

Dr. Fred Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Putnam's lecture on the Book of Proverbs explores the definition and characteristics of proverbs, contrasting biblical proverbs with those in other languages. He emphasizes that biblical proverbs, often presented in parallelisms, function as **counsel** rather than laws, requiring careful consideration of context and multiple perspectives. The lecture further examines the **dual purpose** of Proverbs: to provide **moral guidance** towards an upright life and to **enhance intellectual understanding**, ultimately contributing to the stability of the Israelite kingdom through wise leadership. Finally, the lecture suggests viewing Proverbs not as condemnations, but as a roadmap for spiritual growth and prayer.

**2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Putnam, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Proverbs).**



**Putnam_Prov_Sessi
on02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on the Book of Proverbs:

Briefing Document: Understanding the Book of Proverbs

Introduction: This document summarizes key points from Dr. Putnam's lecture on the Book of Proverbs, focusing on the nature of proverbs, the purposes of the book, and how to properly interpret its wisdom.

I. Defining Proverbs:

- **No Universal Definition:** There is no single agreed-upon definition of a proverb. Many definitions exist, each with its own nuances. As Putnam notes, "If you read the dictionary, you'll find something like a brief, pithy saying of folk wisdom that passes along traditional advice, or something like that."
- **Key Characteristics:** Common threads across definitions include:
 - **Short:** Proverbs are concise and compact.
 - **Memorable:** They are designed to be easily remembered.
 - **Simple:** The concepts are easy to grasp.
 - **Widely Used:** They are not limited to one person's sayings.
 - **Image-Based:** Often rely on a picture or mental image.
 - **Socially Accepted & Experientially Based:** Many contemporary definitions emphasize these points.
 - **Neurological Impact:** Proverbs uniquely engage both hemispheres of the brain simultaneously.
 - **"I Know It When I See It":** The lack of a rigid definition leads many to fall back on recognizing a proverb through its use and application.

- **Biblical Proverbs: Compactness:** While English translations often make them appear longer, Hebrew proverbs are very compact. "The average number of words in Hebrew per verse is 7.6. The average number of words in English is over 18."
- **Parallelism:** Biblical proverbs often feature two statements that function together, not as independent statements. "The two statements function together, and it's not that they lie side by side. They actually are woven together, and they're meant to be read in light of each other because together they say something that neither of them can say independently of the other."
- **Misinterpretation through incomplete quoting:** Quoting only half a proverb can miss the intended meaning because they are meant to be understood as a single, woven unit.
- **Application:** Proverbs are not laws or promises, but rather a form of advice or counsel. This is illustrated with the fence post example: "Nobody's talking about sewing the fence post back together...we all understand that they're advising us because that's what proverbs are."

II. How Proverbs Function:

- **Counselors and Advisors:** Proverbs function like advice from a counselor or doctor - not commands but suggestions for wise living. "A proverb is like a medical doctor, or like a lawyer, from whom we get advice that we then have to decide what to do with."
- **Dueling Proverbs:** Apparent contradictions (e.g., "He who hesitates is lost" vs. "Look before you leap") exist because no single proverb addresses every situation.
- **Extension to Situations:** A single proverb's meaning can be extended to apply to different circumstances. For example, "like father, like son" can be extended to "like teacher, like student."
- **Metonymy:** Proverbs use figurative language (e.g., "money talks") where one thing stands for something else. In "money talks," it is not the money that talks, but the person with the money and their influence.
- **Wisdom through Application:** Wisdom lies in discerning which proverb applies to a particular situation. "The wisdom comes, you see, in knowing which proverb to apply to which situation. That's wisdom."

III. Purposes of the Book of Proverbs:

- **Moral Purpose:** To impart prudence, the ability to think, understand, and be still before acting. "One of the things that Proverbs wants to give us is insight. We cannot have insight if we are so busy coming up with our answer." This also relates to developing a "straight life," which is being on the path, and straying from that path is "heading for death."
- **Mental Purpose:** To increase the ability to understand Proverbs and riddles. "There's something about studying Proverbs that makes us smarter and makes us better able to understand Proverbs, even ones that we haven't studied yet."
- **Learning by Experience and from Others:** Solomon offers the accumulated wisdom of others. "What Solomon is doing is giving us the opportunity of learning from the accumulated experience of the wise men of the ancient Near East taking their sayings and saying, these things are worth pondering and thinking about."
- **Counsel for Making Moral Decisions:** Proverbs are a form of verbal counselors to guide decision-making. "The Proverbs themselves will become a circle or a part of your advice. They'll become part of the counsel that you have and on which you can base a decision. And they will become moral guides."
- **Avoid "Biblical Bullets":** Proverbs are not meant to be used as condemning statements or law. Rather, they are to reflect God's character and desires for us. "The Lord is showing us what He wants us to be, not because He's a bully, but because He knows that that is how we will be most happy, what will be best for us."
- **Basis for Prayer:** Proverbs should inspire us to seek God's help in applying their wisdom, using them as a basis to repent and ask for change. The requirements of proverbs "become things that become bases upon which we can pray."
- **Covenantal/Communal Purpose:** The book was originally intended for future leaders of Israel, the "prep school guys." Solomon wanted to ensure the continuity of his kingdom and his people by training these leaders to live in accordance with the covenant. "The book of Proverbs is addressed to the people who are going to step into positions of leadership in the nation because the biblical, as the Bible shows clearly again and again and again, as the leaders go, so goes the country."
- **Addressing Rulers:** Many proverbs speak to issues that leaders face, such as justice, wealth, and proper behavior in the king's presence.

