

"In taking us straight to the heart of the text, Phil Moore has served us magnificently. We so need to get into the Scriptures and let the Scriptures get into us. The fact that Phil writes so relevantly and with such submission to Biblical revelation means that we are genuinely helped to be shaped by the Bible's teaching."

– Terry Virgo

"Fresh. Solid. Simple. Really good stuff."

– R. T. Kendall

"Phil makes the deep truths of Scripture alive and accessible. If you want to grow in your understanding of each book of the Bible, then buy these books and let them change your life!"

– P J Smyth – GodFirst Church, Johannesburg, South Africa

*"Most commentaries are dull. These are alive.
Most commentaries are for scholars. These are for **you!**"*

– Canon Michael Green

*"These notes are amazingly good. Lots of content and depth of research, yet packed in a **Big Breakfast** that leaves the reader well fed and full. Bible notes often say too little, yet larger commentaries can be dull – missing the wood for the trees. Phil's insights are striking, original, and fresh, going straight to the heart of the text and the reader! Substantial yet succinct, they bristle with amazing insights and life applications, compelling us to read more. Bible reading will become enriched and informed with such a scintillating guide. Teachers and preachers will find nuggets of pure gold here!"*

– Greg Haslam – Westminster Chapel, London, UK

"The Bible is living and dangerous. The ones who teach it best are those who bear that in mind – and let the author do the talking. Phil has written these studies with a sharp mind and a combination of creative application and reverence."

– Joel Virgo – Leader of Newday Youth Festival

"Phil Moore's new commentaries are outstanding: biblical and passionate, clear and well-illustrated, simple and profound. God's Word comes to life as you read them, and the wonder of God shines through every page."

- Andrew Wilson – *Author of Incomparable and If God, Then What?*

"Want to understand the Bible better? Don't have the time or energy to read complicated commentaries? The book you have in your hand could be the answer. Allow Phil Moore to explain and then apply God's message to your life. Think of this book as the Bible's message distilled for everyone."

- Adrian Warnock – *Christian blogger*

"Phil Moore presents Scripture in a dynamic, accessible and relevant way. The bite-sized chunks – set in context and grounded in contemporary life – really make the Word become flesh and dwell among us."

- Dr David Landrum – *The Bible Society*

"Through a relevant, very readable, up to date storying approach, Phil Moore sets the big picture, relates God's Word to today and gives us fresh insights to increase our vision, deepen our worship, know our identity and fire our imagination. Highly recommended!"

- Geoff Knott – *former CEO of Wycliffe Bible Translators UK*

"What an exciting project Phil has embarked upon! These accessible and insightful books will ignite the hearts of believers, inspire the minds of preachers and help shape a new generation of men and women who are seeking to learn from God's Word."

- David Stroud – *Newfrontiers and ChristChurch London*

For more information about the Straight to the Heart series, please go to **www.philmoorebooks.com**.

You can also receive daily messages from Phil Moore on Twitter by following **@PhilMooreLondon**.

STRAIGHT TO
THE HEART OF

Solomon

60 BITE-SIZED INSIGHTS
FROM PROVERBS,
ECCLESIASTES AND
SONG OF SONGS

Phil Moore

MONARCH
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

Copyright © 2013 by Phil Moore.

This edition copyright © 2013 Lion Hudson.

The right of Phil Moore to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Monarch Books

an imprint of

Lion Hudson plc

Wilkinson House, Jordan Hill Road,

Oxford OX2 8DR, England

Email: monarch@lionhudson.com

www.lionhudson.com/monarch

ISBN 978 0 85721 426 3

e-ISBN 978 0 85721 427 0

First edition 2013

Unless indicated otherwise, Scripture quotations taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version* Anglicised. Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790. Both 1984 and 2011 versions are quoted in this commentary. Scripture quotation marked CEV is from the Contemporary English Version New Testament © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used with permission. Scripture marked ESV is taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK, March 2013, LH26

*This book is for my wife Ruth,
the greatest co-pilot of them all.*

CONTENTS

<i>About the Straight to the Heart Series</i>	10
Introduction: Life Works God's Way	12

LESSON ONE: LEARN GOD'S WAY (PROVERBS 1-9)

Two Won't Do (1:1-7)	19
The Five Faces of a Fool (1:8-33)	23
Better than Money (2:1-22)	28
The Tree of Life (3:1-35)	32
Water Supply (4:1-27)	36
Free Chocolate (5:1-7:27)	40
Make Tracks (6:20-24)	44
Choose (8:1-9:18)	48

