

# PROVERBS OVERVIEW - Chuck Swindoll

## Who wrote the book?

Proverbs, like Psalms, names multiple individuals as the authors of its various sections. Solomon was uniquely qualified to serve as the principal author for this book of wise sayings. [First Kings 3:5–9](#) recounts Solomon asking God for wisdom in his reign over Israel, a request God eventually granted ([1 Kings 4:29–31](#)). In fact, Solomon identified himself as the source of most of the book. His name appears at the beginning of three distinct sections—[Proverbs 1:1](#), [10:1](#), and [25:1](#)—covering almost all of the first twenty-nine chapters of the book.

A short section consisting of [Proverbs 22:17–24:34](#) expresses “the words of the wise” ([Proverbs 22:17](#)), which Solomon may have compiled from various sources. Evidence that Solomon drew on multiple sources appears in [Proverbs 24:23](#), where Solomon used the plural noun for “wise” (also translated sages) to describe the authors of this section. Also, due to the book’s similarities with Mesopotamian and Egyptian collections of proverbs such as “The Instruction of Amenemope,” it’s possible that God inspired Solomon to record this section based on wise sayings he had been exposed to throughout his life.<sup>1</sup>

The final two chapters identify Agur (30:1) and Lemuel (31:1) as their authors, though the identities of these men remain mysterious in history.

## Where are we?

The composition of Proverbs remains one of the most difficult questions about the book. Its strong association with Solomon means most of its contents were completed prior to his death in 931 BC. Clearly the book stayed in the southern kingdom of Judah, as Hezekiah’s men compiled more of Solomon’s proverbs in [Proverbs 25–29](#). This indicates that the book was likely in its final form sometime before the end of Hezekiah’s reign in 686 BC.

## Why is Proverbs so important?

Proverbs accomplishes something no other biblical book does: it simply compiles numerous short instructions for living an effective life on earth. While other books articulate profound theological truths, lengthy narratives of triumph and failure, or prophetic preaching to a disobedient people, Proverbs concerns itself completely with instructing people in the path of wisdom. The writers of the book recognized the varied circumstances of a person’s life and provided principles to apply in a variety of situations rather than instructions to follow in only a few specific instances.

## What's the big idea?

Proverbs states its theme explicitly very early in the book: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” ([Proverbs 1:7](#)). The fear of the Lord refers to our viewing Him with the respect He deserves. It means living our lives in light of what we know of Him, holding Him in the highest estimation, and depending on Him with humble trust. Only then, Proverbs teaches, will we discover knowledge and wisdom (see also 9:10).

In writing the Proverbs, Solomon hoped that his readers would attain practical righteousness in all things and that we would do this by living our lives under the authority and direction of God. He specifically explained the book’s purpose in 1:2–6, focusing on imparting understanding that would impact every facet of our lives. Much

of the book emphasizes listening to others so that we might learn from them and apply the combined knowledge of those who have gone before us—such as parents and elders—to the unique circumstances of our own lives (1:5, 8). Wisdom then involves appropriating a measure of humility, first before God and then before others. If instead, we decide to speak rashly rather than listen attentively . . . well, Proverbs deals with that too (12:15; 13:3).

## **How do I apply this?**

Read it! Then live it! Proverbs contains some of the most applicable nuggets of truth in all of the Bible. Most of the proverbs are pithy statements brimming over with imagery from the real world. This approach allows us to see very clearly how any particular proverb might be applied to any number of everyday situations we encounter—from getting out of bed in the morning to building a strong foundation in our relationships with others. Proverbs reminds us that God concerns Himself not just with the big, cataclysmic events of life but even those mundane, “invisible” moments in our lives as well.

Are you following God, even in those seemingly “small” circumstances? Allow Proverbs to refocus your attention on all the hidden moments of your life.

## **OUTLINE by J Vernon Magee**

### OUTLINE:

I. Wisdom and folly contrasted,  
Chapters 1 — 9

II. Proverbs of Solomon, written and set in order by himself,  
Chapters 10 — 24

III. Proverbs of Solomon, set in order by men of Hezekiah,  
Chapters 25 — 29

IV. Oracle of Agur, unknown sage,  
Chapter 30

V. Proverbs of a mother to Lemuel,  
Chapter 31

### COMMENT:

I. Wisdom and folly contrasted,  
Chapters 1 — 9

## **Chapter 1—**

The boy in the home starting out in life.

v. 5

— The challenge.

v. 7

— This is repeated for every age and period in a person's life: childhood, teens, school age, adulthood, and the estate of senior citizen.

v. 8

— The responsibility of parenthood — the little boy in the home is to be taught by his parents.

v. 10

— This reminds us of Joseph (Genesis 39).

v. 22

—

Simplicity is “stupidity.”

v. 32

—

Prosperity of fools is a picture of our affluent society.

