom as a person

In the Old Testament, wisdom was, for the most part, seen as a characteristic of God, like his justice or mercy. The Hebrew mind however tended to avoid abstract

ideas, and to think of wisdom poetically as a person. This personification may be seen beautifully in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:22-31 (even to the point of having a part in creation). But wisdom probably was not seen as a literal person, i.e. the Son of God rather than simply an attribute of God, until after Old Testament times.

Day 2. The fool

Verses from Proverbs chapters 14,15,18,20,21,23

Sometimes in Proverbs the fool, who makes frequent appearances throughout the book, is described as simple - that is, one who is not stupid but who prefers to reject disciplines and wisdom and to go his own way. At other times the fool is referred to as one who is dull and obstinate (without referring to his intellectual ability).

1. To build up a picture of what the writers thought of foolishness you could look up in a concordance the references in Proverbs to 'fool' and 'simple'. However, to get you started, look up the following verses: 14:3, 8, 15; 15:2, 5; 18:2, 6; 20:3; 21:20; 23:9.
2. Note down on one side of the page what is said about the fool and on the other, the contrast of the wise.
3. Does your behaviour always match up to that of the wise?

Take time to consider your own life in the light of what you have written down.

Day 3. Idleness

Proverbs 6:6-11; 19:24; 21:25-26; 24:30-34

The way of the sluggard is another common theme in this book. As in the previous study, note down the point made about him in each of the verses given below. Then consider your own attitudes in the light of these verses!

1. 6:6-11 - How long does it take you to offer to help out in your church, to help your friends or family? With what result?
2. 19:24 - How often can you just not be bothered to complete a job you have started?
3. 21:25-26 - What place does wishful thinking have in your life? With what result?
4. 24:30-34 - Are there things you need to put right now before it is too late? The sluggard will always put off things till another day!

Day 4. Friendship

Verses from Proverbs chapters 14,16,17,18,19,25

The commonest word used for friend has a wide range of meanings. The context should help to clarify the meaning.

1. Jot down a summary of 14:20; 19:4-5,7. Then contrast this type of friendship with that spoken of in 17:17 and 18:24. How guilty are you of befriending or paying attention to the seemingly important or influential people in your church or social group?
2. Take time to reflect on the friendships you have. What motivates that friendship?
3. Relationships are frequently vulnerable and they need to be protected and cultivated. Look at 17:9,17 to see one way in which a friendship can be developed.
4. According to 16:28, 17:9 and 25:17 what can so easily destroy friendship?

Perhaps you have recently been hurt by the damaging of a friendship. Jesus at least understands what it means to be betrayed by a friend (Luke 22:1-6, 47-53). Or perhaps you have been the cause of damaging a friendship. Ask God for his forgiveness (if you are truly sorry) and see if you can bring some reconciliation.

Day 5. Wives

Proverbs 31:10-31

There are some amusing but alarmingly apt comments about wives in Proverbs e.g. 27:15-16! But one of the best known parts in the whole book is 31:10-31.

1. As you read these verses, note down each characteristic of this resourceful woman, trying to use twentieth century language and images.
2. Not every woman is involved in trade or buying property, yet this view of womanhood suggests a wholeness which many in society today are searching after. How could you use the Bible's view of this woman to help those disillusioned by the lot of women?
3. What do you notice about her relationships with God, her husband and children? What about their approach to her? Could that be the reason for her 'wholeness'?
4. If you are a woman, whether or not you are married, how can the example of this woman encourage you in your daily life? If you are a man, how far do your expectations of your wife or women in general tie in with this woman's character? If married, can you help your wife to gain greater fulfilment in her daily life?

Weekend

1. There are so many other themes which we could have explored in this study