

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON #8

Teacher's Tip

Quote: *Sins against illumination and conviction make deep wounds in the soul. Other sins fetch blood; these are a stab in the heart. Every little hole in the roof lets in rain, but a crack in the foundation endangers the fall of the house. Every sin of weakness is prejudicial, but sins against illumination crack the conscience and threaten the ruin of the soul. To sin in this matter makes sin the heavier and hell the hotter.* (Thomas Watson, *Mischief of Sin*, p.94.)

Outlining Jer. 9:23-24

Thus says the Lord,	(GOD SPEAKS TO YOU)
"Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom,	(DON'T BOAST ABOUT YOUR WISDOM)
and	
let not the mighty man boast of his might,	(DON'T BOAST ABOUT YOUR MIGHT)
let not a rich man boast of his riches;	(DON'T BOAST ABOUT YOUR RICHES)
but	
let him who boasts boast of this,	(PROPER THINGS TO BOAST ABOUT)
that he understands [Me]	(BOAST THAT YOU UNDERSTAND GOD)
and	
knows Me,	(BOAST THAT YOU KNOW GOD)
that I am the Lord	(WHO GOD IS)
who exercises lovingkindness,	(GOD ACTS IN KINDNESS)
[who exercises] justice,	(GOD ACTS IN JUSTICE)
and	
[who exercises] righteousness on earth;	(GOD ACTS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS)
for I delight in these things,"	(WHY GOD ACTS THE WAY HE DOES)
declares the Lord.	(GOD SPEAKS TO YOU)

TEACHING OUTLINE:

WHAT YOU SHOULD AND SHOULDN'T BOAST ABOUT

- I. THREE THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T BOAST ABOUT
- II. TWO THINGS YOU CAN BOAST ABOUT
- III. THREE REASONS WHY YOU CAN BOAST ABOUT GOD

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Lesson # 8

How to Study Proverbs

Proverbs are very practical tidbits of wisdom from God to help us live wisely for the glory of God. If God's wisdom in the book of Proverbs is heeded, it will spare us from a life of sin and misery. Yet, many people don't understand how to study proverbs. Most know that the book of Proverbs teaches us wisdom, but don't know how to go about studying Proverbs in an organized and systematic way. In this study we will take some time to consider some of the characteristics of the book of Proverbs and how to study this unique portion of God's Word.

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROVERBS

A. **Remember that proverbs are wisdom statements or truisms.** They are not formulas that always produce predictable outcomes. They are easy to remember wisdom statements that teach us how to live.

1. **Prov. 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
2. **Prov. 23:9** Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.
3. Do all children trained in the way they should go end up following the Lord? Do fools always despise the wisdom of your words?

B. **Remember to watch for parallelism.** There are three major kinds or types of parallelism found in the book of Proverbs - synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic.

1. *Synonymous parallelism* comes in two types i.e. "**Identical**" or "**similar**." The key word to look for is "**and**" at the beginning of the second line.
 - a. Identical parallelism states the same thing twice but uses different words.
 - (1) **Prov. 14:13** Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, **And** the end of joy may be grief.
 - (2) **Prov. 16:16** How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! **And** to get understanding is to be chosen above silver.

- b. Similar parallelism states two things which are similar and have some things in common.
 - (1) **Prov. 16:20** He who gives attention to the word shall find good, **And** blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.
 - (2) **Prov. 17:27** He who restrains his words has knowledge, **And** he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

- 2. *Antithetical parallelism* provides sharp contrast between two different things. Usually something good is contrasted with something bad. The key word to look for is "**but**" at the beginning of the second line.
 - a. **Prov. 5:3-6** For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, **And** smoother Than oil is her speech; **But** in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of Sheol. 6 She does not ponder the path of life; Her ways are unstable, she does not know it.
 - b. **Prov. 12:18** There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, **But** the tongue of the wise brings healing.

