

Solomon's Wisdom

The Secret Pathway To Happiness

by
John David Clark, Sr.

The Pioneer Tract Society, Inc.
P. O. Box 99 Burlington, NC 27216-0099

www.pioneertract.com

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This book is dedicated to the young, who are precious in the sight of God and in the eyes of those who are like Him. It is not written as a substitute for the wonderful books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but to acquaint the young reader with some of the beauty and wisdom found in them, along with the wisdom of a few other wise men whose words are also occasionally cited.

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My life has been alright, I guess,
now that I write this letter;
but I should have talked a little less,
and listened a little better.

Erik Dove

Introduction

We are all desperate travelers in this confusing and tormented world. Old and young, rich and poor, wise and foolish, we are all yearning and striving from the moment of our birth for true and lasting happiness. This longing for real happiness induces all people at all times to do whatever they do. It drives treasure hunters as well as thieves to risk their lives for gold; it inspires astronauts to circle the earth, and it motivates lazy bums to beg for coins on the street. The irrepressible human longing for happiness constrains people to buy their homes, to go to work, to sleep late or to rise early, to study or to play games, to invent new materials or to vandalize masterpieces of construction and art, to love and nurture or to hate and kill, to write books or to climb mountains, to become martyrs or to conquer empires, to trust in God or to deny His existence. You are reading this book as part of your own pursuit of happiness, and you will soon decide either that it will help you obtain it and, so, keep reading, or that it will not help you and, so, lay it down.

You want to be happy; everybody does. When you as a newborn cried in your mother's arms, you cried because you wanted to be happy. Even now, after all these years, that same yearning for happiness is leading you to do whatever you do and to say whatever you say. You have chosen the path you are on because you believe that it is a path that will eventually lead to happiness. But will it? Nothing means more to you than finding the answer to that question.

In this book, you will not find mysterious or pontifical pronouncements, for Solomon's wisdom is not philosophy; rather, it is an ability to perceive and to describe the simple, common-sense life that leads to lasting happiness. One reason most people never find lasting happiness is that they search for it down esoteric paths, complex and sophisticated ways that flatter their ability to perceive and navigate them. Courage is required to believe that true happiness is found only in the peaceable, clean life to which our Creator calls us. That is the secret pathway to happiness, and those who learn this become "wise". The secret pathway to eternal happiness is the pathway that is called Wisdom.

During any given time in human history, the vast majority of humans can be found pursuing happiness in wrong ways, but all roads except the right one are dead ends. I feel certain that most people decline to take the path of God's wisdom, not because they do not care – everybody has chosen a path, everybody is making an effort – but simply because we humans tend to trust our own desires rather than God's guidance when it comes to choosing a way to live. But in choosing to go our own ways, we are in fact seeking happiness apart from our Creator, although in reality such happiness does not even exist. The beginning of our journey to happiness begins with the understanding that there *is* a way that leads to lasting happiness and that the way to lasting happiness must be revealed to us by our Creator. To help young adults find that hidden pathway is the primary purpose of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and of this book as well.

All of us at one time or another have been fooled into laying down our burden of doing good in the vain hope of being more quickly rewarded by doing evil. An ancient servant of God wrote, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." And another servant later agreed, saying, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." What both of these wise men understood (though neither of them said it in these words) is that people who search for happiness on wrong pathways do so because they do not believe that the right pathway will take them there. The "wise" are those who dare to walk in the way that leads in eternal happiness. They have labored to know what is right, and they have come to understand that there is no such thing as a short cut to happiness, in spite of much earthly propaganda to the contrary.

The difference, then, between the few who find eternal happiness and the multitudes who do not is simply the choices made between doing God's will or our own; that is, doing either good or evil. But what is God's will? It is a simple way of living which, despite its simplicity, seems exceedingly difficult for young people to grasp. Solomon offers his wisdom to guide the young to that hard-to-find pathway.