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## **Chapter 2—**

The boy begins to grow up and moves beyond the circle of the home.

v. 2

— Source of true wisdom.

v. 16

—

Strange woman

was a harlot. God's law forbade His people from being harlots.

## **Chapter 3 —**

The boy is now to listen to God's law, as he was advised as a child in the home to turn to his father and mother (Proverbs 1:8).

vv. 5-7

— This is a popular portion, but v. 7 is usually omitted

— it should be included.

v. 9

— Material blessings always have a spiritual significance.

vv. 11, 12

— A Christian should learn this early in life (Hebrews 12:5-11).

vv. 33-35

— These verses are gems. The first part of v. 33 applies to Ahab and Jezebel.

#### **Chapter4—**

Although the child is now a boy who has entered the big, bad and mad world, he is still counseled to remember the instruction of his father.

v. 7

— This thought runs like a stuck record through the entire book as the total objective of life. Wisdom, for the Christian, is Christ.

v. 23

— The heart is the seat of the total personality. For its importance, get a concordance and look up all the references to the heart.

#### **Chapters 5 and 6—**

Read these chapters carefully and you will find that the young man is counseled to live a pure life for the sake of his home. This is the kind of sex education that God gives.

Chapter

5

v. 21

— The private life of the individual is always open before the Lord.

#### **Chapter 6v. 1**

— Beware of signing a friend's note, and never become a partner with a stranger.

vv. 6-9

— Don't be lazy. Have a plan. Be organized. Let the lowly ant teach you.

vv. 16-19

— God loves, but God also hates. Here are 7 things on

His hate parade. They are an ugly brood. Pride is number 1; it is a tumor of the brain. Through pride, Satan fell (Isaiah 14:12-17).

Contrast these 7 things with the 7 beatitudes.

vv. 27-29, 32

— The young man is being given a full sex education. A clean life is the only thing that meets God's standard. It is in conflict with, and actually opposite to, the "new morality."

#### **Chapter7—**

Beware of the woman of easy morals.

#### **Chapter8—**

The young man is ready to go to college. The school of Wisdom and the school of fools bid for his application.

vv. 1-4

— Wisdom calls urgently to the young man.

v. 13

— This is the major in the college of Wisdom.

v. 17

— The only scholarship offered is a passionate desire to learn.

v. 23

—

Set up is “anointed.”

### **Chapter9—**

The young man matriculates in the school of Wisdom.

v. 10

— This is the freshman course. It is the great lesson from the cradle through college. Classes are ready to begin.

II. Proverbs of Solomon, written and set in order by himself,  
Chapters 10 — 24

### **Chapter10—**

The school bell rings. Notice the guidelines for the young student: vv. 1, 5, 7, 14, 16, 18, 23, 26, 30.

### **Chapter11v. 1**

— Principle for business.

v. 10

— Think of David and Saul in connection with this verse.

v. 15

— Don't sign the note.

v. 16

— This reminds us of Ruth and Boaz.

v. 22

— Beauty is only skin deep.

v. 26

— This also reminds us of Joseph's experience in Egypt.

v. 30

— The young man is to witness.

### **Chapter12v. 4**

— Choosing a wife is more important than choosing a course.

v. 15

— Rehoboam illustrates this proverb (1 Kings 12).

v. 22

— Tell the truth.

### **Chapter13v. 3**

— Shut up!

v. 5

— When you talk, tell the truth.

v. 24

— This is child psychology.

### **Chapter14v. 3**

— This reminds us of the giant, Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

v. 5

— Don't believe all you hear.

v. 9

— This is applicable to Jezebel.

v. 12

— This is God's answer to the man who says that it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

v. 16

— The prodigal son did not return to the far country. Jonah never bought a second ticket to Tarshish.

v. 34

— This is the plank that has been left out of the platform of all political parties. It is a prophecy that is coming true in the United States.

### **Chapter15v. 1**

— See the story of Nabal and Abigail — “Beauty and the Beast” (1 Samuel 25:2-38).

v. 3

— Big Brother may not be watching you, but God is.

vv. 8, 26

— The wicked cannot do good nor think right.

vv. 16, 17

— Read Daniel 1.

v. 20

— The father brags about his son who does well — forgets the other.

v. 23

— It is not only what you say, but when you say it.

v. 29

— Does God answer prayer?

v. 30

— The young man gets his first-quarter grades.

