

# PROVERBS

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## BACKGROUND

The book of Proverbs is a collection of proverbs and wise sayings brought together for the purpose of imparting wisdom (see exposition on [§Proverbs 1:1-7](#)). Some of the proverbs deal with serious moral issues, while others are simply observations and advice about everyday life, such as one might expect from a person with the broad interests of King Solomon (see [1 Kings 4:32-33](#)). The proverbs tend to be brief and memorable, easily learned and applied.

Proverbs focuses on the difference between the *wisdom* that results from belief in God and the *folly* that results from denial of his existence. It describes the fate of the "fool" (see exposition on [§Proverbs 12:1](#)), who, because he has deliberately rejected God (see [Psalm 14:1](#); [Romans 1:18-23](#)), becomes one of "the wicked" (see exposition on [§Proverbs 4:10-19](#)). As the wicked fool moves ever further from God, he moves further from wisdom and common sense as well. By contrast, the wise person realizes God exists and has a healthy "fear" of God's authority (see exposition on [§Proverbs 1:1-7](#)). He or she realizes, therefore, that right and wrong actions have consequences. Such awareness of how the world works leads to a happy and satisfying life.

## AUTHOR

Proverbs includes wise sayings from several authors, with the vast majority coming from Solomon, who had asked the Lord for wisdom instead of wealth (see [1 Kings 3:5-9](#)):

- *Solomon*: Proverbs is divided into seven sections (see [Outline](#)). [Proverbs 1:1](#) suggests that Solomon may have authored the entire first section ([Proverbs 1-9](#)), although that verse may be an introduction to the book as a whole (Solomon may have compiled the entire book). The second major section ([Proverbs 10:1-22:16](#)) is directly attributed to Solomon, as is the fourth ([Proverbs 25-29](#)). Proverbs probably includes at least 800 of Solomon's 3,000 proverbs (see [1 Kings 4:32](#)).
- Solomon may also have written many of the proverbs in the third section, the "Words of the Wise" ([Proverbs 22:17-24:34](#)), whose compiler and authors are anonymous. Many scholars also assume he wrote the final section, the tribute to the worthy woman ([Proverbs 31:10-31](#)).
- *Agur*, apparently a non-Israelite, is credited with the proverbs of the fifth section ([Proverbs 30](#)).
- *Lemuel* authored the sixth section ([Proverbs 31:1-9](#)). He was a king ([Proverbs 31:1](#)), presumably a non-Israelite. Some scholars believe, however, that Lemuel was actually Solomon.

## DATE

Solomon reigned 970-930 B.C. The "advisers of King Hezekiah" ([Proverbs 25:1](#)) would have lived some 200 years after Solomon. Dates for the anonymous collection and the collections of Agur and Lemuel are unknown.

## PURPOSE

Proverbs seems in large part to be addressed to those who are "simple," who have not yet made up their mind between the way of wisdom and the way of folly (see exposition on [§Proverbs 14:15, 18](#)). It seeks to impart to them the wisdom that comes from the "fear of the LORD" (see exposition on [§Proverbs 1:1-7](#)) and to show them how to apply that wisdom to life.

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

*Genesis-Deuteronomy:*

- While the books of law outline God's laws and specify blessings for obedience and punishments for disobedience, Proverbs presents righteous behavior as being in the best interest of the individual since it leads to the best kind of life.

*Job:*

- Both praise wisdom ([Proverbs 1:1-9](#); [Job 28:12-28](#)).
- Both show that wise and righteous people are not always rewarded with health and wealth (see exposition on [§Proverbs 15:6, 16-17](#); [Job 1-2](#)).

*Psalms:*

- Both contrast the righteous with the wicked (numerous proverbs; [Psalm 1](#); [Psalm 37](#)).
- Both emphasize the "fear of the LORD" ([Proverbs 1:7](#); [Proverbs 9:10](#); [Proverbs 16:6](#); [Psalm 111:10](#); [Psalm 112:1](#); [Psalm 128](#)).

*Ecclesiastes:*

- Both praise wisdom ([Proverbs 1:1-9](#); [Eccles. 9:14-18](#)).
- Both despise the "fool" (numerous proverbs; [Eccles. 10](#)).
- Both emphasize the "fear of the LORD" ([Proverbs 1:7](#); [Proverbs 9:10](#); [Proverbs 16:6](#); [Eccles. 12:13](#)).
- Both contain practical instructions (see exposition on [§Proverbs 27:23-27](#); parts of [Eccles. 5](#); [Eccles. 7](#)).
- Both affirm that all people are sinners ([Proverbs 20:9](#); [Eccles. 7:20](#)).

## OUTLINE

- I. A CALL TO PURSUE WISDOM ([Proverbs 1-9](#))
- II. PROVERBS OF SOLOMON ([Proverbs 10:1-22:16](#))
- III. WORDS OF THE WISE ([Proverbs 22:17-24:34](#))
- IV. MORE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON ([Proverbs 25-29](#))

- V. THE WISDOM OF AGUR ([Proverbs 30](#))
- VI. THE WORDS OF LEMUEL ([Proverbs 31:1-9](#))
- VII. THE WORTHY WOMAN ([Proverbs 31:10-31](#))

#### TIMELINE

c. 971 B.C.:	Solomon granted wisdom, writes many proverbs
960 B.C.:	Solomon completes Temple
931 B.C.:	Death of Solomon

**[Proverbs 1:1-7](#)** *"Here's why we're writing this book."* The first verse of Proverbs identifies it as "the proverbs of Solomon" (however, see *Author*). [Proverbs 1:2-7](#) states the book's purpose: to impart wisdom. Wisdom in Proverbs is not intellectual knowledge but "skill" ([Proverbs 1:5](#), RSV) in handling the issues of everyday life. This skill is based above all on a healthy fear of God. This fear or respect for God

- "is the beginning of knowledge" or "wisdom" ([Proverbs 1:7](#); see [Proverbs 9:10](#); [Job 28:28](#))
- imparts confidence and life ([Proverbs 14:26-27](#); [Proverbs 19:23](#))
- produces contentment ([Proverbs 15:16](#))
- saves from evil ([Proverbs 16:6](#))
- brings riches and honor ([Proverbs 22:4](#))

[Proverbs 1:2-7](#) is a fitting introduction to the entire book. With its offer of instruction to "young people" ([Proverbs 1:4](#)), it may also be seen as an introduction to the book's first section ([Proverbs 1-9](#)).

