

# BIBLE CHALLENGE

## A one week study of the book of Proverbs

### Proverbs: Wisdom for a Life of Faith

The story so far: We continue our brief break from the story line of the Old Testament this week with a look at the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is most often associated with Solomon – as attested to in 1:1. But the book is also made up of proverbs collected from a variety of sources, not all of which were written by Solomon himself. At 22:17 we get an indication that what follows are “sayings of the wise.” Again at 25:1 we get an indication that the proverbs to follow were from Solomon, but copied during the time of Hezekiah, who lived centuries later. We find that at 30:1 we have the sayings of Agur and at 31:1 the sayings of Lemuel, both of whom are people who are lost to us. We don’t know who they were, but their wise sayings are included in the collection.

The book of Proverbs deals with everything from where to sit at a banquet to how to deal with your children and how to manage your finances. But the key to all this wisdom lies in our relationship with God.

#### Monday:

Read Proverbs 1:1-7, 20-33

What to look for:

- The key to understanding the entire book of Proverbs can be found in verse 7. Wisdom is rooted in relationship. That is a different approach to knowledge than we use in this century. In today’s culture, wisdom is derived from the reasoning self and what I, with my own intellect, can come to know, deduce, understand, etc. But the book of Proverbs suggests that the place for true understanding develops in relationship with God. A faith relationship becomes the context in which understanding grows. This idea is repeated in 3:5-6.

#### Tuesday:

Read Proverbs 4

What to look for:

- Note the structure of this chapter. A wise man is teaching about life to those who have gathered around him to listen. This is a typical pattern for Proverbs.
- Note also the pattern that is used in this poetry. It is a common style of poetry also found in the psalms, called “parallelism”. Its structure is such that what is said in the first half of the verse is repeated in a slightly different way in the second half. For example, note the parallelism in vs. 6, 7, 12. Can you find other examples in this chapter?

- What must you do to “above all else guard your heart” (vs. 23)? What consequences come from letting your guard down?
- How do vs. 25-27 help in guarding your heart?

Wednesday:

Read Proverbs 10

What to look for:

- Once again the style found in this chapter is common throughout Proverbs and Psalms. What you see in this chapter is called “antithetical parallelism”. Note how the thought in the first half of the verse is followed by its opposite in the second half, connected with the word “but”. You can see it clearly throughout this chapter. Noticing the structure of the poem in this way can help you pick up the subtle shades of meaning the author wanted to communicate.
- It is important to understand the book of Proverbs as a whole. To quote individual proverbs as if they were absolute truth in every case can do violence to the book and represent a misunderstanding of it. For instance, vs. 4 would not be a helpful proverb to bring to bear on someone who is struggling from unemployment or underemployment.
- As you read each proverb in this chapter, one at a time, which one speaks most directly to you?

Thursday:

Read Proverbs 11

What to look for:

- Relationship with God, the context for growth in wisdom according to Proverbs, has an equally important second component: relationship with people. Where in this chapter do you see concern for wisdom as it relates to the importance of your relationship with others?
- A general theme found throughout Proverbs is that character counts. The health and wisdom we have on the inside is of far greater concern than what we show to the world around us. Where in these proverbs do you find that theme underscored?

Friday:

Read Proverbs 31:1-9

What to look for:

- Both the Old and New Testament contain an unrelenting concern for the poor and the voiceless in our world. Why do you think the Bible is so concerned with those whose rights are at risk and who are at the bottom of the social ladder? Why is it important for those in the middle and top rungs to speak for those who are at the bottom?

- Who are the voiceless in our society who need to be spoken for? Who are they in your personal world? How might you go about speaking up for victims?