### **Chapter16**

v. 2

— This is the way we rationalize our conduct.

v. 5

— God has not changed His mind.

v. 7

— This is a barometer for conduct.

v. 11

— This is a word for the butcher, the baker, and the candle-stick maker.

v. 12

— This is the lesson Hitler (and others like him) did not learn.

v. 18

— The lull before the storm.

v. 24

— Say it with words now and not with flowers later.

v. 25

— Men are all striving for the same place, but it is not the place they think. Notice God's way (John 14:6).

v. 31

— A motto for the senior citizen.

v. 33

— Applicable to the Book of Esther.

## **Chapter17**

v. 3

— This reminds us of Job's sufferings.

v. 5

— God is interested in the poverty program.

v. 9

— You can't believe half of what you hear, but you can repeat it!

v. 16

— Someone has rhymed it this way:

You can lead a horse to water, But you cannot make him drink.

You can send a boy to college, But you cannot make him think.

v. 17

— It is wonderful to have friends.

v. 21

— This is when the parents receive the first-semester grades.

v. 22

— "The joy of the LORD

is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4).

v. 23

— Don't be bribed.

v. 28

— It pays to keep your mouth shut.

## **Chapter18**

v. 10

— "Safe in the arms of Jesus" — yes, but rather "Safe as an arm of Jesus."

v. 14

— The will to fight and live.

v. 16

— This fits David, but also each one of us.

v. 21

— Have you told that loved one or friend that Jesus died for him or her? You have the keys to the kingdom of heaven — use them!

v. 22

— Let God help you choose a wife.

v. 24

— Are you a friend to your friends? “There is no friend like the lowly Jesus.”

## **Chapter19**

v. 4

— Ask the prodigal son about fair-weather friends (Luke 15).

vv. 5, 9

— You can cut your throat with the tongue.

v. 13

— Delinquent children and a nagging wife do not make a happy home.

v. 21

— Man can make a computer; only God can put sense into it.

v. 23

— Fear of the Lord is still basic truth.

v. 24

— Boy, is he lazy!

v. 29

— God is not soft on the guilty.

## **Chapter20**

v. 1

— This was true at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2). Christ did not make intoxicating drink.

v. 2

— See Romans 13:1-5.

v. 3

— Keep your nose out of your neighbor’s business.

v. 4

— Obstacles can be either stumbling blocks or stepping-stones.

v. 9

— Guilty or not guilty? The Great Physician says, “The heart is...desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9).

v. 12

— God not only made the bird to sing, but the ear to hear the song. God not only made the sunset, but the eye to see it.

v. 14

— “Look at the bargain I got!” He told the salesman that the price was too high.

v. 20

— “Honor thy father and mother” (Ephesians 6:1, 2) is still sound advice.

v. 23



— Honesty is the best policy.

## **Chapter21**

v. 1

— God has to give the green light.

v. 2

— Man rationalizes; God scrutinizes.

v. 3

— “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).

v. 4

— Attitudes and motives are the yardstick of sin.

v. 9

— This is the man who did not know what true happiness was until he got married — and then it was too late.

v. 13

— “God must love the poor, for He made so many of them” is ascribed to Lincoln.

v. 30

— The power of positive preaching (2 Corinthians 13:8).

## **Chapter22**

v. 1

— A Dunn and Bradstreet rating.

v. 2

— It is all level ground at the cross.

v. 6

— “Train up a child in the [God’s] way he should go and, when he is old, he will not depart from it.” God has a way for a child, and it is up to parents to find that way. The parents should train a child in God’s way, not the parents’ way.

## **Chapter23**

vv. 1-3

— Don’t make a pig of yourself.

v. 4

— Riches and education are excess baggage.

v. 5

— Did you ever invest in a wildcat oil well?

v. 9

— You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. The Pygmalion and Galatea of the Bible.

vv. 13, 14

— This is applying the board of education to the seat of knowledge.

v. 23

— A bargain at any price.

## **Chapter24**

v. 10

— It takes a man to do a man's job.

v. 16

— Peter and Judas illustrate this.

vv. 19, 20

— God will take care of all cases of injustice.

III. Proverbs of Solomom, set in order by men of Hezekiah,  
Chapters 25 — 29

## **Chapter25**

v. 2

— Search the Scriptures. God never puts diamonds on top of the ground.