**[Proverbs 1:8-9](#)** *"Listen to them, too."* The "fear of the LORD" ([Proverbs 1:7](#)) must be followed by a deep respect for the advice of one's parents. The writer put this advice in the mouth of a father who, in [Proverbs 1:8-9:18](#), would take his son on a walk through the city streets, showing him the scenes of everyday life and exhorting him to seek wisdom instead of folly. Ten exhortations are introduced with the words "my child" and followed by commands such as "pay attention" or "listen carefully." The child was to heed the advice of wisdom, which is personified in several ways:

- a street vendor or prophetess calling out at the city gate ([Proverbs 1:20-33](#); [Proverbs 8:1-21](#), [32-36](#))
- a master architect helping in God's creation ([Proverbs 8:22-31](#))
- a sister ([Proverbs 7:4](#))
- a noble lady offering good instruction ([Proverbs 3:13-18](#); [Proverbs 4:6-9](#); [Proverbs 9:1-6](#))

The son is to reject the temptations of the

- "immoral woman" ([Proverbs 2:16-19](#); [Proverbs 5:3-14](#); [Proverbs 7:5-23](#))
- "adulterous woman" ([Proverbs 2:16](#); [Proverbs 6:24-35](#))
- "woman named Folly" ([Proverbs 9:13-18](#))

The personifications are for the most part women, traditionally referred to as "Dame Wisdom" and "Dame Folly."

**Proverbs 1:10-19** *"Just say no!"* The father wanted to impart his experience to his child. He hoped that his child would always choose the path of righteousness and purity.

**Proverbs 1:20-33** *Calling out like a street vendor.* Personifying wisdom as a vendor offering her wares, the father warned his child not to ignore her advice. If wisdom called out and the child refused to listen ([Proverbs 1:24-27](#)), the child would one day call out, only to have wisdom refuse to hear him ([Proverbs 1:28-33](#); see [Proverbs 8:1-11](#)).

**Proverbs 2:1-9** *Seek and you will find.* If the child would diligently seek wisdom ([Proverbs 2:1-4](#)), he would find it—and righteousness as well—for true wisdom comes from God ([Proverbs 2:5-9](#)).

**Proverbs 2:10-22** *Insured against iniquity and immorality.* Wisdom would deliver from evil and keep those who love her on the right track. Specifically, it would keep the young man from the immoral woman ([Proverbs 2:16-22](#)), whose seductions always lead to death ([Proverbs 2:18](#); see [Proverbs 5:3-14](#)).

**Proverbs 3:1-10** *Trust in him, tithe to him.* The child would be rewarded with a long and peaceful life ([Proverbs 3:1-4](#), [7-8](#)) if he would trust in God and acknowledge him ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#); [Proverbs 28:26](#)) and give him the "best part" of his wealth, as the law required ([Proverbs 3:9-10](#)).

**Proverbs 3:11-12** *Correction means satisfaction.* If the child wanted to enjoy health, wealth, and a long life ([Proverbs 3:13-18](#)), he should accept his father's correction ([Proverbs 3:11-12](#)). Such correction can and should be administered in love ([Proverbs 3:12](#); see [Proverbs 13:1](#), [24](#)).

**Proverbs 3:13-18** *A treasure and a tree of life.* Wisdom is pictured as a noble lady who is more precious than silver or gold or rubies, and is a "tree of life." Throughout Proverbs, wisdom is compared to precious jewels and metals (see [Proverbs 8:10-11](#); [Proverbs 16:16](#); [Proverbs 20:15](#)). The "tree of life" image recurs as well (see [Proverbs 11:30](#); [Proverbs 15:4](#); compare [Psalm 1:3](#)).

**Proverbs 3:19-20** *"By wisdom he made the world."* By wisdom God created the world ([Proverbs 3:19](#)) and by wisdom he sustains it ([Proverbs 3:20](#); see [Proverbs 8:22-31](#); [Psalm 104:24](#)).

**Proverbs 3:21-26** *Safety, confidence, and sweet sleep.* The wise person will find protection from harm by day and secure sleep at night, both a result of the confidence wisdom brings ([Proverbs 3:26](#)).

**Proverbs 3:27-35** *"Do unto others . . ."* The wise person will be kind and generous ([Proverbs 3:27-30](#); see [James 3:17](#)). He or she will not be envious of the wicked ([Proverbs 3:31-33](#); see [Proverbs 23:17-18](#); [Proverbs 24:1](#), [19-20](#); [Psalm 37](#)) but rather will be humble ([Proverbs 3:34-35](#); see [James 4:6](#)).

**Proverbs 4:1-9** *"Listen to me as I listened to him."* The father exhorted his child to learn wisdom from him, even as he had learned it from his own father. Wisdom is personified as a woman who should be embraced, exalted, and not forsaken.

**Proverbs 4:10-19** *The right path, the light path.* The father had led his child on the paths of wisdom. Now it was up to the child to choose that path, which would lead to ever increasing joy and light ([Proverbs 4:18](#); see [Proverbs 15:24](#)), rather than the path of the wicked ([Proverbs 4:14](#)), which would lead only to deeper darkness ([Proverbs 4:19](#)).

