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# A STORYTELLER'S GUIDE TO PROVERBS

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# 3 Things Proverbs is NOT

Proverbs is often portrayed as a great collection of wise sayings. These thoughtful bits of wisdom are great for blowing the minds of your Christian fellows--if you can snag a relevant one from the sea of two-liners. While Proverbs is a collection, as even a casual glance through the book will show, such a basic understanding does not come close to doing this book justice.

It's like describing Star Trek as the journeys of a spaceship, or Harry Potter as the adventures of a young wizard. There are many collections of wise sayings, but this is Proverbs. This is the one that tops them all!

With that said, there are some things you absolutely will not find in Proverbs. So, if any of these three are what you personally look for in a collection of wise sayings, you may wish to look elsewhere.

Proverbs is NOT

# A List of Rules

Odd for a book dedicated solely to dispensing wisdom to ignorant masses, isn't it? Indeed, Solomon, the author, may not be the wisest man who ever lived. After all, everyone knows that wisdom is found in the proper length of a young lady's skirt, in long lectures on the evils of alcohol, and in the proper style of worship music. To say nothing of warning the wayward young against the devils of Pokemon, Harry Potter, and dancing.

Instead of a large list of do's and don'ts, Solomon offers knowledge, understanding, and discernment. It as if Solomon and the Lord he speaks of expect young people to take what their parents have told them and think for themselves, decide for themselves. In all seriousness, I've never heard of such a thing (even though it's in my Bible...).

Proverbs is NOT

# "Because I Said So"

It does not say, "Believe me, because I'm a book of the Bible and inspired by God." For example, Proverbs does encourage trusting in God, but it always gives a reason as to why. Take Proverbs 3:5-6, which begins, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart," and ends, "and He will direct your paths." These verses promise that all who trust God completely will receive His direction in their lives.

The style of teaching based solely on authority and faith is completely contrary to the purpose of Proverbs, as laid out in the first 6 verses. "To understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles," (Proverbs 1:6). Note the words "to understand". Why should the Lord, who claims to have all wisdom and understanding, fear when the young ask why? Never fear, young readers, Proverbs will always explain itself. Its purpose is to help the simple understand.

Proverbs is NOT

# Cryptic

Proverbs explains all its own terms and interprets all its own concepts. It will often say the same thing twice using different words, which allows for greater understanding of what it is trying to say.

Take Proverbs 3:5, for example, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” Anyone who has ever been told to trust in God knows that this phrase, standing alone, means very little. This verse, however, qualifies it by adding “with all your heart,” and then restates the concept. “With all your heart” tells me this decision is an all-or-nothing deal. Trusting God halfway won’t cut it.

“Lean not on your understanding” defines what trusting God means; that is, to abandon my own understanding of my world in favor of God’s. In the same way that the second line completes the meaning of the first, the first line helps explain the second. Not leaning on my own understanding means trusting God with my whole being.



Now that I know what “trust in God” entails, I can act accordingly, whereas before I could only discard the advice for lack of knowledge. I am also guarded from defining what “trust in God” means for myself, as the verse has already defined the phrase.

Of course, Proverbs 3:5 is only one example. Many, if not all, the themes in Proverbs are recurring, so there are multiple verses on the subject of wives, children, money, and so forth. Proverbs contains its own truth; when taken as a whole, there is no room for subjective interpretation.

Assuming the reader sticks around to consider the entirety of the book before drawing conclusions.



# 7 Key Words to Know

In reading Proverbs, certain terms appear several times. Since they are repeated so much, it is safe to assume that knowing how the book defines these terms will lead to a greater understanding of Proverbs as a whole. Here I have listed most of the important ones, along with my own interpretation of them after studying Proverbs on my own.

These are not dictionary definitions. I often wonder how helpful the dictionary actually is when studying the Bible, as the dictionary often states everything is such plain, basic terms that I have to reinterpret them in order for the definition to actually mean something. In short, dictionaries in a general sense have no class (though I might change my mind after completing this list).

## ***Knowledge***

Information about the world and all that is in it.

