

Evidence that Proverbs Was Written for Parents and Children

The Book of Proverbs shows significant evidence of having been written as a comprehensive wisdom resource for the training of children. I have compiled some relevant verse lists below. Let me first explain the reasoning behind these lists: There are 139 imperatives in Proverbs. The vast majority of them have the understood subject, "you." For example, Proverbs 3:5 declares, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding"* (Proverbs 3:5). "Trust" is a command; "You" is the understood subject.

But when the subject for these commands is specified in Proverbs (in a total of 22 places), all but three passages address a "son" or "sons." For example: *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching"* (Proverbs 1:8). In the first clause, "hear," is a command. But the subject is clearly identified as "my son." A father is expressly commanding his son to "listen up" to what he has to say. Almost twenty times, Proverbs reads like a father to son wisdom exchange.

There are only three possible places (that I have been able to find) where the subject of an imperative is specified in Proverbs and that subject is not a "son." The first is Proverbs 6:6 where the sluggard is instructed to study ants. The other two are in Proverbs 8:5: *"O naive ones, understand prudence; And, O fools, understand wisdom."* The term "naive" is the same term found in Proverbs 1:4 where it is used as a synonym for "a young man." The bottom line is that in all but two, possibly three, instances, the Book of Proverbs specifies its primary target as sons. Below I have listed both commands **and** exhortations that highlight this familial connection. They have been categorized according to their purpose:

A Father's Command (Or Exhortation) for a Son to Listen to His Parents

1. *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching"* (Proverbs 1:8).
2. *"My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you"* (Proverbs 2:1).
3. *"My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments"* (Proverbs 3:1).
4. *"Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding"* (Proverbs 4:1).
5. *"Hear, my son, and accept my sayings And the years of your life will be many"* (Proverbs 4:10).

6. *"My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings" (Proverbs 4:20).*
7. *"My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding" (Proverbs 5:1).*
8. *"Now then, my sons, listen to me And do not depart from the words of my mouth" (Proverbs 5:7).*
9. *"My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother" (Proverbs 6:20).*
10. *"My son, keep my words And treasure my commandments within you" (Proverbs 7:1).*
11. *"Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth" (Proverbs 7:24).*
12. *"Cease listening, my son, to discipline, And you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27).*
13. *"Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22).*
14. *"Let your father and your mother be glad, And let her rejoice who gave birth to you" (Proverbs 23:25).*
15. *"Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways" (Proverbs 23:26).*

A Father's Command or Exhortation for a Son to Listen to Wisdom

1. *"My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof" (Proverbs 3:11).*
2. *"My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion" (Proverbs 3:21).*
3. *"My son, if your heart is wise, My own heart also will be glad" (Proverbs 23:15).*
4. *"Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way" (Proverbs 23:19).*
5. *"My son, eat honey, for it is good, Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste; Know that wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find it, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 24:13–14).*
6. *"Be wise, my son, and make my heart glad, That I may reply to him who reproaches me" (Proverbs 27:11).*

A Father's "Situation Specific" Instruction to a Son

1. *"My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10).*
2. *"My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path" (Proverbs 1:15).*

3. *"For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?" (Proverbs 5:20).*
4. *"My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, Have given a pledge for a stranger" (Proverbs 6:1).*
5. *"Do this then, my son, and deliver yourself; Since you have come into the hand of your neighbor, Go, humble yourself, and importune your neighbor" (Proverbs 6:3).*
6. *"My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change" (Proverbs 24:21).*

Commendation of a Daughter

Proverbs 31:11-31 describes a woman of wisdom. She is praised by her husband as an exceptional "daughter." Thus, "The Proverbs 31 Woman" is presented as an ideal to which every young woman with a heart for wisdom should aspire.

"Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all" (Proverbs 31:29).

Third Person Observations about Sons

All of these third person passages come from the main body of Proverbs (chapters 10-31). There are no **commands** directed to sons in this list. But these passages bring sons into the spotlight for consideration and evaluation. For sons, these profiles are of profound and immediate value. The presence of these verses corroborates (albeit does not, by itself, prove) my claim that Proverbs is a parenting resource.

1. *"The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother" (Proverbs 10:1).*
2. *"He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully" (Proverbs 10:5).*
3. *"A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1).*
4. *"A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible" (Proverbs 15:5).*
5. *"A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother" (Proverbs 15:20).*
6. *"He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy" (Proverbs 17:21).*
7. *"A foolish son is a grief to his father And bitterness to her who bore him" (Proverbs 17:25).*
8. *"A foolish son is destruction to his father, And the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping" (Proverbs 19:13).*
9. *"He who assaults his father and drives his mother away Is a shameful and disgraceful son" (Proverbs 19:26).*

10. *"He who curses his father or his mother, His lamp will go out in time of darkness"* (Proverbs 20:20).
11. *"The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, And he who sires a wise son will be glad in him"* (Proverbs 23:24).
12. *"He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father"* (Proverbs 28:7).
13. *"He who robs his father or his mother And says, "It is not a transgression" Is the companion of a man who destroys"* (Proverbs 28:24).
14. *"A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth"* (Proverbs 29:3).
15. *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother"* (Proverbs 29:15).
16. *"There is a kind of man who curses his father And does not bless his mother"* (Proverbs 30:11).
17. *"The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it"* (Proverbs 30:17).

Conclusion: The most reasonable explanation for the striking presence of these verses is that Proverbs is written as the words of a father training his son (and daughter who is given special attention in Proverbs 31) in the ways of wisdom. Proverbs is written by a father calling his son to live by wisdom.