

PROVERBS

Who Needs the Instructions?

As a child I was very competitive. My goal was to get my school work done faster than anyone else. To me, it was like a race. That is, until the fateful day when I learned a valuable lesson about slowing down and reading the instructions.

You probably remember the first time you saw this quiz. The teacher always introduced it by explaining that you needed to read the instructions before starting. In those instructions you were specifically told to do the first and last problems *only*. Like most of my classmates I started the quiz with gusto. Who needed instructions? The first questions looked simple enough—reading the instructions would only slow me down.

As I raced to finish I was flustered to see that a couple of my classmates had finished before I did. They weren't even my usual competition. I pressed on and finished fast, but was disappointed that it had taken as long as it did. That was only the beginning of my embarrassment though. We all groaned when the teacher explained that the purpose of the quiz was to teach us to *slow down and read the instructions before beginning anything*.

Sometimes life is like that quiz isn't it? It looks

simple enough, almost routine. Why would we need instructions from God on living? And yet that is exactly what God offers—the divine perspective on life that offers wisdom for completing the “quiz”. Much of life is an enigma or riddle that can only be answered by the wisdom of God.

In later years I took that quiz a few more times. Each time I was prepared. I always read the instructions and followed them. It was still funny to watch the people who had never seen it before and pushed ahead uninformed. What was really funny though was to hear those who had seen this quiz before and still ignored the instructions. Their foolishness always manifested in a groan. They had been warned, but didn't pay attention.

Solomon opens Proverbs with a challenge to hear God's words of wisdom and instruction. *“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to perceive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity”* (Proverbs 1:2-3).

We would be smart to slow down and ponder them, to read them with understanding, and to live them out with confidence. Divine wisdom will never disappoint.



LOOK CLOSELY

observation

Proverbs 1:1-6

1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding, 3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity; 4 To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion -- 5 A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, 6 To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles.

- **What did you find most interesting about this passage?**
- **Before you decide what this passage means, look closely at what it says.**

Mark every instance of the word, "to" that is immediately followed by a verb.

Mark every verb preceded by the word "to."

Mark the two things that Proverbs helps us know (v 2).

Mark what Proverbs helps us perceive (v 2).

Mark the four things Proverbs enables us to receive (v 3).

Mark what Proverbs gives to the simple (v 4).

Mark the two things Proverbs gives to the young man (v 4).

Mark the two things a wise man will do (v 5).

Mark what a man of understanding will do (v 5).

Mark in what four things Proverbs enables understanding (v 6).

Identification Key

Develop your own key for identifying the various words and phrases in the text provided. Use different colored pencils, circles, boxes, underlining, etc., but be consistent from week-to-week.



THINK CAREFULLY

interpretation

- v 1 **"...proverbs..."** The title of the book comes from the Hebrew word meaning, "to be like." So, the proverbs present truth in the form of comparisons. These comparisons may be in the form of an object lesson, a short saying, an extended teaching, a parable, a common example, or some other comparison that provides truth.
- v 2 **"...to..."** This word designates purpose. There are five purpose clauses given in the first six verses which reveal the overall purpose of the collection of proverbs in general. "to know" ... "to perceive" ... "to receive" ... "to give" ... "to understand."
- v 2 **"...know..."** There are two ideas of *know* in the Bible. The first is to know by observing. The second is to know by experiencing. Both have the idea of learning. The term that is used here refers to experiential knowledge. The Proverbs were given in such a way that we can easily put into practice what is learned.
- v 2 **"...wisdom..."** The entire collection of Proverbs in Scripture deals with the subject of wisdom. Wisdom does not deal merely with what one knows, but rather what one does with what is known. Wisdom is to be understood as: "The skill of walking according to God's way." It is the ability to make choices in life which prove God is at the very core of your life.
- v 2 **"...instruction..."** The Hebrew word for instruction in the Old Testament has a three-fold range of meaning: 1) physical or parental discipline (Job 5:17), 2) verbal warning or exhortation (Pro 1:7), and 3) moral training or instruction (Pro 23:23). The instruction in Proverbs is a discipleship manual for wisdom-living.
- v 2 **"...perceive..."** The meaning of the word *perceive* refers to "the ability to make distinctions between things." One of the purposes of Proverbs is to enable one to discern what God has to say about life.
- v 2 **"...words of understanding..."** Understanding Proverbs provides discernment needed to distinguish truth from error and what is wise from what is foolish (see Pro 2:2; 4:1; 4:5; 9:6).
- v 3 **"...receive..."** To *receive* means "to treasure up."
- v 3 **"...justice..."** The word *justice* (or righteousness) describes conduct that conforms to a standard. In the biblical sense it refers to that which conforms to the standard of God's Word.
- v 3 **"...judgment..."** The concept of judgment is making decisions that are right and just. The precedents for these decisions are given throughout the proverbs.
- v 3 **"...equity..."** The word *equity* refers to activity that is morally straight. In other words, it speaks of life that is on the proper path. In 1 Sam 6:12 it is used to describe cows that walk on a straight path without turning to the right or left.
- v 4 **"...prudence..."** Prudence refers to shrewdness—not in the negative sense, but rather in the positive sense of understanding God's plan. The simple person is headed for trouble unless he listens to wisdom and follows God's plan (see Pro 8:5).