LESSON TWO: LIVE GOD'S WAY (PROVERBS 10-31)

Solomon's Toolkit (10:1-22:16)	55
The Righteous and the Wicked (10:1-32)	59
God at Work (11:1)	64
Money Talks (11:16-28)	69
Wisdom is Contagious (11:30)	73
Strong on the Inside (12:4)	77
The Strongest Muscle (12:6-13:3)	81
The Sluggard (13:4)	85
Two Ears, One Mouth (13:10-20)	89
A Hearing Heart (14:12)	93
God in Disguise (14:20-31)	97
Beads and Trinkets (15:16-17)	102
How to Make God Hate You (16:1-19)	106

How Not to Help the Poor (16:26)	110
Two Big Brothers (17:15)	114
Omission (18:9)	118
Swimming with Sharks (18:10–11)	122
Christmas 1914 (18:17)	126
How to Murder Your Child (19:18–19)	130
Kindness to Fools (19:25, 29)	135
Get Out of God's Way (20:22)	139
The Last Word (21:30–31)	143
Solomon's Friends (22:17–24:22)	147
First Things First (24:23–34)	151
Solomon's Missing Tools (25:1–29:27)	155
When Good Men Do Nothing (25:2–28)	159
The Royal Mail (25:13–14)	163
Tomato Doesn't Go in a Fruit Salad (26:1–16)	167
Careless Talk Costs Lives (26:17–27:6)	171
Enough is Enough (27:7–27)	175
What God Hates about Sundays (28:9)	179
A Straight Ruler (28:1–29:27)	184
Solomon's Students (30:1–33)	188
Choose Your Co-Pilot (31:1–31)	192

LESSON THREE: LOVE GOD'S WAY (SONG OF SONGS)

Love Song (1:1)	199
From a Distance (1:2–2:7)	203
Waiting for the Day (2:8–3:5)	207
Wedding Day and Wedding Night (3:6–5:1)	211
The Wake-Up Call (5:2–6:3)	216
Vintage Love (6:4–8:4)	220
Love's Conclusion (8:5–14)	224

LESSON FOUR: KEEP TO GOD'S WAY (ECCLESIASTES)

Flight 007 (1:1)	231
Life Minus God (1:2-11)	236
Well-Fed Fools (1:12-2:26)	240
The Return of Mr Incredible (3:1-15)	244
Darkness and Light (3:16-6:12)	248
Fifteen (7:1-8:8)	252
Fifteen More (8:9-11:6)	256
Fighter Pilots (11:1-6)	260
The Return of the King (11:7-12:14)	264
Conclusion: Life Works God's Way	268

About the *Straight to the Heart* Series

On his eightieth birthday, Sir Winston Churchill dismissed the compliment that he was the “lion” who had defeated Nazi Germany in World War Two. He told the Houses of Parliament that *“It was a nation and race dwelling all around the globe that had the lion’s heart. I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar.”*

I hope that God speaks to you very powerfully through the “roar” of the books in the *Straight to the Heart* series. I hope they help you to understand the books of the Bible and the message which the Holy Spirit inspired their authors to write. I hope that they help you to hear God’s voice challenging you, and that they provide you with a springboard for further journeys into each book of Scripture for yourself.

But when you hear my “roar”, I want you to know that it comes from the heart of a much bigger “lion” than me. I have been shaped by a whole host of great Christian thinkers and preachers from around the world, and I want to give due credit to at least some of them here:

Terry Virgo, David Stroud, Dave Holden, John Hosier, Adrian Holloway, Greg Haslam, Lex Loizides and all those who lead the Newfrontiers family of churches. Friends and encouragers, such as Stef Liston, Joel Virgo, Stuart Gibbs, Scott Taylor, Nick Sharp, Nick Derbridge, Phil Whittall, and Kevin and Sarah Aires. Tony Collins, Jenny Ward and Simon Cox at Monarch Books. Malcolm Kayes and all the elders of The Coign Church, Woking.

My fellow elders and church members here at Everyday Church in Southwest London. My great friend Andrew Wilson – without your friendship, encouragement and example, this series would never have happened.