- 3. **Synthetic parallelism** is accumulative or climatic, building repetitiously upon the same truth. Each line builds upon the same subject a little further.
 - a. **Prov. 19:17** He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, **And** He will repay him for his good deed.
 - b. **Prov. 27:15-16** A constant dripping on a day of steady rain **And** a contentious woman are alike; 16 He who would restrain her restrains the wind, **And** grasps oil with his right hand.

- C. **Remember to watch for groups of proverbs that have a similar theme or address the same truth.**
 - 1. All of **Prov. 7** has a unified theme – how to escape from the adulterous woman.
 - 2. **Proverbs 31:10-31** has a unified theme – what it means to be an excellent wife.

- D. **Remember that to God, knowledge doesn't become wisdom unless it is applied knowledge.** Wisdom is the art of right living, not merely the knowledge of right living. There are many exhortations in Proverbs to walk, obey, listen to, heed, etc., which emphasize the application of the truth which leads to wisdom.
1. **Prov. 1:15** My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path.
 2. **Prov. 19:20** Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

II. STUDYING PROVERBS

A. You can study individual proverbs.

1. **Prov. 17:12** A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.
2. **Prov. 29:1** A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

B. You can study a series of connected proverbs that have a unifying theme.

1. **Prov. 25:11-15** Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a **word spoken** in right circumstances. 12 Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a **wise reprover** to a listening ear. 13 Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest Is a **faithful messenger** to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters. 14 Like clouds and wind without rain Is **a man who boasts** of his gifts falsely. 15 By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a **soft tongue** breaks the bone.
2. **Prov. 27:13-16** The **sluggard** says, "There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!" 14 As the door turns on its hinges, So does the **sluggard** on his bed. 15 The **sluggard** buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. 16 The **sluggard** is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

C. You can study a collection of proverbs which speak to the same theme.

1. **Prov. 12:1** Whoever loves **discipline** loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid.

2. **Prov. 13:18** Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects **discipline**, But he who regards reproof will be honored.
3. **Prov. 15:32** He who neglects **discipline** despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.
4. **Prov. 19:20** Listen to counsel and accept **discipline**, That you may be wise the rest of your days.

D. **You can study verse by verse through Proverbs.** Notice that each of the proverbs below addresses a different truth and could be taught individually or as many truths as you wanted to address in one lesson or study.

1. **Prov. 27:18** He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit, And **he who cares for his master** will be honored. (Basic truth – you reap the benefits of your labors.)
2. **Prov. 27:19** As in water face reflects face, So **the heart of man reflects man**. (Basic truth – your heart shows what you really are.)
3. **Prov. 27:20** Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, nor are **the eyes of man ever satisfied**. (Basic truth – men are by nature discontent.)
4. **Prov. 27:21** The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, And **each is tested by the praise accorded him**. (Basic truth – how we respond to praise is a true test of our character.)
5. **Prov. 27:22** Though you pound **a fool** in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, Yet **his foolishness will not depart from him**. (Basic truth – It is next to impossible to make a foolish person wise.)

III. **INTERPRETING PROVERBS**

Many proverbs are clear in their meaning and the application jumps out at you. Yet, there are other instances where the truth being taught is a bit more obscure. Below is an example of a proverb that some have used as a proof text to say that borrowing is sin. Notice how principles from this lesson, as well as other principles already learned, are used to examine what this particular proverbs means and how it applies.

Prov. 22:7, *The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower becomes the lender's slave.*

A. Make Preliminary Observations

1. **Proverbs 22:7** may seem at first glance to tell us that borrowing is wrong. Upon closer examination we observe that there is an "**and**" at the beginning of the second line. We conclude that it is **synonymous parallelism**. This means the first line teaches something similar to the second line.
2. By examining the first line we learn that rich people rule over poor people (a general truth).
3. By examining the second line we learn that *in a similar way* (since it is synonymous parallelism) borrowers become slaves to lenders. If you wanted to rearrange the second line so that it matches the first line you might say that lenders (the rich who have money) become masters over those who borrow from them (the poor) who must pay their debts.
4. You notice the figures "slave" and "master." One who borrows does not literally become a slave, neither does a lender become an owner of a slave. The borrower is merely bound to repay the debt and in that way only is he "enslaved," figuratively speaking, to the lender. The lender is *like a master* in that he has a right to expect repayment of the debt.