The struggle to persuade the young to take the right path is a desperate one. There is a titanic battle constantly raging between good and evil men to win young hearts, a battle in which Solomon was fully engaged. His proverbs, being directed chiefly toward the young, will especially profit them if they receive his wisdom and follow his guiding light. At the same time, the deceitful efforts of evil men for converts to their ways are also directed chiefly toward the young and will especially harm them if they believe their lies and take the wrong path. It is in the trenches around the hearts of young people that the most desperate and unrelenting spiritual battles have always been fought. This book is only a small part of that continuing warfare for the hearts of the young.

Sometimes, Solomon spoke his proverbs only to his son; at other times, he addressed them to his children. There is no explanation in either Proverbs or Ecclesiastes for the difference, and I have not attempted to provide one. In the main, I have merely followed Solomon's lead. If he spoke to his son, that is what I recorded; if he spoke to his children, I recorded that, without making any comment concerning the change. This book is not a translation from the Hebrew. I have only used Solomon's words as a basis for instructing modern young people concerning the secret pathway to happiness. The following two paragraphs provide examples of how I have used and expanded Solomon's counsel to his children. (All verses throughout this book are from the book of Proverbs, unless otherwise indicated.)

Your life is your own. Your choices and the results of them are yours alone. Wise men who show you the right path will not reap your reward from God if you walk in it, and fools who would lead you down a wrong path will not bear your judgment from God if you follow them. Your heart's sorrows and joys are your own, so choose the kind of life that will bring you true and lasting happiness. *If at any point you are discouraged in your pursuit of happiness because someone disapproves of your walking in the right way, you do not have much strength in your soul – or much good sense in your head.*

This is a restless world, a world in which there is no peace, except in the hearts of those who are on the right path. It is a universe of ceaseless, futile effort. There is no rest, no peace, to be found anywhere in this creation. *Even beneath the earth there is no rest, for just as men's eyes never grow weary of seeing, so hell is ever greedy and restless for more souls; my son, do not let your precious soul be one that is sacrificed to its burning desire.* Where there is no revelation from God, people search for happiness in all the wrong places and then die without hope of obtaining it, but whenever one hears God's loving voice and trusts it, he is shown the secret pathway to happiness that this world vainly pursues and can never find.

Such was the instruction Solomon gave to his children and recorded for the benefit of all young people. Solomon's deep love for the young and his profound wisdom from God shine through his wise sayings as clearly in our day as they did three thousand years ago, when they were first spoken. It is my prayer that our Creator will cause these seeds of truth to burst into life within every young heart that reads them.

“Happy is the old age not disgraced by the youth.”

– ancient proverb, said to be from China

Section One

THE GOODNESS OF AND NEED FOR WISDOM

Chapter 1

WHAT TRUE WISDOM IS

1:1-4 These instructions in wisdom belong to Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. The purpose for producing these wise sayings in a book is to transform the young reader from a wondering child into a discerning judge of character, a careful decision maker, and an understanding listener.

1:5-6 My son, true wisdom is not defined in terms of mental prowess; rather, **wisdom is the possession of a teachable spirit**. A wise man is a man who can still be taught, one who stays willing to listen and learn. A wise man never gives up his pursuit of the truth; he overcomes every impediment to finding wise counsel.

It could happen that a wise man is thoroughly educated, with massive amounts of information in his intellectual arsenal; at the same time, a wise man could just as easily be an illiterate, poverty-plagued hermit. By the same token, a fool may be extremely intelligent, with celebrated degrees from prestigious universities. Then again, a fool may be uneducated, penniless, homeless, and shivering naked in the cold. Neither earthly station nor the possession or lack of great intelligence has any bearing whatsoever on the question of whether or not a man is wise. What matters is this: Is he teachable? Will he humble himself to listen and to learn?

