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About This Book

The Beginning

This book was conceived over 25 years ago. John was far away, training in the National Guard. I was teaching art and music in a Christian school. Email didn't exist, so the time-honored letter became our main vehicle for communication. Occasionally a drawing would sneak into one of those letters. Time to guess the proverb! I would illustrate a verse from Proverbs and John would identify it in his next letter. Then he would draw an illustration, and I would identify his.

Eventually this little game blossomed into a calendar filled with brightly colored proverbs illustrations, one for each month, bound and wrapped and left outside the apartment door of the man who would someday become my husband.

The game reappeared as our children began to arrive. As soon as the little guys could draw, John started reading a chapter of Proverbs while they listened and scribbled. A few minutes of silence would follow at the end of the chapter, then show time! While one boy displayed his picture, the rest of us would try to identify the proverb he had illustrated.

Eventually we collected twelve of our best drawings and put them together into another calendar, this time one we could photocopy and distribute to each family in our church.

The Goal

Over the years our family has continued to spend a lot of time reading the book of Proverbs. It is a book full of wisdom for young and old. Every family should be studying it!

We want to encourage and help other families dig into the book of Proverbs. With this in mind, we sponsored a contest. We invited young people to join us in our proverbs illustration game. We asked them to read Proverbs, select verses, and draw pictures to illustrate them. Our goal was to collect at least two good illustrations for each chapter of Proverbs. We received more than 500 entries! What a blessing it was to our family as we selected the 62 winners and 28 runners-up that are included in this book!

This collection of drawings is designed for use during family Bible times. As someone reads a chapter, family members can listen while looking at the picture for that chapter. Attending carefully to the meaning of each proverb, the family can attempt to identify which proverb the picture represents.

After you have read the entire book twice and identified all the proverbs, we will show you how to progress to topical and chapter studies in the book of Proverbs. Like the treasure hunter looking for the chest of gold, the student of Proverbs must slow down, read clues, contemplate, and dig! We'll help you learn how!

We want to thank the many young people who took the time to study their Bibles and to draw and send the many fine illustrations we received for this project. You are great! We

pray that your love for God's Word will continue and mature, and that your fear of the Lord will lead you to become wise men and women, eager and equipped to advance Christ's kingdom in His world.



One of the drawings from our original 1979 Proverbs calendar.
The proverb is from chapter 26.

Join the Treasure Hunt

Where to Look for Wisdom

Proverbs are designed to give knowledge and discretion to the young and immature, and to give even greater wisdom to those who are already wise. As parents, we are responsible to teach our children when we sit down in our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.

The book of Proverbs is a perfect God-given handbook to help us fulfill our task. It is an *essential* book to study with our children as we train and disciple them in wise and righteous living. To attempt to raise godly children while ignoring the wealth of wisdom in the Proverbs is foolhardy. Would we expect to arrive at a specific destination thousands of miles away without consulting a map or seeking directions from others? The book of Proverbs is like a treasure hunter's map. It will guide you, and help you guide your children, to the great riches of God's wisdom.

Wisdom in Pictures

While offering wisdom to the naive and greater wisdom to the wise, the book of Proverbs also paints a myriad of vivid pictures – a pig with a gold ring in its nose, smoke in the eyes, a madman throwing firebrands and arrows, lame legs, stones bound in slings, a thorn in the drunkard's hand, wood that feeds a fire, piercing swords, a hedge of thorns, broken teeth, silver-coated pottery, doors swinging on their hinges, and more. The wise men who authored Proverbs knew the power of a word picture! Pictures help us remember!

This book is designed, in part, to help your family make the most of the pictures in Proverbs. Join us in a treasure hunt! 90 illustrated proverbs will challenge you to listen carefully as you seek to identify the proverbs being pictured.

Digging Deeper

Your hunt for the treasures of Proverbs will continue as you follow the other suggestions for study. Categorizing the proverbs by topic is a simple and effective way to study the Proverbs with your family. Have you ever wondered why the wisest man in the world didn't think to organize the book of Proverbs into categories? Wouldn't it be easier to refer to one chapter in the Bible that specialized in wisdom about sluggards, another chapter about gossips, and another about parenting? Perhaps Solomon knew how much more we learn when we meditate, study, search, and organize.

As your family grows in understanding and skill, you can also analyze different types of proverbs and study the interrelationship of different proverbs within chapters.

Proverbs 2:1-6 says,

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;
so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to

understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou *seekest her as silver*, and *searchest for her as for hid treasures*; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

Solomon tells us that we should want wisdom as much as we want riches. We need to be willing to work just as hard to become wise as we do to earn money to buy the things we need and desire. We are supposed to search for wisdom like we would for hidden treasures.

Hidden treasures are *hidden*. The treasure seeker doesn't just wander around picking up gold and diamonds under every tree! He works hard, invests time, gathers information, and follows clues. The Proverbs do not explain themselves, but leave us to contemplate and meditate on their meanings. The proverbs are not arranged in tidy, topical categories, but are somewhat randomly sprinkled about for our gathering and study.

Your family will be greatly blessed by simple, diligent study in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is a treasure trove of wisdom waiting to be discovered.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her."

Proverbs 3:13-18

Understanding the Treasure Map

An Overview of the Book of Proverbs

To accurately understand a map we must recognize its purpose. Some maps picture the landforms of an area, identifying mountain peaks, hills, valleys and other land formations. Political maps record important facts and details, such as cities, borders, and parks. Highway maps help a traveler navigate his way through a state or region, while street maps help him find his way through a city or town. Some maps give information about the resources and products of an area. Others help us see how the population is distributed in a region.