Proverbs mentions "the wicked" nearly a hundred times. These are the "fools" who, because of their rejection of God and the wisdom he offers, have become more and more hopeless in their sinful rebellion (see [Background](#)).

**Proverbs 4:20-27** *The bottom line: Guard your heart.* All the father's instructions and wise sayings would do no good unless the child would guard his or her heart ([Proverbs 4:23](#)). This means involving the intellect as well as the emotions in the quest for righteousness. The "heart" produces not just feelings but also understanding (see [Proverbs 2:2](#)).

**Proverbs 5:1-14** *"Don't even pass by her door!"* No matter how seductive the immoral woman may appear, the wise young man should avoid her at all costs, not even going near her door ([Proverbs 5:8](#)). If he gives in to her, she will destroy everything he has worked for in life ([Proverbs 5:9-14](#); see [Proverbs 22:14](#)).

**Proverbs 5:15-23** *One wife for one life.* The father affirmed, in beautiful poetry, the sanctity and joy of marriage (see [Proverbs 18:22](#)).

**Proverbs 6:1-5** *"If you've been too generous, admit it!"* If a person overextends himself or herself in showing generosity, he or she should not be afraid to humbly admit the mistake and ask to be freed from the obligation. Several proverbs warn against unwisely cosigning for the debts of others (see [Proverbs 11:15](#); [Proverbs 17:18](#); [Proverbs 22:26-27](#)).

**Proverbs 6:6-11** *Lazy people, lowly ants.* Diligence like that of the ant will ensure prosperity. Just a little laziness, on the other hand, can become habitual and result in financial ruin and a wasted life (see [Proverbs 10:4-5](#); [Proverbs 12:24, 27](#); [Proverbs 14:23](#); [Proverbs 19:15-16](#); [Proverbs 20:4, 13](#); [Proverbs 24:30-34](#)). Even someone who greatly desires wealth can end up in poverty because of laziness ([Proverbs 21:25-26](#); see [Proverbs 13:4](#)). (See exposition on [Proverbs 26:13-16](#).)

**Proverbs 6:12-19** *God's "Bottom Seven" list.* The wicked person is insincere and deceitful in everything he does ([Proverbs 6:12-15](#)). Seven characteristics of such people are singled out as particularly displeasing to God ([Proverbs 6:16-19](#)). [Proverbs 6:13](#) describes some of the body language people of ancient times may have used to communicate evil intentions (see [Proverbs 10:10](#); [Proverbs 16:30](#)).

**Proverbs 6:20-35** *Fornication's fruit: Disease, dishonor, death.* Returning to the theme of [Proverbs 5:1-23](#), the father again urged his son to listen to his advice, particularly regarding the seductions of evil women ([Proverbs 6:24-35](#)). The man who is seduced "is an utter fool" ([Proverbs 6:32](#)), "scoop[s] fire into his lap" ([Proverbs 6:27](#)), suffers "wounds and constant disgrace" ([Proverbs 6:33](#)), and "destroys his own soul" ([Proverbs 6:32](#)).

**Proverbs 7:1-27** *Like a spider seducing a fly!* Urging his son once again to "write" his commands "deep within your heart" (to internalize them), the father issued further warnings about immoral women. He described an aimless young man who was easy prey to the wayward woman's flattery and aggressiveness.

**Proverbs 8:1-11** *The call of wisdom.* Having described the seductions of the adulteress, who boldly sought her prey "in the streets and markets" ([Proverbs 7:11-12](#)), the father described wisdom as a prophetess standing in a prominent place near the city gates, loudly proclaiming her worth. In contrast to the fleeting pleasures offered by the adulteress, wisdom offers things of lasting value. City gates were the center of social and economic life in Bible times and were therefore a favorite place for merchants, politicians, and prophets.

**Proverbs 8:12-21** *The worth and availability of wisdom.* Wisdom gives understanding and strength ([Proverbs 8:14](#)), as well as riches and honor ([Proverbs 8:18-21](#)). It enables kings to rule well ([Proverbs 8:15-16](#)). Best of all, there are no prerequisites to gaining wisdom except earnestly desiring it ([Proverbs 8:17](#); see [Matthew 7:7](#)). Though wisdom tends to make its possessor wealthy ([Proverbs 8:18, 21](#)), it produces other fruit that is "better than the purest gold" ([Proverbs 8:19](#)).

**Proverbs 8:22-31** *The person of wisdom.* Wisdom is described as an "architect" or "master craftsman" ([Proverbs 8:30](#)) who assisted God in creating the world. Because of other passages describing his important role in Creation, scholars tend to view these verses as a description of Christ (see [John 1:1-3](#); [Col. 1:15-17](#)).

**Proverbs 8:32-36** *The rewards of wisdom.* To find wisdom is to find life. To despise wisdom is to wrong one's own soul and to love death.

**Proverbs 9:1-6** *The banquet of wisdom.* Wisdom is again presented as a noble lady offering instruction (see [Proverbs 3:13-18](#)). Having prepared a banquet, she invites "those without good judgment" to feast on her life-giving teachings.

**Proverbs 9:7-12** *The reaction to wisdom.* When the voice of wisdom offers advice, wise people and scoffers respond very differently. Wise people welcome the advice and become still wiser ([Proverbs 9:9](#)); scoffers despise the person giving the advice ([Proverbs 9:7-8](#)). The difference between these two kinds of people is that the wise person fears the Lord ([Proverbs 9:10](#); see [Proverbs 1:7](#); [Job 28:28](#)).