Just as you must spend money in order to make money, so you must use wisdom in order to attain to wisdom. The wisdom of God is never accidentally discovered; it is not an ingot of gold over which you will stumble in the dark. Success in your quest for God's hidden wisdom will require diligence, patience, and prudence. It will demand an attitude of sincerity, humility, and fear of God. It is the pathway of wisdom that leads to happiness, but wisdom itself, like happiness, must be sought rightly or it, too, will never be found.

To obtain true wisdom is a vain hope for most people because they seek it with the wrong attitude. The prudent alone attain to wisdom because they listen to the wise and learn how to pursue it the right way – a way thoroughly described for you here in this volume of my wise sayings. If you will acknowledge the Creator's patient and loving voice, and if you will receive His words with meekness, then, and then only, will you

become wise. (Have you never heard this? It is because you have been taught by proud fools, and not by your Creator.)

1:7-9 True wisdom is insurpassably practical. It is not the speculative intellectualism of Gentile philosophers. Wisdom is the ability to discern between right and wrong. Wisdom reveals the Creator's design for eternal life – the kind of life He anticipated that man should live when He first created him from the dust.

(I want you to understand that by “eternal life” I do not mean simply an everlasting *length* of life. Eternal life is a *way* of life; it has nothing to do with time. Eternal life is the *way* the Creator lives, which will never be altered or destroyed.)

Apart from that which is received with fear of God, all knowledge is vain. Only that pursuit of wisdom which springs from a sincere desire to know God and to do good will bear fruit and permanently benefit the seeker. Those who pursue wisdom as though it exists on its own without its Creator will never find it. The Gentiles have made a goddess of wisdom for themselves and worship her instead of Jehovah, but they are foolish. The devotees of “the goddess of Wisdom” do not even recognize wisdom when God mercifully sends someone to reveal it to them. They, in their foolish pride, treat the truth with disdain and go their own way.

These wise sayings are for your learning, you who are about to set sail from the familiar shores of home to embark upon your own odyssey through life, you who have a heart to pursue happiness the right way because your heart has been touched by God. Because you are, as yet, unlearned in the ways of your Creator, you are unprepared to deal with the wicked who are waiting for you, but my wisdom will prepare you to meet and to overcome them. There is safety for you in my words.

My son, listen intently to the instruction your wise father gives you and live by the standards which govern your mother's godly life. If you live as we have taught you, your whole life will be adorned with the beauty of God's gracious favor.

1:10-19 If a cunning, hunted animal is shown the location of a pitfall that has been dug for him, he will avoid it. You, my simple-hearted young son, are the intended prey of the ungodly. Listen to me, and I will show you the snares that others, whose hearts are not like yours, have craftily laid and to which they will attempt to lure you.

They will promise you rewards for your complicity in their crimes; they will leave the impression that those who refuse to do evil are throwing away fleeting opportunities to have a good time. They are confident that secret pleasures and merry times await them because they trust in their evil deeds to bring them happiness, and they will assure you that such happiness will come to you too, if you are clever enough to join them. They will not say to you, “Surrender to us your purity and your hope of eternal life.” No, they are too clever for that. Instead, they will say such things as, “Come on and have some fun with us. Everybody does it. There'll be no problems. No one will find out.”

They will promise you justice, saying that every one among them is treated as an equal and that everyone who shares in their adventures also shares in the wealth that is taken, but do not go down that road. If you do, your heart will be baked hard by the flames of sin. Your conscience will become calloused with shame, and you will find yourself committing cruel and lewd acts that you never dreamed you would commit: thievery, murder, and other such wickedness.

Do not think for a moment that this cannot happen to you! That kind of thinking only makes it easier for them to seduce you. It has happened to many other young people, and it will happen to many more as time goes by. But I want you to escape, and to do so you must first humble yourself to see your need of godly discipline and instruction. It is easy to do this when you understand that until we become wise and are established unmovable in the right path, every one of us has a price for which we would sell our souls. The wicked know this, and until you admit this to yourself they have an advantage over you in the warfare for your heart.