## ***Understanding***

To know a matter completely; to understand in full. To have knowledge of something is not to understand it. For example, if I watch a video by Smarter Every Day about honey curling, I know that honey curls. I've seen it myself, and he shows it in awesome slow motion. However, I do not understand why it curls until he explains the physics to me.

## ***Discretion/Discernment***

The ability to judge the best option. When you know the facts of a matter and you understand what the matter is about, you can discern the best action to take. A great example is knowing when to speak and when to keep your mouth shut. Discernment is also used when making tough decisions (like whether to use your mouth or not).

## ***Wisdom***

The pinnacle of knowledge, understanding, and discretion. Wisdom is the possession and application of all three.

### ***Instruction***

To teach, to give to the ignorant knowledge and understanding. Only helpful if the other party is able to accept the instruction.

### ***Correction***

To redirect from a wrong decision to a right one. To be used to increase the understanding of the other party for their future wellbeing. Otherwise, it's just abuse.

### ***Abomination***

The most horrid, despicable, vile thing in existence. Hate is not strong enough to define the feeling that arises in God when he sees one. God names seven-  
-“A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:17-19).



# A Cast of Characters

There are many characters in Proverbs, some of them helpful and others decidedly not. Whatever their role, they are all unforgettable.

Here is a list of the people you'll meet when reading through Proverbs.

# Major Characters

The **Son** is the protagonist of Proverbs. He is right on the verge of adulthood, and has many choices in front of him. Of all the paths that lay ahead, which will he choose? And where will he end up?

The **Father** is the Son's mentor. He takes great interest in seeing his Son succeed. He recognizes that he cannot make his Son's choices for him, but the Father can point his Son in the right direction.

**Wisdom** is the main opposition to the antagonists and the minions. Describing her ways takes almost the entirety of Proverbs.

The **Lord** is the Absolute in Proverbs. It is he that defines right and wrong. He is one who created Wisdom, and by His hand the righteous prosper.

# Antagonists

The main antagonist in Proverbs is obviously **Satan** himself. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, could not have missed warning young people against the wiles of the devil. Well, that's the thing... Solomon did not see fit to mention Satan in his Proverbs, not even in passing.

The first antagonist is actually the **Wicked**, or Sinners. Since the Lord is defined as absolute, the Wicked are men who live contrary to everything the Lord represents. There are various classifications of wicked men, including those greedy for gain, the miser (who may be either rich or poor), and the oppressor.

The other antagonist is the **Seductress**. She comes in three main varieties: the harlot (prostitute), the adulteress, and the woman of folly. Like the sirens of Greek mythology, the Seductress tempts men to their grave.

# Minions

There are other characters in Proverbs who live contrary to the Lord's ways, but they are a danger very different from the Wicked and the Seductress. Comparatively, they do not seem nearly as strong. Nevertheless, do not underestimate the ease with which men fall into their ways.

The **Simple** is not, at first, living in opposition to the Lord. He just doesn't know a lot. The danger, however, is when the Simple cling to their simplicity and refuse knowledge.

The **Fool** is perhaps spoken of the most, when he himself is not speaking, that is. He scoffs at Wisdom. The Fool is the easiest to find and perhaps the easiest to become.

The **Sluggard**, or the lazy man, is best friend to the fool. He does not talk nearly so much, though, as he can most often be found sleeping. The Sluggard actually does own a field, so he can work, but he refuses to. Lions and all, you know.

# Minor Characters

There are many characters that make small appearances. Some of these are listed below, but not all.

The **Wise** are those who seek Wisdom as their single most precious pursuit. Curiously, no age limit is mentioned for the wise. As young men particularly are encouraged to seek Wisdom, presumably even the very young can still be numbered among the Wise.

The **Wife** comes in two categories: the foolish wife and the prudent wife. If a husband has the first, he is urged to seek refuge on the corner of a roof or in a desert somewhere. The second, however, is her husband's greatest joy.

The **King** is one to be careful of. How people act in his presence often sorts the fools from the wise.