

## The Best Is Yet to Come (How Proverbs Work)

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### A Proverb on a Pillow



My friend gave me her pillow because she no longer needed it. She'd had a change of heart.

For quite a while, her experiences weren't living up to her expectations. (Specifically, marriage wasn't all she'd envisioned.) But a proverb on a pillow kept her going: **THE BEST IS YET TO COME**. When she'd get discouraged, she'd look at her pillow and think *Things will get better. I just have to wait*. But waiting wasn't working very well.

Then she tried another tack – she got wise counsel, learned new life skills, and began to see things she'd missed. She shifted her focus from waiting for the future to making choices in the present. In the process, she learned to be thankful.

When she gave me her pillow, she told me her new proverb: **THE BEST IS NOW**. This proverb fit her situation much better than the proverb on her pillow.

Her first proverb, "The Best is Yet to Come," is true if we're talking about anticipating heaven, but it's not necessarily true if we're talking about marriages. Proverbs aren't *universal* truths; they're *situational* truths. That's how proverbs work.

### How Many Cooks Belong in a Kitchen?

Sometimes proverbs seem to contradict each other. Take these two:

"Too many cooks spoil the pot." and

"Many hands make light work."

Which proverb is true? It depends. Proverbs only make sense if they're applied to the situation the author had in mind.

At times, I've *longed* to be left alone in my kitchen. Too many people milling around brought confusion, spoiled the pot, and spoiled my attitude. Sometimes I need space. But not always. At other times I've welcomed the many hands helping me prepare a multi-dish meal. We've spread the tasks around and enjoyed each others' company. My helpers were a real help. They made the preparation easier and a lot more fun.

Proverbs are situational. That's how proverbs work.

### The Nature of Proverbs

I learned something of the nature of proverbs from Bruce Waltke. (The two kitchen proverbs came from him.) I don't recall whether I read his kitchen proverb illustration or heard him explain it in person, but I do remember his caution: proverbs are situational – we need to apply them to the particular circumstances they describe.

Proverbs have a distinct nature. They're meant to provide general wisdom and guidance, but they aren't meant to be ironclad promises or universal truths. For example, Proverbs 16:7 tells us: *When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him*. That's good advice

and a wise guide. But living in ways that please the Lord doesn't always bring peace. Jesus had a different experience: He always pleased His Father, but His enemies never did make peace with Him.

Want another example? Proverbs 15:1 counsels us: *A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.* True. A gentle answer often defuses a volatile situation. But not always. It depends on the heart of the hearer.

### **Digging Deeper**

This introduction to how proverbs work is merely an overview. If you're interested in reading more detail, you may find these books useful.

- [Derek Kidner, Proverbs](#)
- [Tremper Longman III, Proverbs](#)
- [Bruce Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, chapters 1-15](#)
- [Bruce Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, chapters 15-31](#)

But – and this is important – **Don't skip the original book.** Open your Bible and read the proverbs themselves. Meditate on what you read. Think about the situations in your life where Solomon's advice makes sense. Notice the situations Solomon addresses and see what advice he gives to his son. Pass his advice on to the children in your life. You'll find that Solomon's proverbs serve us well. They guard us against avoidable pitfalls and guide us to live wisely on this earth.

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