**Proverbs 9:13-18** *The enemy of wisdom.* Having described "Dame Wisdom," the father ended his admonition by again describing "Dame Folly," who was obviously the exact opposite of everything Dame Wisdom stood for. For instance, while Wisdom counseled the young man to drink from his own well ([Proverbs 5:15](#))—that is, to be faithful to his wife—Folly declared that "stolen water is refreshing" ([Proverbs 9:17](#)).

## **Proverbs of Solomon ([10:1-22:16](#))**

Except for [Proverbs 1-9](#), most of the book of Proverbs consists of short, disconnected proverbs, many of which touch on similar themes. While each proverb offers valuable insights into skillful living (see



exposition on <sup>s</sup>[Proverbs 1:1-7](#)) and deserves careful study, the present exposition can only cover representative sections and give references to parallel passages.

**[Proverbs 10:1-7](#)** *The wise and foolish children.* Solomon noted the stark contrasts between the wise child, who is a joy to his parents, and the foolish child, who brings them grief (see [Proverbs 17:21, 25](#); [Proverbs 19:13](#); [Proverbs 23:24-25](#)).

**[Proverbs 10:19](#)** *Are your lips sealed?* It is unwise to speak too hastily or openly (see [Proverbs 15:28](#); [Proverbs 17:27-28](#); [Proverbs 21:23](#); [Proverbs 29:20](#)), especially when you are angry (see [Proverbs 12:16](#); [Proverbs 19:11](#); [Proverbs 29:11](#); [James 1:19](#)).

**[Proverbs 10:22-32](#)** *Rewards for the right, ruin for the wrong.* Solomon drew several contrasts between the righteous, who will eventually receive the desires of their heart, and the wicked, who will come to sudden ruin (see [Proverbs 11:19, 23](#); [Proverbs 12:7, 21](#); [Proverbs 13:21](#); [Proverbs 15:6](#); [Proverbs 17:20](#); [Proverbs 28:18](#); [Proverbs 29:1](#)).

**[Proverbs 11:1](#)** *Calibrate those scales!* God is concerned with honesty in the marketplace. The law of Moses demanded honest measurements in "length, weight, or volume" ([Leviticus 19:35-36](#)). For instance, a dishonest Israelite merchant may have taken a weight that he knew weighed one pound and written a higher or lower weight on it, depending on whether he was using it for buying or selling (see [Proverbs 16:11](#); [Proverbs 20:10, 23](#)). Likewise, a person buying land may have secretly moved a boundary marker in order to increase the size of his property (see [Proverbs 22:28](#); [Proverbs 23:10-11](#)). Modern technology has produced many advancements in such theft by deception.

**[Proverbs 11:4-9](#)** *Dollars won't help on that day.* Money cannot buy righteousness in God's economy. For "day of judgment," see exposition on <sup>s</sup>[Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#).

**[Proverbs 11:5-6, 8](#)** *Caught in their own trap.* While the righteous are delivered, the wicked are often ensnared by their own evil devices (see [Proverbs 28:10](#)). For other biblical examples of God's turning evil intentions to his own glory, see exposition on <sup>s</sup>[Ezra 6:1-12](#).

**[Proverbs 11:10-11](#)** *The upright uphold the city.* Righteous citizens are truly a blessing and should be recognized as such (see [Proverbs 14:34](#)).

**[Proverbs 11:14](#)** *Get a second—and third—opinion.* When making an important decision, it is wise to get advice from several sources (see [Proverbs 15:22](#); [Proverbs 24:6](#)).

**[Proverbs 11:22](#)** *A gold ring in a pig's snout.* Spiritual traits such as modesty are more important than physical beauty.

**[Proverbs 11:24-26](#)** *The ironies of greed and generosity.* Generous people end up receiving more than they give, while stingy people lose what they try to keep (see [Proverbs 13:7](#); [Proverbs 19:17](#); [Proverbs 21:13](#); [Proverbs 22:9](#); [2 Cor. 6:10](#); [James 2:5](#)).

**[Proverbs 11:27-31](#)** *Your inheritance: Trees or wind?* "The godly are like trees that bear life-giving fruit," while "those who bring trouble on their families inherit only the wind." Throughout Proverbs,

Solomon and the other wise men expressed confidence that good would ultimately triumph over evil (see [Proverbs 10:25](#); [Proverbs 12:3, 7, 12](#); [Proverbs 14:11](#); [Proverbs 29:16](#)). Proverbs' frequent use of tree images ("tree," "foliage," "roots") for the righteous recalls [Psalm 1](#).

**[Proverbs 12:1](#)** *Do you hate school?* A wise person loves learning from others (see [Proverbs 10:8](#); [Proverbs 15:31-33](#); [Proverbs 19:20](#)), while "fools think they need no advice" and therefore see no need for instruction or correction (see [Proverbs 12:15](#); [Proverbs 13:18](#); [Proverbs 16:25](#); [Judges 21:25](#)). The fool's unrealistically high self-esteem comes from his or her rejection of God, which leads to wickedness and a lack of understanding of the common-sense issues of life (see [Background](#) and exposition on [Proverbs 26:1-12](#)).

**[Proverbs 13:20](#)** *Choose your friends wisely.* People tend to become like the people with whom they associate. One should be especially careful of forming close friendships with "fools," or with angry or evil people (see [Proverbs 22:24-25](#); [Proverbs 24:1](#); [Proverbs 29:24](#)). It is only natural for good and evil people to avoid each other's company (see [Proverbs 29:27](#); [Psalm 1:1](#); [1 Cor. 15:33](#)).

**[Proverbs 13:22](#)** *"Your gold will go to the godly."* Wealth gained dishonestly often ends up benefiting the godly poor rather than the ungodly rich who accumulated it (see [Proverbs 28:8](#); [Eccles. 2:26](#)).

