

Equip: Resources on the Book of Proverbs

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Proverbs are everywhere, as Alyce M. McKenzie points out in her book *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit*. They are, she explains, on “billboards, T-shirts, coffee mugs, cartoons, magazine ads, bumper stickers and posters.”

They are found in songs, commercials and conversations. I’m sure both you and I already have scrolled past a proverb or two this morning on Instagram or Facebook.

“About the only place proverbs do not seem to be found today,” McKenzie laments in her introduction, “is the pulpit.”

Why aren’t preachers preaching proverbs? Why aren’t Sunday school teachers teaching them?

I remember the first time I was asked to preach a proverb. I was assigned the text in a seminary class. It was Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

I was completely baffled. How on earth was I meant to preach *that*? A single verse, for 20 minutes? Where was Jesus, where was God in these words? What did it even mean?

If you, like I, are daunted by the task of filling an entire sermon or lesson with only a few words from the Bible to build upon, if this is a book of the Bible you’ve also been neglecting, here is some help.

Don’t miss out on preaching and teaching Proverbs. As Thomas Long once wrote in *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, “The question is

not will people live by proverbs, but what kind of proverbs will they cherish?”

Here are a few resources to help you guide your church to cherish the proverbs that come to them from the word of God.

***How to Read Proverbs* by Tremper Longman III**

Begin here. Tremper Longman’s book provides an easy-to-read overview of Proverbs that will answer all the questions you have, such as: What if a proverb doesn’t always seem true? How do I handle (what looks like) a prosperity gospel in Proverbs? Where is God and Jesus in the book of Proverbs?

Not only will Longman’s book answer such questions, but its final section also offers an invaluable resource for following three themes in Proverbs: money, love and speech. The material this book includes on each of these themes easily could become the basis of a sermon or Bible study series for your church.

***New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Proverbs* (2 volumes) by Bruce K. Waltke**

If you’re looking for a commentary to help you write sermons and lessons on Proverbs, this is the one you need. Bruce Waltke’s two-volume, semi-technical commentary is absolutely the most thorough—almost obsessively so—commentary on Proverbs you will find. Everything I’ve ever needed, I’ve found here, even an explanation of those “apples of gold.”

Other commentaries

Other notable commentaries, if you like to peruse more than one, include: Ellen F. Davis' *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*; Alice Ogden Bellis' *Proverbs*; and Tremper Longman's *Proverbs* from the *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament* series.

***Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* by Thomas Long and *Preaching with Variety* by Jeffrey Arthurs**

Even with an understanding of Proverbs as a book of the Bible and some solid commentaries to draw upon, the question remains: How does a preacher create a sermon from what they have learned?

Long and Arthurs' books will help you here. They are practical guides for preachers in how to preach specific kinds of texts in the Bible.

Although they cover more than just how to preach proverbs (they also provide guidance for preaching stories, psalms, parables and more), what I like about these books for *this* project is that they teach you how to preach proverbs *briefly*. Sometimes, all a pastor has time for, with respect to a resource like this, is one chapter. Either of these two books contain the one chapter you need.

How to Preach Proverbs from the

Preaching Biblical Literature series by Jared Alcántara and *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom from the Pulpit* by Alyce McKenzie

These two books are stuffed to the brim with resources for preaching Proverbs but are more technical than my other recommendations. They are best suited for those seeking to become experts, rather than as a quick resource for an upcoming Sunday.

However, each book has unique strengths. Alcántara's text includes an invaluable chapter on justice in Proverbs, which again, could inspire a sermon or Sunday school series. You'll also find an appendix on Proverbs 31 here—essential reading before preaching it, especially if tempted to preach it on Mother's Day.

A strength of McKenzie's text is she herself is a masterful preacher of Proverbs, and in the final section of her book you'll find her sermons as examples, showing her approach at work. Even if you don't read her book, watch McKenzie's sermon on Proverbs 3:5-6: "[Wise Up! The Lenten Journey from Fear to Faith](#)."

Also, don't miss Haddon Robinson's classic "[Lessons from Agur](#)" on Proverbs 30:24-28. Like learning to cook or how to tie our shoes, sometimes the best way to learn is to watch an expert at work.

'A word fitly spoken'

Not too long after that obscure proverb was assigned to me in class, I found myself preaching a summer sermon series in the book of Proverbs at my church. Overtime, with the help of tools like those listed above, I really did

learn how to preach this oft-neglected book.

But perhaps what I learned most of all that summer wasn't just how to preach that verse—"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver"—but how *true* it was, that these timely words really are beautiful and valuable and precious for God's people.

Hopefully, with the help of these resources, you'll be able to discover the truth of that proverb, too.

Alison Gerber is a Ph.D. candidate in preaching at Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#), where she preaches, teaches and writes about preaching. Before that, she was a pastor in South Peabody, Mass. The views expressed in this resource article are those of the author.