- v 4 “**...simple...**” The word *simple* refers to the naïve or untutored person. This person is unsuspecting and open minded in the sense that his mind is an open door to any idea because he lacks the prudence to know what to shut out. Therefore the simple person is easily influenced by others (see Pro 7:7; 14:15; 22:3). The proverbs equip even the most simple to prudently make decisions in life.
- v 4 “**...discretion...**” *Discretion* refers to the ability to carefully consider choices, thereby formulating a solid course for one’s life.
- v 5 “**...hear and increase in learning...**” One of the characteristics of a wise person is that he desires to learn. He is humble and teachable and therefore will listen to what God has to say. The word *hear* in Proverbs refers to intently listening externally with a heart to obey inwardly. Hearing in this sense increases learning—something is gained as the wise person adds to his storehouse of wisdom. To increase in wisdom one must recognize that the wisdom of God is naturally foreign to all of us. We are totally dependent on God’s revelation for wisdom.
- v 6 “**...enigma...**” The proverbs present wisdom in the form of figures and spiritual comparisons, often hidden behind word pictures painted by the writer. The figures in Proverbs are rich and vivid, and require careful thought.
- v 6 “**...riddles...**” Proverbs contain riddles in the sense that the truth they present is deeper than what appears on the surface. They are intended to make us to think—to ponder and consider what they mean.

Who were the various people God used to record the proverbs in this book?

- Pro 1:1—9:18
- Pro 10:1—22:16
- Pro 22:17—24:22
- Pro 24:23—34
- Pro 25:1—29:27
- Pro 30:1—33
- Pro 31:1—31

Since the first purpose of Proverbs is to “know wisdom and instruction,” what do the following verses teach about wisdom?

- Pro 16:16
- Pro 8:11
- Pro 3:19
- Pro 24:3
- Pro 9:10
- Pro 4:5
- Pro 4:7
- Pro 2:2
- Pro 3:13

In what ways does the second purpose of Proverbs, “to perceive the words of understanding,” encourage you to carefully study this book?

Describe how the third purpose of Proverbs, “to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity,” urges you to “treasure up” God’s direction for life?

- How might Proverbs direct you in living wisely?
- How might Proverbs direct you in living righteously?
- How might Proverbs direct you in living justly?
- How might Proverbs direct you in living properly?

Why does a simple person need prudence?

- Pro 1:32
- Pro 22:3
- Pro 14:15

According to verse 5, “a wise man will hear and increase learning.” What characteristics are needed for this?

The proverbs provide the opportunity to understand spiritual truth that is deeper than merely what is just on the surface. Some of the treasure in this book is found on top of the ground for us to just pick up. However, much of the treasure is to be found buried deep below the surface. Proverbs compels us to dig deep to extract the wisdom that is found within these pages. Read Pro 2:1-6, what do these verses tell you about what is needed in approaching the book of Proverbs?



RESPOND WISELY

application

What are you hoping to gain through this study of Proverbs?

In what ways might knowing God's wisdom in your mind, but not living according to God's wisdom in your life, reveal an absence of wisdom?

Describe how God has been disciplining you lately in the following areas:

- Discipline or chastening
- Warning or exhortation
- Training or instructing

In what ways might studying and practicing Proverbs benefit the following people?

- A Christian in his relationship with God
- A child in the home
- A spouse in marriage
- A parent in the family
- An employee in the workplace