I would like to thank my parents, my brother Jonathan, and my in-laws, Clive and Sue Jackson. Dad – your example birthed in my heart the passion which brought this series into being. I didn't listen to all you said when I was a child, but I couldn't ignore the way you got up at five o' clock every morning to pray, read the Bible and worship, because of your radical love for God and for his Word. I'd like to thank my children – Isaac, Noah, Esther and Ethan – for keeping me sane when publishing deadlines were looming. But most of all, I'm grateful to my incredible wife, Ruth – my friend, encourager, corrector and helper.

You all have the lion's heart, and you have all developed the lion's heart in me. I count it an enormous privilege to be the one who was chosen to sound the lion's roar.

So welcome to the *Straight to the Heart* series. My prayer is that you will let this roar grip your own heart too – for the glory of the great Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Introduction: Life Works God's Way

Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?... "Those who find me find life and receive favour from the Lord."

(Proverbs 8:1, 35)

12

Very few people ever get to pilot an F-35 fighter jet. With a top speed of 1,200 miles per hour and enough onboard weaponry to destroy a small city, it's probably just as well. Would-be pilots have to pass a gruelling set of physical, intellectual and psychological tests even to make it into flight school, and only the very best graduates are ever trusted to handle a jet as powerful as the F-35. Air force commanders know that only a fool would try to pilot an F-35 without the proper training.

Solomon grasped this principle when he visited the Tabernacle at Mount Gibeon in 970 BC. He sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings because he knew that he was in desperate need of God's attention. The Lord responded by appearing to him that night in a dream with an incredible offer: *"Ask for whatever you want me to give you."*¹

Solomon didn't hesitate. If piloting an F-35 is difficult, piloting life is even harder. It didn't matter that his father David had assured him when he named him king of Israel that *"You are a man of wisdom"*; Solomon knew that he couldn't pilot his life on his own. *"I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties,"* he pleaded. *"So give your servant a discerning*

¹ 1 Kings 3:5. See also 1 Chronicles 21:29; 2 Chronicles 1:3–6.

*heart.*² Solomon had seen the smoking wreckage caused by his father's adulterous affair with his mother, and he had seen three of his older brothers wreck their own lives too by ignoring God's shouts from the control tower. Amnon had copied his father's sexual sin, Absalom had chased fame and Adonijah had lusted after power. All three of them were dead, and the new King Solomon was determined that he would not fly solo any more. *"Give your servant a hearing heart,"* he asked God literally in Hebrew. He asked to enrol in the Lord's flight school because he had seen firsthand that life only works God's way.

The Lord was delighted with Solomon's reply. Offered carte blanche, he hadn't asked for women or worship or wealth, but for wisdom to handle the flight path of his life better than his father and his brothers. *"I will do what you have asked,"* the Lord promised. *"I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be."*³ 1 Kings 4:29–34 tells us that God gave him such great wisdom that he outclassed the finest teachers of the world and received visitors from every nation who shared his passion to find out how to live life God's way. It also tells us that he wrote 3,000 proverbs and over 1,000 songs to preserve his wisdom for anyone humble enough to ask God if they can enrol in his flight school too.

Although some modern scholars have questioned whether Solomon actually wrote the three Old Testament books which we know as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, the text of the three books seems to support the almost 3,000 years of consensus among Jews and Christians that he did so. Proverbs 1:1 describes the book as *"The proverbs of Solomon son of David,*

² 1 Kings 2:9; 3:7–9. Solomon must have only been about 18 years of age when he became king.

³ 1 Kings 3:12. You can read about the smoking wreckage of David and his eldest sons' lives in 2 Samuel 11–20 and 1 Kings 1–2. You can read about the wisdom and later folly of Solomon's life in 1 Kings 1–11.

king of Israel".⁴ Song of Songs 1:1 explains that it is "*Solomon's Song of Songs*", which is a Hebrew way of saying "*Solomon's Best Song*".⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:1 and 12 describe the author as "*The Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem... king over Israel in Jerusalem*", which is something only Solomon could ever say since all subsequent kings of Jerusalem ruled over Judah but not Israel. We should therefore view these books as a description of the lessons which Solomon learned through the ups and downs of his life's flight path. We should treat them as a warning that we need help to live life God's way.

Solomon reigned for forty years from 970 to 930 BC, and during the first half of his reign he succeeded in living life God's way. 1 Kings 10:23 celebrates the fact that "*King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.*" Not content with sharing his wisdom with visitors in his own generation, he devised a way that he could put succeeding generations of believers through God's flight school too.⁶ He began to compile the book which we know as Proverbs, starting with lesson one in **Proverbs 1-9**, which is a call to **Learn God's Way**. He created lesson two by picking 375 of his 3,000 proverbs to form the bulk of **Proverbs 10-31** and spell out in detail what it means to **Live God's Way**.⁷ If this longest lesson appears to jump from one theme to another, with

⁴ His authorship is reiterated in Proverbs 10:1 and 25:1.