**[Proverbs 14:1](#)** *Destroying your own home.* The foolish person will destroy even those things most precious to him or her.

**[Proverbs 14:12](#)** *"But it seemed so right."* Decisions that seem right, humanly speaking, may be totally wrong by God's standards. Human nature, aided by the work of Satan, can make darkness appear as light (see [2 Cor. 11:14](#)). Believers should always compare their own thoughts with Scripture (see [Proverbs 16:1-3](#); [Proverbs 21:2](#); [Proverbs 24:12](#)).

**[Proverbs 14:15, 18](#)** *Simple today, a fool tomorrow.* The position of the "simple" person, the "naive" bystander ([Proverbs 14:15](#), NASB), is not neutral but extremely precarious, for he or she is in the process of becoming a fool ([Proverbs 14:18](#); see [Purpose](#)).

**[Proverbs 14:20-21](#)** *"They don't have friends, so be their friend."* Solomon had noticed that the rich tend to be much more popular than the poor ([Proverbs 14:20](#)); he urged believers not to practice such discrimination ([Proverbs 14:21](#)). Many Proverbs, like [Proverbs 14:20](#), are simply observations about the realities of life, rather than statements of moral truth (see [Background](#)). For instance, [Proverbs 14:20](#) does not mean a poor person will *never* have friends.

[Proverbs 18:23](#) and [Proverbs 19:4, 7](#) offer similar observations about discrimination against the poor, while [Proverbs 28:27](#) issues a similar admonition against such discrimination.

[Proverbs 16:14-15](#); [Proverbs 20:14](#); [Proverbs 21:14](#) and [Proverbs 22:7](#) are other examples of observation proverbs.

**[Proverbs 14:27](#)** *When fear is a fountain of life.* "The advice of the wise is a life-giving fountain," as is "fear of the LORD" ([Proverbs 13:13-14](#)). Those who seek life outside the law will find only death. (See [Proverbs 10:27](#); [Proverbs 19:16, 23](#); [Proverbs 28:14](#).)



**Proverbs 14:31** *Protector of the poor.* God identifies with the poor and views as a personal reproach any oppression or mockery of them (see [Proverbs 17:5](#); [Proverbs 19:17](#); [Proverbs 21:13](#)). He establishes their property rights (see [Proverbs 15:25](#); [Proverbs 23:10-11](#)) and pleads their cause ([Proverbs 22:22-23](#)).

**Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 7** *Your word power.* Words have great power to either heal or hurt (see [Proverbs 12:18](#); [Proverbs 16:24](#)). They can "bring life and health" ([Proverbs 15:4](#)), "lead to life" ([Proverbs 10:11](#)), or be "as lovely as golden apples" ([Proverbs 25:11](#)). Used wrongly, words can crush the spirit ([Proverbs 15:4](#)), "pierce like a sword" ([Proverbs 12:18](#), NIV), and bring death ([Proverbs 18:21](#)). (See [Proverbs 12:17-19](#), [22-23](#); on gossip, see exposition on [Proverbs 26:17-28](#).)

While the proximity of two proverbs does not necessarily imply a connection, the affirmation of God's omnipresence ([Proverbs 15:3](#)) reminds us that he hears our every word. We cannot conceal gossip or foolish talk from God by moving to a private place or lowering our voice (see [Ps. 139:7-12](#)).

**Proverbs 15:6, 16-17** *Do the righteous always prosper?* [Proverbs 15:6](#) declares that "there is treasure in the house of the godly." [Proverbs 15:16-17](#) makes it clear, however, that this is not always the case. Yet when the righteous experience hard times, they can be assured that a life of poverty in godly surroundings is better than a life of wealth amid ungodliness (see [Proverbs 16:8](#); [Proverbs 17:1](#); [Proverbs 19:1](#); [Proverbs 28:6](#)).

**Proverbs 15:8-9** *Heartless worship.* The mere offering of a sacrifice means nothing to the Lord unless the worshiper's heart is right. The cost-free prayer of the upright is worth far more than the expensive animal sacrifice of the wicked (see [Proverbs 21:27](#)).

**Proverbs 15:13, 15** *Better than medicine.* As modern-day health professionals are discovering, the emotions play a key role in physical well-being (see [Proverbs 15:30](#); [Proverbs 17:22](#)).

**Proverbs 16:18-19** *Pride and prosperity.* Pride leads to humiliation, while humility brings honor (see [Proverbs 11:2](#); [Proverbs 18:12](#); [Proverbs 22:4](#); [Proverbs 29:23](#)). It is better to be humble and poor than proud and rich. The OT repeatedly presents pride and idolatry as the sins most dangerous to God's children.

**Proverbs 16:31** *Gray hair: A badge of honor, if . . .* Older people have earned a "crown of glory," if they have lived a godly life (see [Proverbs 20:29](#)).

**Proverbs 17:8** *Bribers, beware!* Solomon noted several times in Proverbs the things that can be accomplished by a timely gift or bribe (see [Proverbs 18:16](#); [Proverbs 21:14](#)). Yet even though this is the way ungodly people do things, God condemns bribery (see [Proverbs 17:23](#)).

**Proverbs 17:13, 15, 26** *No plea bargains, please!* Like other Bible authors, Solomon took issue with those who, out of favoritism, condemn the innocent or acquit the guilty (see [Proverbs 18:5](#); [Proverbs 24:23-25](#); [Proverbs 28:21](#); [Exodus 23:7](#); [Isaiah 5:23](#)).

**Proverbs 17:14** *Anyone can start a quarrel. . . .* It takes very little effort to start an argument but much effort to prevent or stop one (see [Proverbs 20:3](#)).

**Proverbs 17:16** *Always a waste.* A fool will squander opportunities to gain both wisdom and wealth (see [Proverbs 21:20](#)).

