

# WEB OF LOVE & FAITHFULNESS

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

# WEB OF LOVE & FAITHFULNESS

## 1. Why Read Proverbs?

1. What Is Proverbs About?
2. Key Themes in Proverbs
3. Living for Jesus from Proverbs

# 1. WHY READ PROVERBS?

- It Helps Us **See** Clearly
  - Wisdom is about seeing life from God's true perspective
  - Proverbs equips us to interpret our experience properly
- It Helps Us **Feel** Rightly
  - Proverbs wants to create in us a passion to live for God
  - It helps shape what we love & hate around God's character
- It Helps Us **Do** The Good
  - Wisdom drives us to do real, practical good
  - It makes us mindful of our relational impact on each other
- It **Points Us to Jesus**
  - Proverbs paints a picture of the true wise man we should follow: Jesus
  - It helps us yearn to live under his rule both now & into eternity

# 1. WHY READ PROVERBS?



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1. Why Read Proverbs?
2. What Is Proverbs About?
3. Key Themes in Proverbs
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

# WEB OF LOVE & FAITHFULNESS

1. Why Read Proverbs?
2. What Is Proverbs About?
  - i. The Message of Proverbs in a Nutshell
  - ii. The Key Concept: Wisdom
  - iii. Reading Proverbs: Structure & Genres
  - iv. Putting It All Together
3. Key Themes in Proverbs
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

## 2. WHAT IS PROVERBS ABOUT?

The Message of Proverbs in a Nutshell:

**GOD MADE, OWNS & RULES THE WORLD  
SO FIND LIFE & JOY IN LIVING BY HIS LOVE &  
FAITHFULNESS**

Key Verse: Prov 3:3

**Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart  
Then you will win favour and a good name  
In the sight of God and man.**

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The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:  
For gaining wisdom and instruction;  
    For understanding words of insight;  
For receiving instruction in prudent behavior;  
    Doing what is right and fair;  
For giving prudence to those who are simple;  
    Knowledge and discretion to the young –  
Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
    And let the discerning get guidance –  
For understanding proverbs and parables,  
    The sayings and riddles of the wise.  
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,  
    But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov 1:1-7)

**THE FEAR OF THE LORD =**

Understanding & living life in right relationship to God of

Awe,

Reverence,

Trust &

Love

Wisdom =  
**Understanding how your 'world' works**  
**And how to live in it for your joy and success**

Hiram had great skill ('wisdom'), understanding, and knowledge to do every kind of bronze work. (1Kgs 7:14)

Let us deal shrewdly ('wisely') with them; otherwise they will multiply further...(Ex 1:10)

Like the deaf cobra that stops up its ears, that doesn't listen to the sound of the charmers who skilfully ('wisely') weave spells (Psa 58:4-5)

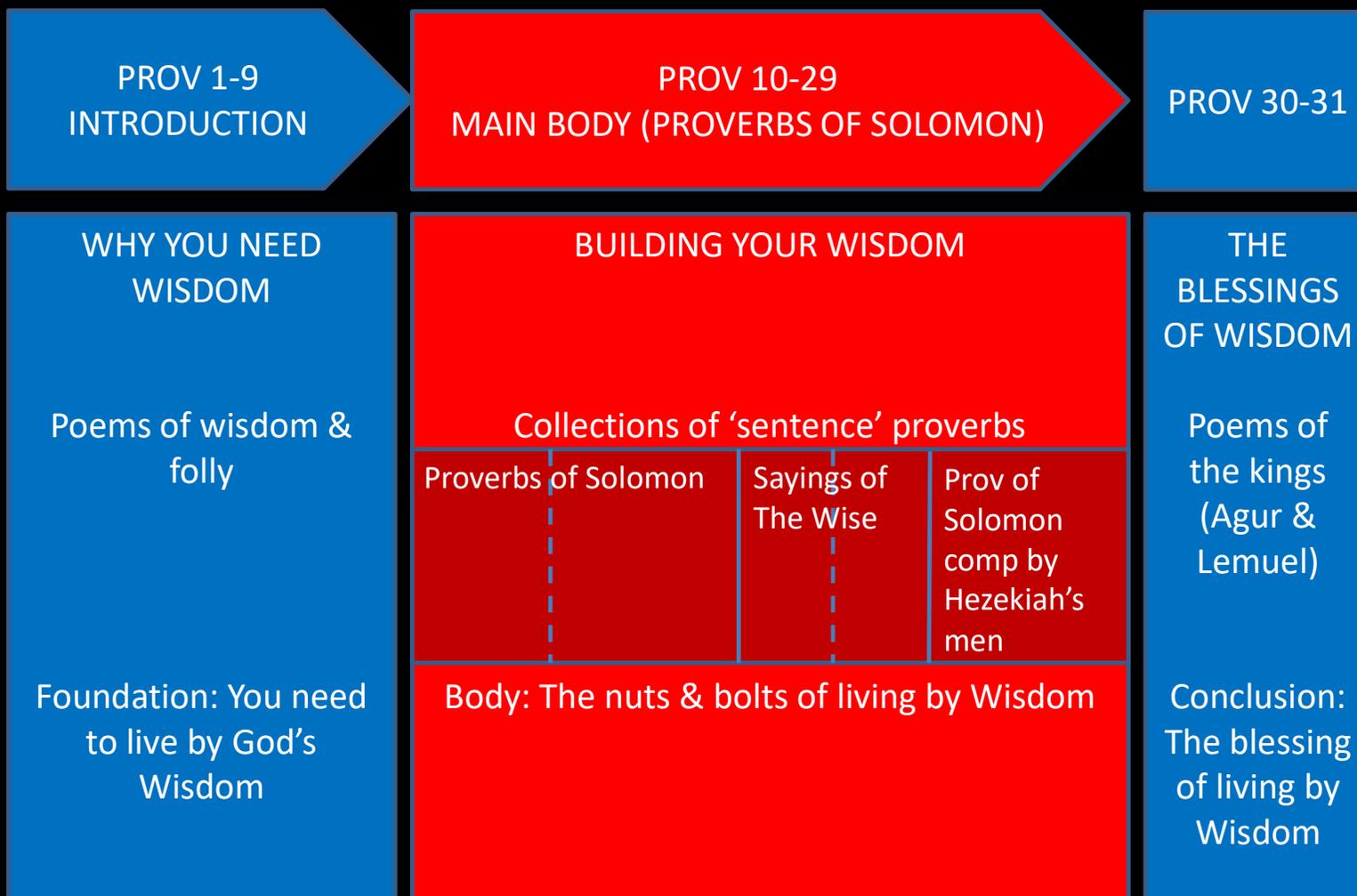
TRUE, ULTIMATE WISDOM =  
**Understanding the world is made & ruled by the God of love & faithfulness**  
**And finding true joy and success in fearing him**