⁵ This was simply the normal Hebrew way of expressing an absolute superlative. We can also see this in the way they referred to "*The Most Holy Place*" in the Tabernacle as "*The Holy of Holies*".

⁶ Solomon may have written specifically for his eldest son and heir Rehoboam, since he repeatedly addresses Proverbs 1-9 to "*my son*". However, Proverbs 4:1 also makes it clear he had a wider readership in mind.

⁷ Solomon's Top 375 forms the bulk of lesson two (10:1-22:16), but by no means all of it. It also includes some of Solomon's favourite wise sayings from around the world (22:17-24:34), as well as 125 more of Solomon's proverbs which were selected by King Hezekiah's wise men over two centuries later (25:1-29:27), and some of their own favourite wise sayings from around the world (30:1-31:31).

little sense of thematic grouping, it is deliberate. Life is more complicated than flying an F-35, and it defies our attempts to compartmentalize its challenges. Since love is perhaps the most complicated aspect of them all, Solomon gave us **Song of Songs** as lesson three in order to teach us how to **Love God's Way**.

Sadly, in the second half of his reign, Solomon failed to practise what he preached. The star student of God's flight school, who had proved in his twenties and thirties that life works God's way, attempted to fly solo and wrecked his life even more seriously than his father David had before him. He nosedived in his forties and fifties into the misery and despair which he describes in the book of **Ecclesiastes** and which serves as lesson four and as a warning that we need to **Keep to God's Way**. Ecclesiastes charts his discovery that life makes no sense without God at the centre, and it describes his homeward path to a recommitment of his life to the Lord and to the fact that life only works God's way.

So let's enrol together in God's flight school and go straight to the heart of the three Old Testament books which were written by Solomon. Let's allow the wisest Old Testament writer to tell us how we can learn God's way, live God's way and love God's way, just as he did. Let's heed his warnings not to deviate from God's flight path, as he did, but to keep to God's way until we reach the landing lights at the end of our life's journey.

Let's ask the God who appeared to Solomon at the Tabernacle to give us wisdom too. Let's ask him to teach us how to live life to the full in the world which he has made. Let's surrender to Solomon's ancient conclusion that life only works God's way.

Lesson One:

Learn God's Way

(Proverbs 1–9)

Two Won't Do (1:1–7)

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

(Proverbs 1:7)

There is an old Chinese proverb about what it takes to become a good painter: *"You need the hand, the eye and the heart. Two won't do."* As Solomon sits us down and begins to deliver our first lesson in God's flight school, he tells us in these opening verses that the same is true of wisdom.

Many people think that wisdom is all about the eye and the heart, and not about the hand. They equate wisdom with the endless debating of Greek philosophers, so Solomon uses a dozen different Hebrew words in these seven verses to make it clear that two out of three won't do. He starts with the Hebrew word *hokmāh* in verse 2, which means *wisdom* in the sense of know-how as opposed to mere head knowledge. It is the same word which was used in Exodus 31:3 to describe a master craftsman's skill at making artwork out of the simple material in his hand. Lucille Ball captured the practical nature of *hokmāh* when she pointed out that *"A man who correctly guesses a woman's age may be smart, but he's not very bright."*¹ Like Jesus ten centuries later, Solomon insists that *"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you **do** them."*²

To reinforce this point, he also uses the Hebrew word *mūsār* in verses 2 and 3. This word means *discipline, chastisement*

¹ She said this in her classic 1950s comedy series *I Love Lucy*. Note that verses 20–21 tell us Wisdom calls out in the streets and public square, and not just in the library and university.

² John 13:17. Jesus also said the same thing in a parable in Matthew 7:24–27.

or *correction*, and it reminds us that wisdom is often learned through personal failure and negative feedback on our actions from others. One of my first employers used to tell me before a reprimand that *"Feedback is the breakfast of future champions."* Solomon wants us to know that it is served as an all-day breakfast in the canteen at God's school of wisdom.

