



THE PRINCIPLES OF PROVERBS

The broad conveyance of the book of Proverbs is that wise people — those who live a life of obedience to God — **will live longer** (9:11); **prosper** (2:20-22); **experience joy** (3:13-18) and the overall **goodness of God** (12:21) during their life here on earth. Conversely, those who fail to live according to Proverbs (referred to by this book as fools) suffer shame (3:35) and death (10:21).

While these truths are generally evident, note that the Bible also teaches that the wicked sometimes prosper temporarily (Psa. 73:3, 12; 17-19) and that sometimes godly people suffer (cf. the book of Job). An important consideration when studying Proverbs therefore is not to do so with an attitude of seeking personal gain and success, as though this book contains a sure formula for that. Rather, study the book for purposes of spiritual maturity and wisdom in order to glorify God, and to become more Christ-like. Accordingly, Proverbs contains principles, not promises.

THE PURPOSE OF PROVERBS

This book answers the question, “How should I live my life?” In answering that, as said, it is not a selfish “how I can be successful” book, but rather, it instructs its reader on how one can be sure that in the day of judgment, they can know for certain if or not they have lived a life that is pleasing to God and worthy or reward. This book deals with personal morality, duty, ethics, values and virtues that inform and instruct what exactly God’s will is...even in the complex matters of life! To the student of the book, it clarifies what exactly righteousness looks like — and is — in a given situation and will inform the reader time and time again as to what is the right thing to do. States one commentator, [It] pricks the conscience, penetrates the soul, and probes the deepest recesses of the heart.... By design Proverbs, being a proactive book, promotes personal holiness at the most practical levels of living.²

A LIFE-LONG STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS WILL HELP MOLD, REINFORCE AND STRENGTHEN THE RESOLVE OF EVERY PERSON’S CONSCIENCE

THE PROCEDURE OF PROVERBS

The following ten tips for interpreting Proverbs are excerpted from *Practicing Proverbs*, by Dr. Richard Mayhue. They will greatly aid your study as you examine and work to understand this great book over a lifetime.

A. TIP 1

Realize that no Proverb or section in Proverbs intends to be an exhaustive, final treatment on the subject.

B. TIP 2

Proverbs must be understood in terms of context, which includes the language of Scripture, the section in Proverbs, the Book of Proverbs, Solomon's writings, the wisdom section of OT Scripture, the complete OT and the entire Bible.

C. TIP 3

Proverbs demands to be interpreted in the cultural and historical setting of the time it was written.

D. TIP 4

Proverbs are not guaranteed promises, but generalizations that can have exceptions.

E. TIP 5

Poetic features and figures of speech need be taken into consideration during interpretation, versus a wooden literalistic interpretation.

F. TIP 6

Proverbs are not a formula for selfish gain, but rather glorification of God via spiritual maturity.

G. TIP 7

If a Proverb is unclear, read it in another translation or use trusted commentaries.

H. TIP 8

Interpret Proverbs to discover the original authorial intent, discover the timeless principle and then make application.

I. TIP 9

Proverbs is not designed for large doses of reading. Study small portions, contemplate and reflect.

J. TIP 10

Treat what Proverbs states as divine and obey it, versus an optional idea coming from the secular world.