- **Justice and Judgement:** Many verses that use "innocent and guilty" are meant to indicate the importance of using the role of a judge fairly.
- **Universal Applicability:** While originally written for young men in positions of power, the wisdom is beneficial for all.

IV. Key Takeaways:

- Proverbs are a unique form of communication with specific characteristics.
- They are meant to be guides, not rigid rules or guarantees.
- Wisdom lies in understanding and applying proverbs to various situations.
- The book has moral, mental, personal, and communal purposes.
- The book is designed to form leaders in accord with the covenant.
- Studying Proverbs can lead to both personal and communal growth.
- They should be a basis for prayer and personal growth.

Conclusion: Dr. Putnam's lecture emphasizes that the Book of Proverbs is a rich source of wisdom, not to be read simplistically, but to be thoughtfully engaged with and applied to daily life and leadership responsibilities. Understanding the nuances of proverbs is crucial to gleaning their full benefit, including their intended purpose and historical context.

4. Study Guide: Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4

Proverbs: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Dr. Putnam, what are some of the key characteristics of a proverb?
2. How do biblical proverbs differ from typical English proverbs in terms of structure?
3. How do people typically use or apply proverbs in their daily lives?
4. Why does Dr. Putnam suggest that proverbs are similar to the advice of doctors or lawyers?
5. Explain the concept of "dueling proverbs" and why they are not necessarily contradictory.
6. What is the significance of the proverb "like father, like son," according to the lecture?
7. What are the two main purposes of the Book of Proverbs as outlined in verses 2-6?
8. Explain the concept of "prudence" as it relates to understanding Proverbs and the broader moral purpose of the book.
9. What does it mean that the word translated as "wisdom" also translates as "skill" in the Bible?
10. Who is the intended audience for the Book of Proverbs, and why is this significant?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Proverbs are short, memorable, simple, widely used, and often image-based. They are socially accepted and experientially based, also affecting both sides of the brain when heard. These traits contribute to their effectiveness as a form of communication.
2. Biblical proverbs are typically very compact in Hebrew, often using parallelism, where two statements are put together to make a single saying. English proverbs

are often a single statement, and they don't necessarily have the parallel structure.

3. People recognize and apply proverbs to various situations as a form of advice or counsel. They don't treat proverbs as strict laws but use them to gain insight and guidance in their decision-making and daily life.
4. Proverbs are like the advice of doctors or lawyers because they offer counsel based on experience and expertise, not mandatory laws. Just as people can choose which advice to follow from experts, so it is with proverbs.
5. "Dueling proverbs" are seemingly contradictory statements that can both be true. These proverbs are not truly contradictory but complementary, each addressing a different aspect or situation. Wisdom lies in understanding when to apply each proverb.
6. The proverb "like father, like son" is an observation about relationships, illustrating how a relationship between a father and son can apply to other relationships (such as teacher/student or pastor/church) to understand different dynamics.
7. The Book of Proverbs has a moral purpose, to give people prudence and guide them towards an upright life, and a mental purpose, to develop intellectual skill and the ability to understand both the proverbs and the world.
8. Prudence is the ability to be quiet and understand a situation before acting, as Proverbs seeks to develop. This wisdom comes by being still and understanding what is real before responding, not what we want or think to be real.
9. The words translated as "wise" and "wisdom" can also be translated as "skill." The skill that is learned in the book of Proverbs involves understanding life and circumstances, not just mastering a single idea or skill.
10. The Book of Proverbs is primarily addressed to young men of the ruling class, who would become the future leaders of Israel. Their understanding of wisdom and morality would determine the fate of the nation.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges in defining a proverb, and how those challenges might affect the interpretation of biblical proverbs.
2. Analyze the role of parallelism in biblical proverbs and its significance in understanding their meaning and function.
3. Compare and contrast how proverbs function as advice or counsel in both modern society and the context of the Book of Proverbs.
4. Explore the moral and mental purposes of the Book of Proverbs, and discuss how those purposes interact with each other in the broader context of the book.
5. Examine how the intended audience of the Book of Proverbs affects its content and the broader implications for those who read and use it today.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Proverb:** A short, memorable, and widely used saying that conveys folk wisdom or advice.
- **Aphorism:** A concise statement of a principle or general truth; more of a unique saying.
- **Paremiologist:** A scholar who studies proverbs.
- **Parallelism:** A literary device used in biblical proverbs, where two or more statements express a similar or related idea.
- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.
- **Prudence:** The ability to be quiet and understand a situation before acting.
- **Chokmah:** The Hebrew word for wisdom, also meaning skill or ability.
- **Sophists:** Ancient Greek philosophers who emphasized rhetoric and argumentation, some of whom believed arguments could prove anything.
- **Canonical:** A text that is part of an officially recognized set of sacred writings.
- **Melitsa:** A Hebrew word that translates to a "dark saying" or riddle