(I am not giving you these warnings because you should worry that God's care for you will be insufficient. It is true that the innocence of young people is a highly sought prize of the Evil one, but no one who follows my instructions has ever fallen victim to him.)

Greedy and murderous sinners, whose life's work is to set clever traps for the innocent, do not seem to realize that the traps they are laying are for themselves. That clever burglary scheme, that clandestine murder, that furtive rendezvous with someone's faithless wife, and all the other evils that men successfully carry out, are nothing but chains which bind their own souls in the pit of condemnation until God's time comes. And it will come.

Do not allow them to deceive you, my son. Listen to my words. *No one ever "gets by" with anything.* It may appear, for a little while, that sinners are winners. But be patient. When you are my age, you will have seen enough to know that God is diligent in righteous judgment, but merciful and very slow to act on His anger. In His perfect time, every deed has its inescapable reward from the Almighty.

1:20-23 God's wisdom is difficult for many to find, but that is not because it is hidden in a deep, dark cave on a deserted island. On the contrary, wisdom shouts its truths loudly everyday, all day long, every place where men live. Nevertheless, most people plod along through life completely unconscious of the fact that the Creator is earnestly crying out to them through every element of His creation, by every means conceivable. His heart's greatest desire is that we humans would requite His deep and abiding love for us. Oh, how He would rejoice, if people would only love and trust Him!

1:24-31 There is a limit, however, to how long the Creator will offer His limitless love to mankind. He will not forever humble Himself to beg people to love Him. He will not

forever tolerate man's arrogant contempt for Him or man's persecution of His chosen people.

These are the words the Creator will say when the Day of Judgment finally comes upon the stubborn, the proud, and the foolish, who for too long refused His loving kindness, mocked His wisdom, and rejected His righteous ways. My earnest hope, my son, is that God never speaks the following words to you:

“Because I called, and you refused to listen; because I reached out for you, and you turned your back on Me; because you belittled holiness; and because when I attempted to correct you for these things, you refused to acknowledge Me; therefore, I will sit and laugh at the results of your foolish wickedness; I will mock at your tears and your trembling hands; I will ridicule your pleas for help when, as a powerful and roaring tornado, tragedies blow apart all that you loved and obtained in this life. It will all be destroyed, all of it! Your body will be in great pain, and your heart will be filled with terror, but I and the people who love and fear Me will be filled with the spirit of laughter at you – I unwilling, and they unable, to lift one finger to help you.

Oh, how loudly you will call out My name on that Day! You will cry aloud for mercy, for you will no longer regard fervent supplication to Me to be vain, superstitious behavior. But even though you weep and pray, yea, even though you scream in terror and pain, you will find no comfort, no relief whatsoever. You will be terrified at My limitless wrath.

You hated My knowledge; you did not fear Me; you despised correction and guidance. Therefore, I have determined that you shall be rewarded fully for your self-willed arrogance. Do you demand your rights? You need not be concerned about that. I Myself will make certain that you receive nothing but what is rightfully yours. You will be spared no just reward for your works. You will not be forgotten; you will have everything that you deserve.”

1:32-33 Listen very carefully, my son. The unwillingness of some young people to listen will result in eternal death for them. Even if they prosper in this life, their own successes will destroy them. The blessings that God gives to ungodly men to enjoy, the earthly blessings for which they should love their Creator, will weigh down their stubborn souls with condemnation all the way into hell. But every person who gives ear to God's tender voice will escape His wrath and dwell forever in perfect peace and happiness. After the Day of Judgment, the wise and obedient shall never again feel the feeling that is called “fear”.

SOLOMON'S COUNSEL TO HIS SON
CONCERNING THE SECRET PATH OF WISDOM.