**Proverbs 18:8** *To gossip or not to gossip?* Gossip is a universal temptation; it is like "dainty morsels." The wise person will not gossip, choosing rather to conceal the tempting information (see [Proverbs 11:13](#)). He or she conceals it out of love (see [Proverbs 10:12](#)), knowing the great damage gossip can do (see [Proverbs 16:28](#); [Proverbs 17:9](#); [1 Peter 4:8](#)).

**Proverbs 18:13, 17** *Listen to both sides.* It is unwise to form an opinion before hearing both sides of an issue.

**Proverbs 18:18** *Gambling or divine guidance?* Solomon viewed the casting of lots not as gambling but as trust in God's overruling providence (see [Proverbs 16:33](#)). When the apostles chose Matthias, their casting of lots was preceded with prayer (see [Acts 1:24-26](#); see also [Leviticus 16:8](#); [Esther 3:7](#); [Jonah 1:7](#)).

**Proverbs 18:24** *The best of all brothers!* Friendship ties can be even closer than family ties and can provide opportunities for mutual edification and correction (see [Proverbs 27:6, 17](#)). Yet Solomon also acknowledged the great worth of blood relationships (see [Proverbs 17:17](#)).

**Proverbs 20:9** *The answer? Nobody!* "Is anyone righteous?" Solomon answered the question in the negative (see [1 Kings 8:46](#); [Eccles. 7:20](#)), as did David ([Psalm 14:1-3](#)), Paul ([Romans 3:10](#)), and John ([1 John 1:8](#)).

**Proverbs 20:17, 21** *Don't get rich too quickly!* Wealth gained dishonestly, or too quickly, will bring misery (see [Proverbs 13:11](#); [Proverbs 21:5-6](#); [Proverbs 28:20, 22](#); [1 Tim. 6:9-10](#)). By contrast, "people who work hard sleep well" ([Eccles. 5:12](#)).

**Proverbs 20:19** *Don't fall for flattery!* The wise person will not be taken in by flattery, knowing that it can often be a trap ([Proverbs 29:5](#)). Rather, he or she will value honest criticism ([Proverbs 28:23](#)). (See [Romans 16:18](#).)

**Proverbs 20:20** *No light for the rebel.* Just as great blessing is promised to those who honor their parents (see [Ephes. 6:2-3](#)), those who dishonor them will suffer severely (see [Exodus 21:17](#)). Evil people are portrayed as being "snuffed out" also in [Proverbs 13:9](#) and [Proverbs 24:20](#).

**Proverbs 21:3** *He watches the worshiper, not the worship.* God valued purity of heart and justice in social relationships more than correctness in worship, even under the OT sacrificial system (see [Proverbs 21:27](#); [Proverbs 24:11-12](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Psalm 50:7-15](#); [Isaiah 1:11, 17](#); [Isaiah 58:1-12](#)).

**Proverbs 21:9, 19** *Sometimes it's simpler to be single!* A life of singleness and poverty is preferable to marriage to a disagreeable spouse (see [Proverbs 19:13](#); [Proverbs 25:24](#); [Prov. 27:15-16](#)).

**Proverbs 21:17** *Love pleasure, lose your treasure.* The hedonist, like the lazy person (see exposition on [Proverbs 6:6-11](#)), will end in poverty (see [Proverbs 23:20-21](#); [Proverbs 28:19](#)).

**Proverbs 21:22** *Right vs. might.* Wisdom will eventually win the day over military strength (see [Proverbs 24:5-6](#); [Eccles. 7:19](#)).

**Proverbs 21:30-31** *Lord of all!* No amount of human thought, planning ([Proverbs 21:30](#)), or action ([Proverbs 21:31](#)) can negate God's sovereign will. Ultimate justice will come from him ([Proverbs 21:31](#); see [Proverbs 29:26](#)). Even kings are subject to God ([Proverbs 21:1](#)).

**Proverbs 22:1** *A good name.* A good name is to be preferred over all the riches of the world (see [Eccles. 7:1](#)).

**Proverbs 22:2** *The common bond of rich and poor.* Solomon's admonitions to respect those who live in poverty (see [Proverbs 14:31](#) and exposition on [Proverbs 14:20-21](#)) were grounded in the realization that all humans have the same Creator (see [Proverbs 29:13](#); [Job 31:13-15](#); [Galatians 3:28](#)).

**Proverbs 22:6** *If you love them, train them.* If children are diligently trained, they will remember and benefit from that training. If left to themselves (see [Proverbs 29:15](#)), their inexperience can lead them into foolish mistakes with lifelong consequences ([Proverbs 22:15](#)). They should be trained and disciplined while there is still hope (see [Proverbs 19:18](#)) of saving them (see [Proverbs 23:13-14](#); [Psalm 9](#)). The well-disciplined child will be a delight to his or her parents (see [Proverbs 29:17](#)). (See exposition on [Proverbs 3:11-12](#); [Deut. 6:6-7](#); [Ephes. 6:4](#); [Hebrews 12:7](#).)

**Proverbs 22:17-21** *"Here's what I want you to know."* The anonymous compiler of this third collection of Proverbs invited the reader to "apply your heart" to his sayings, which are "filled with advice and knowledge."

**Proverbs 22:29** *The pursuit of excellence.* Success will come to those who pursue excellence in their work, while "lazy people" ([Proverbs 10:4](#)) or those who talk instead of work (see [Proverbs 14:23](#)) will not succeed.

**Proverbs 23:1-5** *When a ruler invites you to dinner.* Dinner at a ruler's house calls for avoiding gluttony and being wary of the host's ulterior motives ([Proverbs 23:1-3](#)). When in such situations, one would do well to heed the perspective on wealth that follows ([Proverbs 23:4-5](#)).