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(2 Timothy 2:15)

v. 17

— "I wish that old gossip would stay home."

v. 19

— Judas was a bad toothache.

vv. 21, 22

— See Romans 12:19, 20.

v. 24

— Is this grounds for divorce?

v. 25

— Have you heard from home lately?

## **Chapter26**

vv. 4, 5

— This is not a contradiction, but two actions with two results. You are in trouble if you answer a fool (v. 4). The fool is in trouble if you don't answer him — he will think he is smart (v. 5).

## **Chapter27**

—

This chapter deals with the subject of friendship.

v. 6

— Paul rebuked Peter (Galatians 2:11-14), but they were still friends. Judas kissed Jesus, but he betrayed Him.

v. 9

— A talk with a friend is sweeter than a bottle of Chanel #5.

v. 10

— This is the California proverb — many folk left their friends in the Midwest, and the nearest relative is 2000 miles away.

v. 12

— Buy insurance.

v. 15

— Here is that battle-ax of a wife again.

v. 17

— A sharp friend will keep you sharp.

v. 19

— A friend is one who knows you and still loves you.

v. 20

— No man was ever satisfied with a million.

v. 24

— “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...”  
(Matthew 6:19).

## **Chapter28**

v. 1

— The wicked is afraid of his own shadow.

v. 9

— If you want God to listen to you, then you listen to Him.

v. 13

— See 1 John 1:9.

v. 14

— Fear God and you will have no man to fear.

v. 24

— Parents should not ignore acts of theft in the home.

v. 26

— “Trust in the L

ORD

with all thine heart...” (Proverbs 3:5).

## **Chapter29**

v. 1

— Sudden death.

v. 2

— For whom did you vote?

v. 5

— Beware of the man who flatters you.

IV. Oracle of Agur, unknown sage,

## **Chapter 30**

v. 4

— Ask Job this question (Job 38).

vv. 8, 9

— Follow the middle of the road. Don't be an extremist.

v. 12

— Is he talking about us?

vv. 15, 16

— The horse constantly pulls on the rein. Abel began a march to the grave that has not ended. The woman who cannot have a child always wants to have children. We have too little rain in California and too much fire.

v. 20

— “Illicit sex is not sin,” the sinner says. The “new morality” is not new.

vv. 21-23

— For these four little troublemakers, a very crude bromide, which was popular when I was a boy, fits: “He is too big for his breeches.”

v. 22

— A thumbnail sketch of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12-14).

V. Proverbs of a mother to Lemuel,

## **Chapter 31**

A popular title would be “Advice on How to Choose a Wife.”

v. 1

— “King Lemuel” was evidently the pet name used by Bathsheba for her son, Solomon. Solomon does not seem to have followed her advice.

v. 2

— “How shall I begin?” It is a delicate subject, and a man does not want his mother to speak to him on this matter of wine, women, and song.

v. 3

— The subject here is women.

vv. 4-7

— The subject here is wine. The Bible teaches temperance in all things. Rulers are advised (vv. 4, 5) to practice total abstinence because of their position. (Several years ago it was reported that there were 128 cocktail parties a week in Washington, D.C.) Strong drink (v. 6) is to be used as a medicine (1 Timothy 5:23).

vv. 8, 9

— The ruler is to defend the helpless, the weak, and the poor. The ruler is to be just and righteous. The ruler represents God.

vv. 10-31

— Choosing a wife.

v. 10

— If a good man is hard to find, a good woman is harder to find. Scarcity makes her valuable — law of supply and demand.

v. 11

— She must essentially be a woman whom her husband can trust.

v. 12

— She is a help, not a millstone around his neck.

vv. 13, 14

— She is a good worker and a bargain-hunter.

v. 15

— A woman's work is never done.

v. 16

— She is a good administrator.

v. 17

— She doesn't mind physical work — she mops the floor.

v. 18

— She is on the swing shift, but she is not a swinger!

v. 19

— She may not be able to play the piano, but she can sew.

v. 20

— She has a compassionate heart.

v. 21

— She keeps her children in warm clothing.

v. 22

— She does fancy work.

v. 23

— Her husband is known as Mrs. So-and-So's husband.

v. 24

— She sells handmade garments on the side for pin money.

v. 25

— She has a good reputation.

v. 26

— She is not a dumb blonde, brunette, or redhead.

v. 27

— She is not lazy, but looks after her family.

v. 28

— Her children celebrate Mother's Day with joy and reality.

v. 29

— She never won the Miss America Pageant, but she is the winner at home.

v. 30

— Not only should a son learn to fear the Lord, but the daughter should learn also.

v. 31

— Her life is a book of praise