2:1-5 It is my dearest hope, my son, that you become a wise man, and our God has promised that He will make you wise if you do your part. He has never failed to fulfill

His promise to make wise all those who seek Him with the whole heart. Your part is this: First, you must BELIEVE the truth that I am telling you and let it become as much a part of you as the blood that flows in your veins. Second, you must work at it. Let the desire to know God burn within you so that it overrides every other desire of your soul. Third, you must ask for Jehovah to give you His hidden wisdom. *There are those who have not, simply because they have not asked.* These three steps are basic to the way to wisdom. All other ways of pursuing happiness, regardless of how promising they may appear or how popular they become, are dead ends.

Jas. 4:2

2:6-9 It will be easier for you to recognize and to reject the phony promises of fools and to pursue happiness with your whole heart, when you fully appreciate this one simple truth: the Creator alone gives wisdom and knowledge. If you really believe that, then you will be unable to trust any way but His, for your heart will tell you that to try any other way is a useless, foolish waste of precious time.

2:10-11 When wisdom enters your heart, it begins a process of recreating you. When the knowledge of God becomes sweet to your spirit, truth becomes easy to swallow. Your heart then ceases its vain wrestling with conflicting thoughts, because you will at last understand that God is always the only One right.

Then, the blurring mist of youthful instability will disappear, and you will find that the choices confronting you are less difficult to make. As the rising sun dissipates morning fog without a struggle, so the light in your eyes will vaporize from within the confusing clutter of the many spirits and vain voices of earth. Your youthful ignorance will give way to manly knowledge of the truth.

Listen, my son. The earth is filled with many spirits, all vying for your trust. You will feel them around you – everyone does – as you go through this life. Everyone is a feeler of spirits, but not everyone is a discerner of spirits. Those who merely feel the spirits around them are influenced by them, but those who discern what they are escape their power. You will become a discerner of the spirits that are in the world if you listen to my instruction, and your heart will remain untouched by their cunning craftiness.

Nothing will befuddle you if you listen to me. Nothing will move you. You will be incapable of believing a lie. Your heart will receive nothing but the truth, and you will fully comprehend every word that the Creator speaks to you. Righteousness will be easy to understand, and how very happy you will be!

2:12-19 Jehovah's reward for your diligent search for His wisdom will be to protect your heart from those who look good but who are not good – especially professional fools, whose inner delight in sin is skillfully concealed by erudition and feigned faith. They confusedly wrangle over exalted theological concepts that they themselves cannot comprehend. They speak eloquently, but long ago they set their sails by a wandering star and strayed from the safe path. Now, they are sailing in circles on a wide, dark sea, with

no knowledge of right and wrong, and they do not even realize it. My son, titles engrave no truth upon a man's heart; positions impart no prudence; nor do degrees confer discernment. Trust God and seek His praise; you cannot safely put your trust in man.

But protection from the snare of intelligent fools is not God's only reward for your pursuit of His ways. The other snare that you will escape when God makes your heart wise is the snare of an ungodly woman. You will see right through her makeup to behold her wretched soul, and you will be so repulsed by the sight, as well as by the stench of her spirit, that her perfumed body will mean nothing to you whatsoever.

Oh, she will coyly compliment you as being engaging and witty, but God will anoint your eyes to peer through her seductively painted lips, down her sweet-smelling throat, and into the disease-ridden pit that is in her heart. It will amaze you at how little her inviting beauty will appeal to you. Her rejection of God's way of pursuing happiness will cause her to seem ugly to you in spite of her efforts to be enticing. She will find no avenue into your heart.

Because she did not listen to the godly instructions she received as a child, she became a fool, a contemptible tool used by God to ensnare foolish young men who also refuse instruction. Because she forgot her God, she is turned over to her own lusts and is now used only to test the hearts of others. Those who are blessed by Jehovah reject her. Those who embrace her are holding in their arms a very expensive ticket to hell. They will all spend eternity together, with no flesh to conceal their vile spirits.

Jehovah has named the wide street that leads to her house "Death Road", and that one-way road will not appeal to you at all when you become wise. All who give themselves to such a woman die; they are never the same again. In the pathway to her door is no happiness and no life, forever.