**Proverbs 23:6-8** *When a miser invites you to dinner.* A dinner invitation from a miser is just as well turned down; your efforts at friendship will be wasted on him or her.

**Proverbs 23:15-28** *Watch out for wine and wicked women.* As in [Proverbs 1:8-9:18](#), the writer addressed his child, urging him to seek godly wisdom ([Proverbs 23:15-18](#), [22-25](#)) and to avoid the company of drunkards and gluttons ([Proverbs 23:19-21](#)) and immoral women ([Proverbs 23:26-28](#)).

**Proverbs 23:29-35** *It sparkles. . . . It stings.* Alcoholic beverages may be appealing to the senses ([Proverbs 23:31](#)), but as these graphic illustrations show, they are a hindrance to wisdom and can cause great physical and emotional harm (see [Proverbs 20:1](#)).

**Proverbs 24:3-4** *The house that wisdom built.* The practice of wisdom produces a full and satisfying life, which may or may not include material prosperity (see exposition on [§Proverbs 8:12-21](#) and on [§Proverbs 15:6, 16-17](#)).

**Proverbs 24:11-12** *Rescue the perishing!* Pretended ignorance ([Proverbs 24:12](#)) is no excuse for failing to speak up for the victims of violence and injustice (see exposition on [§Proverbs 21:3](#)).

**Proverbs 24:15-20** *Down seven times, but not out!* No matter how often a righteous person is seemingly defeated, he or she will always recover. The wicked person, however, will fall and not recover ([Proverbs 24:15-16](#)).

The righteous should not, however, rejoice over the misfortunes of the wicked ([Proverbs 24:17](#); see [Job 31:29](#); [1 Cor. 13:6](#)). Such rejoicing could turn God's wrath away from the sinner and against the righteous ([Proverbs 24:18](#); see [Proverbs 17:5](#)).

Even when the wicked person prospers, he or she is not to be envied, for, in terms of eternity, "the evil have no future" ([Proverbs 24:19-20](#)).

**Proverbs 24:21-22** *A wise rebel?* Even though political rebellions may seem to have legitimate causes (see [Proverbs 28:2](#)), the wise person will tend to avoid getting involved in them, choosing rather to trust in God's providence over human affairs (see exposition on [§Proverbs 21:30-31](#); [Romans 13:1-7](#); [1 Peter 2:13-17](#)).

**Proverbs 24:29** *The Rule was always Golden!* Rather than return evil for evil, OT believers were to trust God to bring about justice for them (see [Proverbs 20:22](#); [Deut. 32:35](#); [Romans 12:17-21](#)). The NT states this principle positively as the "Golden Rule" (see [Matthew 7:12](#); [Matt. 5:39](#); [Matt. 7:12](#)).

**Proverbs 25:1** *Copied by Hezekiah.* A second collection of proverbs attributed to Solomon begins with the note that they were compiled by "the advisers of King Hezekiah."

**Proverbs 25:2-7** *In the corridors of power.* Speaking no doubt from experience, Solomon offered observations concerning those who seek to influence kings. Even though it is easier to know the mind of a king than to know the mind of God ([Proverbs 25:2](#)), they are still somewhat mysterious ([Proverbs 25:3](#)). Those who seek an audience with a king should do so with the greatest humility ([Proverbs 25:6-7](#); see [Proverbs 27:2](#); [Luke 14:7-11](#)). Meanwhile, the king himself must be very careful about whose advice he listens to, for there will be no shortage of unsavory characters seeking his influence ([Proverbs 25:4-5](#); see [Proverbs 20:26](#)).

**Proverbs 25:8-10** *Be slow to sue.* It is better to settle disputes in private than to risk public humiliation (see [Matthew 18:15](#)).

**Proverbs 25:16-17** *Moderation in all things.* Whether the subject is food or friendship, one should never overdo a good thing.

**Proverbs 25:18** *When words are deadly weapons.* Three warlike similes describe the harm that can be done by the false witness; such liars deserve severe punishment (see [Proverbs 19:5, 9](#); [Proverbs 21:28](#)).

**Proverbs 25:21-22** *Kindness, not combat.* Whenever possible, an enemy is to be treated kindly. As with the prohibition of vengeance (see exposition on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 24:29](#)), the NT is not the only place that teaches love for one's enemy (see [Exodus 23:4-5](#); [Matthew 5:43-45](#); [Romans 12:20-21](#)).

**Proverbs 25:28** *How high are your walls?* A person with no self-control exposes himself or herself to all kinds of danger, just like an ancient city with no walls (see [Proverbs 14:29](#); [Proverbs 16:32](#); [Proverbs 19:11](#)).

**Proverbs 26:1-12** *Facts on the fool.* The fool (see [Background](#)) is described from several perspectives. He is unworthy of honor but very worthy of a good beating ([Proverbs 26:1, 3](#); see [Proverbs 19:29](#)). He is useless for any practical endeavor ([Proverbs 26:6-8](#)). Efforts to reform him are hopeless ([Proverbs 26:11](#)). (See [Proverbs 17:10, 12](#); [Proverbs 23:9](#).)

[Proverbs 26:4-5](#) does not have to be seen as a contradiction: While one generally should not engage in useless dialogue with a fool, sometimes it may be necessary to do so, so that he won't think his worthless arguments are beyond challenge.

**Proverbs 26:13-16** *Which one is the laziest?* After drawing three caricatures of lazy people, Solomon contemptuously noted that even such sloths are wise in their own eyes (see exposition on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 6:6-11](#)).

**Proverbs 26:17-28** *Misuses of the mouth.* Solomon condemned the insensitive practical joker ([Proverbs 26:18-19](#)) and the flatterer ([Proverbs 26:28](#)), along with the hypocrite ([Proverbs 26:23-26](#)), liar ([Proverbs 26:28](#)), troublemaker ([Proverbs 26:17, 21](#)), and gossip ([Proverbs 26:20, 22](#)) for their misuses of the gift of speech.