5. FAQs on Putnam, Psalms, Session 2 of 4, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Proverbs

1. **What is a proverb, and how is it defined?**
2. Defining a proverb is complex, with no universally agreed-upon definition. Common characteristics include brevity, memorability, simplicity, widespread use, and often image-based language. Some definitions emphasize their social acceptance and experiential basis. Modern psycholinguistic research even suggests that proverbs engage both halves of the brain simultaneously. It's often said that you "know it when you see it" rather than having a strict definition, as proverbs can be understood in terms of their structure, their effect on the listener, or their applications.
3. **How do biblical proverbs differ from common English proverbs?**

While biblical proverbs share characteristics like brevity, they differ significantly from English proverbs. Hebrew proverbs are often much more compact than their English translations, averaging 7.6 words in Hebrew compared to over 18 in English. A key difference lies in their use of parallelism, where two statements are woven together to function as a single saying, unlike typical English proverbs which often consist of a single statement. Understanding biblical proverbs requires considering both parts together, as they convey meaning through their relationship.

1. **How should we use and understand proverbs?**
2. Proverbs should be viewed as advice, counsel, or guidance rather than as laws, promises, or guarantees. They are meant to function like a counselor, offering wisdom that individuals must then discern how to apply. They can be extended to various situations, like "like father, like son" which can describe the relationship between a pastor and congregation or teacher and student. This also explains why there are often "dueling proverbs," that seem contradictory, like "he who hesitates is lost" and "look before you leap." No single proverb can cover every situation, so wisdom lies in knowing which proverb to apply.

3. What is the moral purpose of the book of Proverbs?

4. The book of Proverbs has a moral purpose, aiming to cultivate *prudence* in readers. Prudence, as understood by the ancient Greeks and Solomon, is the ability to be still, to understand what is actually happening, not what one wishes to be happening or feels to be happening, in any given circumstance before acting. It encourages readers to pause, to think, to understand the situation before making a decision. This cultivates a life that is upright and straight, following the right path as opposed to turning aside to the left or right which leads toward death. Proverbs is thus intended to help people discern the right path in all circumstances.

5. What is the mental purpose of the book of Proverbs?

6. Beyond its moral purpose, Proverbs also has a mental purpose, which is to enhance our capacity for understanding, making us smarter and increasing our insight. Studying proverbs can increase one's ability to understand not just the studied proverb, but other proverbs. The act of studying something wise increases one's own wisdom, as wisdom is a type of skill. In the Book of Proverbs it seems to refer to a skill in understanding both proverbs themselves and also the nature of life and the situations that we face. This mental cultivation also includes paying attention to the nature of situations before one acts.

7. Why is it important not to use proverbs as "biblical bullets"?

8. It's critical to avoid using proverbs as simple rules or laws. They are not to be used as commands that condemn us. Rather they show us what God desires in the lives of those who are becoming the people He is creating them to be. Instead, Proverbs reveal God's expectations for us, not as a form of condemnation but as a reflection of what a person made in God's image should be. The proverbs then become building blocks of our prayers, providing opportunities to ask for God's help in aligning our lives with His will, rather than just as a way to simply point out our failings.

9. Who was the original intended audience for the book of Proverbs?

10. The book of Proverbs was primarily written for young men from the royal court or aristocracy, those destined to become leaders, judges, and advisors, the equivalent of prep school students who will become the nation's leaders. This explains why many proverbs address topics such as how to act in the presence of a king, how to manage wealth, and how to deliver justice. While originally targeted towards a specific group, its messages are applicable to all individuals due to its canonical status within the Bible.

11. What is the broader, communal purpose of the book of Proverbs?

Beyond personal moral and mental growth, the book of Proverbs serves a communal or covenantal purpose. Its guidance aims to ensure the continuity of the nation of Israel by training its leaders to fulfill the conditions of the covenant. By living righteously, the leaders would not only experience the blessings of the covenant in their own lives but also ensure that their entire nation avoids its curses and receives blessings. The nation's well-being is seen as directly linked to the actions of its leadership.