Other people think that wisdom is all about the heart and the hand, and not about the eye. They ask God for wisdom and expect to get it as an effortless download from heaven, but Solomon warns that two out of three won't do. He crams these seven verses with Hebrew words which reinforce the need to use our eyes to learn wisdom through keen observation and analysis of the world we live in. In verse 2 it is *bīnāh*, the same word for *understanding* which is used in Ezra 8:15 when the writer tells us that *"When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there."* Wisdom comes through checking and making a thoughtful examination of the facts. Solomon tells us to *sākal* or *be circumspect* in order to gain *'ormāh* or *prudence* and *da'ath* or *knowledge*. He tells us to tax our brains and feast our eyes on the facts in order to form a *mizmāh* or *discerning plan* in order to understand the *hīdāh* or *dark riddles*, which are fathomed by the wise. His word for *proverb* is *māshāl*, which means literally a *lesson by comparison*, and his word for *parable* in verse 6 is *melītsāh*, which was the normal word used for an *interpretation* offered after careful study of a foreign language.

Sherlock Holmes tells Dr Watson the difference between mere sight and observation in one of Conan Doyle's short stories:

You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room... Then how many are there?... Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. This is just my point. Now, I know that

*there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.*³

Like any flight school instructor, Solomon tells us that piloting begins with seeing and perceiving. He promises in verse 5 that if we use the senses God has given us, we will find they give us *tahbulōth* or *guidance*, the Hebrew word which was used for the ropes held by a steersman in order to guide the rudder of a cargo boat or warship.

Other people think that wisdom is all about the hand and the eye, and not about the heart. That's what sets Solomon's wisdom literature apart from that of his pagan contemporaries, because he tells us that two out of three won't do. Whereas pagan philosophers treat wisdom as a commodity to be acquired in its own right, Solomon fills these verses with reminders that true wisdom only comes through relationship with God. The man who asked God for a "*hearing heart*" at the Tabernacle in 970 BC uses the same word *shāma* again in verse 5 to emphasize that wise people are those who have learned to still their hearts before God and listen. His word *māshāl* or *proverb* is used in Numbers 23:7 and 18 to describe an *oracle* from God, and his word *leqah* or *learning* is used in Deuteronomy 32:2 to record Moses teaching God-given *doctrine*. If Adam and Eve's sin was to eat from the tree of knowledge in order to gain wisdom without reference to God, Solomon points us back to the tree of life and to dependency on God instead.⁴ Paul unpacks what Solomon means in New Testament language in 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 30, when he tells us that Jesus is "*the wisdom of God*" and "*has become for us wisdom from God*". Solomon warns us

³ He says this in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891).

⁴ We will examine this contrast further in the chapter entitled "The Tree of Life", but for now simply note that Solomon hints at this in Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12 and 15:4.

not to grasp for wisdom as a thing, but to receive him as a person into our hearts.⁵

Enough of Hebrew words.⁶ Solomon has made his point, so he moves to a conclusion in verse 7. Unlike most of the Old Testament writers, he starts Proverbs with a clear statement of the book's purpose.⁷ He tells us that our quest for wisdom will require us to use our eye and hand and heart. When we feast our eyes on who God is, on what he calls us to do, and on his offer to let us feast on his Messiah in our hearts, it silences our boasting in human wisdom and it causes us to bow before the only wise God. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"* Solomon explains. Of course it is if Wisdom is not a substance, but a person.⁸

Solomon looks up at us from these opening verses of our first lesson in God's flight school. He offers us the perfect co-pilot to help us – the one he is about to describe as Wisdom personified, and whom the New Testament tells us is none other than Jesus Christ himself. Solomon tells us to offer this co-pilot our hand and eye and heart. If we want to find out that life works God's way, he warns us that two out of three won't do.

⁵ Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:7-16 and Ephesians 1:17 that we receive Jesus as God's Wisdom in our hearts through receiving the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Wisdom. We will look at how much Solomon understood he was prophesying about the coming of the Messiah in the chapter "Choose".

⁶ If you are enjoying this Hebrew and want a little more, here you go: In the whole of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Solomon uses the word *hokmāh* and its sister words 129 times, *mūsar* 30 times, *bināh* 13 times, *da'ath* 46 times, *mizmāh* 10 times, *sākal* 14 times, and *'ormāh* and its sister words 11 times.

⁷ He restates this purpose again in 9:10 and 15:33. He defines *"the fear of the Lord"* in 8:13 as hating sin and loving obedience, which is why he tells us here in 1:3 that it means *"doing what is right and just and fair"*.

⁸ Solomon repeats this summary of the message of Proverbs in 9:10 and 15:33. Job and David had already said something similar in Job 28:28 and Psalm 111:10.