B. Do Word Studies

1. The word "*rules*" is a Hebrew verb which can describe 1) something which has occurred in the past, 2) something which is still continuing or progressing from the past but hasn't been completed, or 3) a future condition which might happen. Here #2 is probably in mind. The word might be paraphrased, "the rich *have been and continue to be ruling* over the poor."
2. "*The borrower*" is an active participle which expresses continual action. It might be paraphrased in the second line as, "the one *who is continually in the process of borrowing*." This is a habitual borrower who keeps taking out loans.
3. "*The lender*" is a causative active participle. This might be paraphrased as, "the one *who causing himself to continually lend*."
4. If we were to write a paraphrased translation we might write it in these words, "In the same way that rich people in the past and surely in the future rule over the poor, so the one who habitually borrows from the one who lends will be in a continual state of obligation to repay his debts."

5. Notice how word studies make the meaning of the text clearer.

C. Use Cross References

The initial thought was that **Prov. 22:7** discourages or forbids borrowing. Yet we can search the Scriptures to see if they teach the same thing. However when we search the Scripture we discover the exact opposite. Lending to the poor is a godly characteristic and commanded, not forbidden. Yet one would need to determine if borrowing and lending were encouraged only in kindness to the poor. Is it okay to borrow money for a TV, use credit cards and not pay off the balance, get a loan for a house, etc. It is beyond the scope of this study to address these things but the point being made is that at least in some instances, borrowing and lending is withing the will of God.

1. **Deut 15:7-8** If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; 8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.
2. **Mt. 5:42** Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.
3. **Lk. 6:34** If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.

D. More Observations Leading to Interpretation

Often times merely looking at, pondering, considering, and meditating on the text will produce more insights that are not gleaned initially and which may prove very helpful.

1. Notice the lender is voluntarily lending i.e. “causing himself to keep on lending” to the borrower.
2. Notice that the borrower being spoken of here is one who has a continual pattern of borrowing.
3. Since both lines are similar we need to ask ourselves, “Is it evil that the rich rule the poor?” The answer is, “No.” There is nothing wrong with rich people ruling poor people. This is a truism.

4. The proverb never says that borrowing is evil or sinful, nor that it should be avoided. If borrowing was wrong you would also have to say that it is morally wrong to be ruled by the rich.
5. The proverb is not saying that by borrowing you become a literal slave any more than having someone rule over you makes you poor. The borrower is like a slave in the one respect. He is “bound,” figuratively speaking, to pay back the debt.
6. The proverb implies that those who voluntarily lend money to others have the right to expect repayment according to the contract.

E. Timeless Truths or “Wisdom” to Apply from this Proverb

1. Realize that the rich will usually rule over the poor because money can be a form of power. Be content with this whether you are rich or poor, a ruler or the one ruled over.
2. Realize that if you are one who borrows from another you will be obligated to pay your debt to the lender and he has a right to expect you to do so. If you continually borrow you will be under continual obligation to repay.
3. Realize that if you lend to someone you have the right to expect repayment according to the contract.

IV. HOMEWORK

- A. Without looking at any commentaries, using only your sharpened hermeneutical skills from this lesson and previous lessons, seek to observe, interpret, and give practical applications of the three proverbs listed below.
1. **Prov. 6:28** Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?
 - a. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say.
 - b. Interpretation – the basic truth/s being taught.
 - c. Ideas for how this proverb might apply to your life.

2. **Prov. 15:8** The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.
 - a. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say.
 - b. Interpretation – the basic truth/s being taught.
 - c. Ideas for how this proverb might apply to your life.

3. **Prov. 30:15-16** The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough": Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, "Enough."
 - a. Helpful observations of what the text does and doesn't say.
 - b. Interpretation – the basic truth/s being taught.
 - c. Ideas for how this proverb might apply to your life.

4. Take some time to consider **Romans 15:4**. Create a teaching outline from this verse with both study title and main outline points. Be sure to include commands or the second person "you" or "your" in each.