WHICH INVOLVES YOUR:  
**PERSPECTIVE: How you see and understand the world**  
**PRACTICE: What you do in the world**  
**PASSIONS: What you love and strive for in the world**

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# THE STRUCTURE OF PROVERBS (OVERVIEW)



## Main genres in Proverbs: Poems & Sentence Proverbs

- Poems (1-9, 30-31)
  - Lyrical, emotive unfolding of a key theme or narrative
  - Not simply information, but appeal to emotions & desires
- Sentence Proverbs (10-29)
  - Short, memorable, striking saying
  - Invites analogy & imaginative reflection and application
  - Can be read individually, but are often linked to other surrounding proverbs in mutually informing ways
- **Both are common ancient wisdom writing genres**
  - **But Biblical proverbs are not just about earthly success**
  - **Biblical proverbs tune your heart to live in right response to the God who created and saves**

Example of a Poem (Prov 9):

Wisdom has built her house;

    She has set up its seven pillars.

She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;

    She has also set her table.

She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city.

    “Let all those who are simple come to my house!”

To those who have no sense she says,

    “Come, eat my food

        And drink the wine I have mixed.

    Leave your simple ways and you will live;

        Walk in the ways of insight.” ...

Folly is an unruly woman;

    She is simple and she knows nothing.

She sits at the door of her house,

    On a seat at the highest point of the city,

Calling out to those who pass by,

    Who go straight on their way.

    “Let all who are simple come to my house!

To those who have no sense she says,

    “Stolen water is sweet;

        Food eaten in secret is delicious!”

But little do they know the dead are there,

    That her guests are deep in the realm of the dead.’ (Prov 9:1-6, 13-18)

### Example of Some Sentence Proverbs (Prov 10-29):

- Considered comparisons & observations
  - E.g. 'Like a thornbush in a drunkard's hand is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.' (Prov 26:9)
  - E.g. 'The heart knows its own bitterness, and no outsider shares its joy.' (Prov 14:10)
  
- Situation value comparisons
  - E.g. 'Better a meal of vegetables where there is love, than a fattened ox with hatred' (Prov 15:17)
  
- Character value statements
  - E.g. 'A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son heartache to his mother.' (Prov 10:1)
  
- Commands & Exhortations
  - E.g. 'Stay away from a foolish man, you will gain no knowledge from his speech.' (Prov 14:7)

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# WISDOM (TRUST IN GOD) IN PROVERBS



**GOD'S LOVE &  
FAITHFULNESS  
(Exod 34:6)**

**Our Love &  
Faithfulness**

'Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
Bind them around your neck  
Write them on the tablet of your heart.  
(Prov 3:3)



## FOOLISHNESS (REJECTION OF GOD) IN PROVERBS



**GOD'S LOVE &  
FAITHFULNESS  
(Exod 34:6)**

A person's own folly leads to their ruin,  
Yet their heart rages against the Lord.' (Prov 19:3)

'Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor  
Will also cry out and not be answered.' (Prov 21:13)





'By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations,  
By understanding he set the heavens in place;  
By his knowledge the watery depths were divided  
And the clouds let drop their dew.' (Prov 3:19-20)

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3. Key Themes in Proverbs
  - i. Wisdom & Folly
  - ii. The Fear of the Lord
  - iii. Human Life as Relational
  - iv. The King (of Israel)
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

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3. Key Themes in Proverbs
  - i. Wisdom & Folly
    - a. Positive characterisations (wise, prudent, diligent etc.) flow from belief & trust in God's good character and rule
    - b. Negative characterisations (fool, sluggard, liar etc.) flow from lack of belief & trust in God's good character and rule
    - c. Earthly life & decisions portrayed as steps on a path towards eternity with God, or without God
  - ii. The Fear of the Lord
  - iii. Human Life as Relational
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E.g. 'Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.' (17:5)

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  - ii. The Fear of the Lord
    - a. Proverbs as God's Law in Deuteronomy 'fleshed out' in real life
    - b. Not just individual decisions, but forming a character built on love & faithfulness
    - c. Not only practical, but also beautiful (Prov 31)
  - iii. Human Life as Relational
  - iv. The King (of Israel)
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

'Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
But a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' (31:30)

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  - ii. The Fear of the Lord
  - iii. Human Life as Relational
    - a. Not just individual morals, but focus on relational/social impact
    - b. Most importantly, our relationship to God
  - iv. The King (of Israel)
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

‘Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death  
Is one who deceives their neighbour and says, “I was only  
joking!”’ (26:18-19)

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  - iv. The King (of Israel)
    - a. Increasing focus on the righteous king in the book
    - b. His rule will conquer sin & bring life & blessing
4. Proverbs, Jesus & The Christian Life

'It is not for kings, Lemuel – it is not for kings to drink wine,  
Not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed,  
and deprive the oppressed of their rights...

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
For the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.' (31:4-7)

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## **The final vision of Proverbs (Prov 31):**

The wise king of Israel, and his wise bride,  
Ruling God's land righteously,  
So that sin is overcome, and God's blessing flows unhindered  
to every person under his rule

# THE WISDOM OF GOD IN JESUS



**GOD'S LOVE &  
FAITHFULNESS  
(Exod 34:6)**

**Jesus' Love &  
Faithfulness**

"The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory; the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (Jn 1:14)



# THE WISDOM OF GOD IN JESUS

- **Jesus as the true wise man/king/wisdom of God:**
  - 'Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.' (Luke 2:52)
  - 'But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.' (1 Cor 1:24)
  - '[Christ] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' (Col 2:3)
  - 'We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would have never crucified the Lord of glory.' (1 Cor 2: 7-8)
- **Jesus as our model and example of wisdom:**
  - 'Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise.' (Eph 5:2-15)
  - 'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' (1 Cor 10:31)

## TIPS FOR READING & LIVING OUT PROVERBS

- Remember proverbs work by imagination & analogy
  - Imagine the scenario the proverb portrays
  - Think about the perspective/dynamic it's trying to convey
  - Imagine yourself in each of the roles of the proverb
  - Reflect on how this might shape your perspective, passions & practices
- For biblical proverbs:
  - Think deeply about how the proverb helps you reflect and respond to living before the God of love & faithfulness
  - Think deeply about how the proverb helps you reflect on the impact you have on others, and others have on you
  - Think deeply about how the proverb might illumine either the person, work, and character of Jesus, or humanity's utter need for him
- Final tip:
  - Remember, proverbs is not just about individual morals & beliefs, it's about shaping God's community of love & faithfulness, so read & think about them together!

## SOME EXAMPLES

- A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth (Prov 19:24)
  - Subject: The sin of sloth
  - Key idea: God's good gift twisted into a self-indulgent daze
  - Reflections: cultural apathy towards God, personal apathy in service, difference between sloth & rest (cf. Prov 19:23)
  - Jesus: the man whose hand was not held out in self-indulgent sloth, but self-giving, saving service
- Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy (Prov 14:10)
  - Subject: The integrity and dignity of individual experience and emotion
  - Key idea: An individual's experience has a unique privacy, which is a gift of God
  - Reflections: God's empathy for us, humility & sensitivity in relationships & pastoral care
  - Jesus: 'Come to me, all who are weary,' but also Jesus' experience of suffering for us
- If you find honey, eat just enough – too much of it, and you will vomit; Seldom set your foot in your neighbour's house – too much of you, and they will hate you (Prov 25:16-17)
  - Subject: loving your neighbour as yourself
  - Key idea: Prov 25 as a sustained meditation on power in relationships
  - Reflections: Mindfulness of appropriate patterns of relationship, our impact on others
  - Jesus: The one who loved his neighbour to the point of death

# WHAT IS PROVERBS ABOUT?

The Message of Proverbs in a Nutshell:

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