**Proverbs 27:14** *"Hold it down out there!"* Some observation proverbs (see exposition on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 14:20-21](#)) appear to take a lighter view of life, or at least to look at serious issues in a more philosophical way (see [Proverbs 25:19](#)). Others deal with familiar emotions not necessarily related to any moral issue (see [Proverbs 13:12](#); [Proverbs 14:10, 13](#); [Proverbs 25:20, 25](#)).

**Proverbs 27:23-27** *Work now, enjoy later.* The person who is punctual and diligent in his or her work will, in due time, enjoy the fruit of that work (compare [Proverbs 24:27](#) and [Proverbs 28:19](#)).

**Proverbs 28:1** *What are they afraid of?* While a guilty conscience breeds irrational fear, a clear conscience produces self-confidence. Furthermore, good people have far fewer enemies than do the wicked (see [Proverbs 16:7](#)).

**Proverbs 28:11** *The emperor's new clothes.* Wealth can give a person an unrealistically high opinion of himself or herself. It is part of the "lure of wealth" ([Matthew 13:22](#)). Meanwhile, a perceptive poor person "sees through" the deceived rich person ([Proverbs 28:11](#), NASB).

**Proverbs 28:13** *Confession or cover-up?* Honest confession of sin is always better than any attempt to conceal an unpleasant truth (see [Job 31:33](#); [Psalm 32:3-5](#); [1 John 1:9](#)).



**Proverbs 28:15-16** *The use and abuse of power.* Kings have great power for good or ill (see [Proverbs 28:28](#); [Proverbs 29:2, 4](#)) and will be rewarded according to how they use that power ([Proverbs 28:16](#); see [Proverbs 29:14](#)). They should remember that, though many seek their favor, God will have the last say (see [Proverbs 29:26](#)). (See [Proverbs 16:14-15](#); [Proverbs 19:12](#); exposition on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 25:2-7](#) and on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 31:1-9](#))

**Proverbs 29:18** *Needed: Leaders from the Lord.* Without good spiritual leadership, people tend to fall deeply into sin (see [Exodus 32:25](#); [Judges 21:25](#); [1 Samuel 3:1](#); [Amos 8:11-12](#); [Mark 6:34](#); [Hebrews 13:17](#)).

**Proverbs 30:1-4** *"I know so little about the Lord."* Agur introduced the collection of his wise sayings by acknowledging his own lack of knowledge and wisdom concerning the ways of God. [Proverbs 30:4](#) recalls [Job 38-41](#), where the Lord convinced Job of *his* lack of such knowledge.

**Proverbs 30:5-6** *Absolutely accurate: No additions allowed!* Agur declared that God's words were "true" and that humans should not add to them. This is the OT counterpart to [Rev. 22:18-19](#)—the Bible's affirmation that its message and even its very words are completely trustworthy.

**Proverbs 30:7-10** *Not too rich, not too poor.* Agur sought a happy medium between wealth and poverty so that he would not fall prey to the temptations associated with either extreme.

**Proverbs 30:11-31** *"Amazing in three . . . or four . . . ways."* Having expressed amazement at the God of creation (see [Proverbs 30:4](#)), Agur made several observations about the humans and animals that populate God's world. Since the number three expresses completion, his repeatedly making four observations instead of just three implies that he could have listed many more:

*Four kinds of sinners (30:11-14).* Agur singled out four kinds of people for special rebuke: Those who disrespect their parents, hypocrites, the proud, and the greedy. (On "devouring" the poor, see [Psalm 14:4](#); [Amos 8:4](#).)

*Four unsatisfied things (30:15-16).* Agur had seen many things—and people—as insatiable as leeches.

*Four fantastic things (30:18-19).* Agur expressed wonder at three natural and one human phenomena. The mixture of human and nonhuman examples both here and in [Proverbs 30:15-16](#) suggests that Agur found the human examples by far the most amazing.

*Four unbearable things (30:21-23).* People given positions or honors they don't deserve become unbearable to those over whom they have power (see [Proverbs 19:10](#)).

*Four small, smart, strong things (30:24-28).* Even the seemingly least significant members of the animal kingdom can teach us wisdom, since they, like us, were created by God.

*Four things that march like a monarch (30:29-31).* The list of "stately monarchs," like the two lists of [Proverbs 30:15-19](#), contains three nonhuman examples and one human example.

**Proverbs 30:32-33** *"Keep calm and quiet!"* Perhaps thinking still of the "king as he leads his army" ([Proverbs 30:31](#)), Agur issued a final call for patience and humility.

**Proverbs 31:1-7** *"Abstain from adultery and alcohol."* Lemuel, identified by some as Solomon, advised kings to abstain from alcoholic drink and from immoral sexual relationships (see [Proverbs 23:19-28](#)). Both are hindrances to the wisdom rulers need.



**Proverbs 31:8-9** *"Defend the defenseless."* On the positive side, kings should have a special concern for the poor and the defenseless—as does the Lord (see exposition on <sup>§</sup>[Proverbs 14:31](#)).

**Proverbs 31:10-31** *The worthy woman.* The writer, assumed by many to be Solomon, described a woman who was a good wife ([Proverbs 31:10-12](#), [23](#), [28](#)); a caring mother ([Proverbs 31:15](#), [21](#), [27-28](#)); a vital part of her community's social and economic life ([Proverbs 31:13](#), [16-20](#), [23-24](#)); and, in general, an honorable person ([Proverbs 31:25-31](#); see [Proverbs 12:4](#); [Proverbs 18:22](#); [Proverbs 19:14](#)).