

## Proverbs - The Treasure Hunt

Tucked into the centre of your Bible, directly after the emotional roller-coaster of the expressive and poetic psalms, comes the Book of Proverbs. It is jam-packed with pearls of concentrated wisdom, like a jar of high-potency vitamins. You could easily wonder whether a book of wise observations written thousands of years ago might be outdated and irrelevant in the high-tech world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. But you don't have to dip into many chapters before you realise that this slim guide to happiness is as relevant today as it was in Solomon's time. As a father ponders his own life and considers the mistakes he's made and how they could have been avoided, he devotes several chapters to warning his son about the dangers of sexual temptation and immorality. Maybe a father today would also warn his son about internet pornography, but the main principles for protecting oneself against the many dangers of pre and extramarital sex are right here in a book written centuries ago.

The book closes with the elegant chapter of Proverbs 31, in praise of women. In many Jewish homes this chapter is still read as a blessing on wives and mothers at the beginning of every Sabbath. The verses describe a picture of exceptional female liberation – the woman who cares for her employees; the one who runs her own business; the one who is skilled with her hands, or grows her own crops; the one who mothers her children well; the one who makes sure her family are warm and well fed; the one who is respected in her community and the one who protects her husband's reputation...Maybe the chapter was written to celebrate women in general, and not one single, amazing super-woman. Maybe it honours the different kinds of lives women lead, even today, so that as many women as possible can find themselves in one of the verses...You can decide...

Sandwiched between the warnings against seductive women and the praise for good women is plenty of practical advice for living the Christian life. If you want to know how to get on with people; parent effectively; have a good marriage; run a successful business; be a respected community member; have good physical, emotional and mental health; and live a long, peaceful life with few regrets; then you'll find many quirky and memorable quotes to inspire you.

The Book of Proverbs is also the comedy section of the biblical library. Many of the proverbs evoke startling, humorous, cartoon-like images. 'It's better to live on the corner of the roof than with a nagging wife.' Or, 'Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.'

We live in a world overflowing with knowledge; we can discover almost anything about anything with a few clicks on my computer. But God's wisdom lies deep in the rocks, like veins of precious silver, nuggets of gold or richly coloured emeralds. It's not always at our finger tips. It's not always discussed, and it doesn't win Oscars. And sometimes you have to dig for it. But when you open the book of Proverbs it's like opening a long-hidden treasure chest. The ancient and beautifully crafted jewels are there in handfuls for the taking and they are as beautiful and valuable today.

Looking for some fresh ways to help you read the Book of Proverbs? Try reading one chapter of Proverbs each day of the month (there are 31). Illustrate a favourite verse by creating a mime, picture, short sketch, limerick, poem or display of items. Pray as you read and ask God for the pearls of wisdom you need for the challenges you face, today, in this very moment. And know you are not alone. You are not the first person to struggle with this issue. Centuries ago someone grappled with

a similar problem, struggled, learned, condensed their wisdom into the capsule of a verse, and wrote it down. Treasures from God, hidden in the heart of the Bible, waiting for the hunters...

Karen and Bernie Holford