2:20-22 This good counsel, my dear son, will guide you to the way of wise and righteous men, men who live good lives and are blessed by the Lord. Their eternal happiness is assured by God. Those who are upright will be given the whole world in which to live, without one danger in it and without one ungodly soul on it. When that day comes, sinners will be thrown away like trash into an everlasting fire, while in that new and blessed world every righteous soul will have another righteous soul for a neighbor. What a wonderful life awaits those who desire to know the ways of the Creator and to walk in His light!

3:1-4 Son, if you remember and obey my instructions, years will be added to your life, and you will enjoy those years better than if you live any other way. Two things will especially be a blessing to your life if you will embrace them: *mercy and truth*. You will hear me speak of them often.

As for **Truth**, I will teach you these things: A wise man is willing to see people and situations as they really are, even if it causes him pain. A wise man loves truth so much – whatever it is, and whomever it concerns – that he would rather know it and be grieved

than to be blind to it and have a false sense of security and contentment. If you sincerely desire to know the truth, then you should prepare yourself now to suffer when you see it.

You must always remember, as you grow in knowledge, that it is possible to do more harm with truth than with a lie.¹ You must always temper your knowledge of truth with a merciful spirit. Otherwise, Jehovah will judge you by your own standard of merciless truth.

Concerning **Mercy**, I will teach you this: Mercy is cheapened when it is bestowed upon an unrepentant sinner. To be promiscuously merciful is foolish. Forgiveness of sin not repented of is not forgiveness of sin at all; rather, it is an endorsement of it. This kind of mercy is especially ungodly, for it promotes wickedness even as it appears to be good.

You must demand of yourself and of those about you a godly balance of mercy and truth. Wisdom will teach your heart when and how to use both these instruments rightly, so that you may genuinely benefit others and truly please God.

3:5 Pray the prayer of my wise father, *who prayed that Jehovah would unite his heart to fear nothing but Him*. Do not divide your faith. Put all your eggs into one basket and trust your whole life to the care of the Lord.

Ps. 86:11

Unwise people try to obtain happiness without God's help. Some have learned to play the role of pitiful victim, so that undiscerning folk will pity them and give them what they want; some are accomplished liars and survive by deceit; others depend on social or family connections to gain earthly advantage. The whole world operates under one form of manipulation or another. To manipulate and mislead others is the world's way of pursuing happiness, for it is the nature of man to seek happiness at the expense of others. Do not trust in worldly wisdom; trust God and live by His direction.

3:6 If you openly acknowledge your trust in God, then He will give order and meaning to your life. You will miss no "golden opportunities" because the Lord Himself will be the Guarantor of your happiness.

3:7-8 Those who survive by manipulation pride themselves on their accomplishments and abilities, but you stay humble before the Lord and do good for others. If you do not resort to the world's ways of pursuing happiness, regardless of its pressures or enticements to do so, then God will see to it that the happiness the world vainly pursues is yours. He will bless you with healing and prosperity.

3:9-10 Never be so foolish as to neglect the financial support of those who truly are servants of God. Multitudes refuse to do this. Many keep to themselves what is due to God's servants because they fear that the money they bring to God will cause them financial stress, even though they cannot point to a single case in history where anyone fell into poverty by bringing their tithes and offerings to God! On the contrary, *the righteous have never been forsaken by God, nor has He ever abandoned their children to*

abject poverty. God has always abundantly provided for those who abundantly love and trust Him.

Ps. 37:25

It is covetousness or rebelliousness, or both, which hinder sinful men from honoring God by financially supporting His servants. Do not believe any of their rationalizations for their wickedness. You know the truth; walk in it, and God will enrich your life.

3:11-12 Do not be discouraged concerning the suffering that the righteous endure. All men must face trials in this life. Take advantage of the times when God puts your heart to the test. If God chastens you, then He has confidence in your faith. *He sends His blessings of rain and sunshine on everyone, both the good and the evil,* but He chastens only those whom He loves. Hard tests of your faith are God's compliments; He is merely preparing you for a degree of happiness which without suffering you would be unable to bear. (Consider what trials young Joseph endured until he was made able to bear the high honor of sitting with Pharaoh himself upon the throne of Egypt.)