The book of Proverbs is like a map. It has a special unique purpose in the canon of Scripture. It guides us on the path to wisdom and warns us about the detours and wrong roads that can lead us astray from the path of righteousness. Like a treasure map, Proverbs is often full of mysterious clues and pictures, designed to be somewhat obscure to the casual reader, but full of meaning to those who choose to slow down and think!

To better understand the book of Proverbs, let's take the time to examine its purpose and its organization. Understanding its basic purpose and structure will help us better understand its message.

The Purpose of the Book of Proverbs

After identifying the book as "proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel," the first chapter of Proverbs quickly and clearly states its purpose:

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (Proverbs 1:2-6).

In its own words, the book of Proverbs sets out to help the "young man" and the "wise man." The little word, "to," in the text helps us easily recognize the book's stated purpose:

- To know wisdom and instruction
- To perceive words of understanding
- To receive instruction
- To give prudence to the naive
- To encourage the wise man to grow even wiser
- To understand and interpret the words of wise men.

No one is born wise; we all need instruction. A diligent study of the Proverbs promises to bring us wisdom, understanding, blessing, protection, and discernment. What rational person would turn his back on such an offer? We all need to learn how to relate to other people, how to respond to different situations, how to work, how to be honest, how to fulfill our roles in life. We need someone to teach us!

Proverbs is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. It is compiled primarily by David's son, King Solomon, the king who prayed, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people" (1 Kings 3:9)? Solomon knew he needed wisdom. We can learn from his God-given wisdom and the wisdom of others who contributed to the book of Proverbs.

A proverb's primary purpose is simply to teach. It does not set out to argue or debate. It aims to make us wise! With colorful and sometimes graphic pictures, it provokes us to reflective thought and sometimes-disgusted response. A proverb's brevity quickly delivers the punch of its message before we have time to defend ourselves. The mental picture painted by its words may haunt us long after we have forgotten the actual words.

What biblically literate child doesn't remember that the fool repeats his foolishness just like a dog that returns to lap up his own vomit? The dirty pig with the gold ring in his snout vividly reminds the beautiful woman that her beauty, if it only clothes a foolish mind and soul, is disgusting. The godly man, when tempted to yield to the smooth flattery of the strange woman, is armed with pictures of the ox being led to the slaughter, the fool in the stocks, the bird in the snare, and the fires of hell at the end of her path.

We must remember that, like the topographical map that is designed for the geologist but not the touring motorist, the book of Proverbs has a specific purpose. It is not designed to delineate God's law as the first five books of the Old Testament do. It does not seek to record events as the historical books of the Old Testament and the Gospels do. It is wisdom literature, collected by wise men and offered to those who need to grow in their ability to respond correctly to life's situations.

Some Cautions

We must never isolate one proverb and view it as the whole truth on any subject. The book must be read as a whole to accurately understand its teaching on a particular subject.

For example, Proverbs 26:4 advises us, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him." If we isolate this verse and view it as a stated law, we will be careful to *never* answer a fool "according to his folly." But the next verse seems to directly contradict this advice: "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." So we *are* supposed to answer a fool according to his folly!

The proverbs have a habit of not explaining themselves! These two proverbs laid side by side seem at odds with each other. "Wait a minute!" we exclaim. "What do you mean? How can we answer the fool according to his folly and *not* answer him according to his folly?" The wise teacher has accomplished his purpose; he has gained our attention. He stops us in our complacent tracks and forces us to think. We look at the verses more carefully. We meditate on the meaning of the words. We may refer to a commentary for help if we are completely stumped. Eventually we learn that we should not stoop to the same sinful attitudes and actions as the fool when we confront him, but we should also not humor his foolishness with too much attention, lest we feed his proud and self-righteous heart.

Likewise, Proverbs 21:14, at first glance, almost seems to be endorsing bribery: "A gift in secret pacifieth anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath." However, further study of the topic clearly condemns the practice. "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live" (Proverbs 15:27). "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment (Proverbs 17:23). "To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress" (Proverbs 28:21).

Remembering the stated purpose of the book of Proverbs will also help us remember that proverbs are not guaranteed promises from God. They are observations of common patterns in life. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is an observation; it is the general pattern in life. However, it is not a promise. Children have free wills and sometimes choose to reject the godly training they receive.

We must also remember that the authors of the book of Proverbs accomplish their goals through poetic means. They employ many figures of speech – hyperbole or exaggeration, metaphor, and more. Not every word of the proverbs should be taken literally. Obviously, if we like to eat and are eating with a ruler, we should not literally put a knife to our throats, as Proverbs 23:1-2 advises. We don't literally heap coals of fire on the heads of our enemies (Proverbs 25:22). We will further discuss the Proverbs' use of figurative speech on pages 14-16.

The Basic Structure of the Book of Proverbs

Although the book of Proverbs seems to be organized in a somewhat random fashion, there are several ways to outline the underlying structure of the book. It is helpful to recognize this organization.

First, three general sections are apparent in the proverbs:

- Chapters 1-9 begin the collection with extended admonitions addressed to "my son," along with Lady Wisdom's lengthy appeals to follow her rather than folly.
- Chapters 10-29 consist of short sentence proverbs.
- Chapters 30 and 31 close the book with additional extended instruction.