Mt. 5:45

3:13-18 If you attain to wisdom, and if you persevere in your search to understand the ways of God, you will certainly be made happy. The benefits of wisdom are greater than anything that this world can offer. They are better than the best silver, better than pure gold, better than jewels, better than all the world's praise and honor. Wisdom affords more happiness, and that eternal, than do all the desirable elements of earthly life.

Wisdom will lead you to eternal life and will bring upon you everlasting honor and true riches. Wisdom will make you a pleasant person and fill your life with an abiding sense of security. Once you possess wisdom, and if you hold it fast, it will be a perpetual spring of blessing, and you will enjoy the happiness that you desire.

3:19-20 Everything in this creation exists and functions by the direction of God's wisdom. This immeasurable universe dances to the intricately synchronized music of His understanding. The Creator's knowledge determines the location and the magnitude of earthquakes, tides, and storms; by His knowledge the atmosphere produces drops of water. You cannot imagine all that God's wisdom has designed and still directs. And there is no end, either in number, in beauty, or in depth, to the knowledge that wisdom affords to those who possess it.

3:21-24 Oh, my son, cling to wisdom and discretion! They will save your life and make your life a beautiful thing, for they will prompt you to make wise choices. You will sleep peacefully at night, and your spirit will enjoy pleasant rest.

3:25-26 The wicked, especially those in positions of great authority, often manipulate others by exploiting men's fears. Do not be moved by the dread of catastrophes that they would plant in your heart. Catastrophes may happen, but they are designed by God for the destruction of the wicked and for the blessing of the upright. Wisdom will persuade

your heart to trust in God's faithfulness so that wicked men will not be able to ensnare you in their net of fear.

3:27-29 Listen to my wisdom. Whenever you have an opportunity to do good for someone, do it. Never put off until tomorrow paying a man what you owe him, especially when you have the money in your pocket today. You *are* your neighbor's keeper. Always look for ways to benefit him and never join in schemes to do him wrong.

3:30 There may be times when you are forced into a controversy with someone. Be certain that you have a compelling reason to do so. (If you do that consistently, those around you will learn to trust your judgment.)

3:31-32 Remember what I said. Do not envy the man who is successful in manipulating others. You will know such men by their "froward tongue", of which I shall have much to say later. For now, remember that God abhors the manipulative soul, and that He reveals His secret path to happiness only to those who seek it in the right way.

3:33-35 Only fools cannot see that the curse of Jehovah is upon the wicked and that they possess nothing that is eternal. The upright, on the other hand, have the best of all things: peace and happiness here in this life, and much more of the same in the world to come.

God scorns their efforts to obtain lasting happiness who scorn His merciful attempts to help them find it, but He opens the eyes of the humble man to see the hidden pathway. In the end, those who have attained to wisdom will share in the incomparable glory of God, while the foolish will be humiliated in the Judgment and cast aside without mercy.

KING DAVID'S COUNSEL TO YOUNG SOLOMON

4:1-5 Listen, my children, to what King David, my father, taught me, and learn from it. It is wise counsel that will help you in every situation you will face. As a child, I was very dear to my father, and my mother felt a special, tender love for me. I listened to them, and I will now teach you the wisdom my father taught me.

He began by saying to me, "Son, keep my words hidden in your heart. Do as I teach you, and you will live forever. Follow my good advice. Seek to understand life rightly, and once you have attained to wisdom, never let it go. Trust God, and you will escape much pain and trouble."

4:6-9 My father told me, "Let wisdom be your chief desire. As you are building your life by getting an education, learning to manage your money, purchasing property, or building a home, be constantly striving for wisdom. That is the most important thing."

"If you put wisdom on a pedestal, it will lift you up. If you take wisdom into your bosom, it will bring you honor and adorn your brow with a crown of authority and praise."

4:10-13 He said to me, "Listen to what I am telling you, my dear son, and take it in. If you do, you will enjoy a long, full life. I am showing to you the secret pathway; I am

instructing you in the hidden ways of righteousness. And I am doing so in order that life in this world will not become excessively burdensome to you and that none of its problems or disappointments will dishearten you or turn your heart toward evil. Cling tightly to instruction, my son, and never let it go. Guard it, for instruction is your life!”

4:14-17 “One result of your acquiring the knowledge of what is good will be a growing awareness of what is evil. When you learn what evil is, do not do it. Avoid it. Turn your head and walk away from it. Those who take that road and learn how to prosper by doing evil can become addicted to sin. When that happens, they cannot rest unless they have done an evil deed or seduced someone else to do evil. Their converts are their trophies; their meat is to do evil; they thirst for the chance to harm someone.”

4:18-19 “The pathway of just men is a bright path full of happiness, and the longer one journeys along that road, the brighter the way grows until the Day comes when all things are understood. The road of evil, however, is a dark road, pitted with snares, where nothing is ever understood rightly. Those who travel on that path never comprehend what God is doing in their lives or in the lives of others around them.”

4:20-22 “O my son, believe my words; give your heart to the instruction I am offering to you. Your health and your happiness are at stake. Your life depends upon it. Keep the instruction of wisdom at the center of your endeavors; never make a decision unless God’s wisdom leads the way.”

4:23–5:2 “The battleground for your life is in your own heart. Happiness will be gained or lost solely on the basis of the attitude of your heart. From your heart will be made all your choices, son. Guard your heart!”

“Not many young people understand that many evils will infiltrate their hearts if they speak to others in an arrogant, sarcastic tone. This is the ‘froward tongue’ of which I have told you, and it is extremely dangerous. I will speak much more about this evil later; but I warn you now to be attentive to the tone in your voice when you speak to others.”

“The use of belittling, haughty words are just another way that ungodly people seek to manipulate others. Ignore them. Discipline yourself to keep straight on the good road. Think about your intended destination and base your decisions upon the instruction of wisdom. If any newly invented evils are offered to you as short cuts to happiness, refuse them. They will not bring you happiness. Stay on the sure road.”

“My son, listen to what I am telling you. Be serious about what I am saying, so that in time to come, when you must give counsel to others, your words may have real worth because you yourself know and love what is right.”

5:3-14 “An immoral woman knows how to make herself desirable. She paints her lips with suggestive colors and doctors her body with sweet fragrances in order to hide the stench of her soul. *She is foolish; it is better to be good than to smell good, but she*

doesn't even understand that. Her way of walking, carefully designed to arouse the passions of men, leads directly into hell. (She is not watching where she is going; she is always looking behind to see if someone is affected by her swaying hips.)”

Eccl. 7:1a

“Her final end will be as bitter as poison as it eats through her belly; the agony that death will bring upon her – the same pains she brings upon all who are deceived by her – will be both excruciating and eternal.”

“This spirit of lust is a fundamental impetus to this wicked world’s ever-changing fads in clothes and social behavior. If the ungodly employed the same methods of alluring young people to sin from one generation to the next, if the ungodly never changed styles, then sin would lose much of its appeal. Every generation is offered new styles for the same sins of the generation before them, but by new fashions young people are led to believe they have attained to some new height of sophistication which the former generation failed to reach. Because the styles for alluring young people into sin constantly change, foolish young people do not recognize themselves in the behavior of the fools of previous generations. Short-haired fools cannot recognize the foolishness of the long-haired fools who preceded them.”

“There is nothing new under the sun. On earth, the whole issue has always been and will continue to be, Does your heart love good or evil? That simple choice is all there is to this life. But the world labors incessantly to make it difficult for young people to perceive that simple, unchanging truth.”

“Listen to me, all you young men who belong to me! Do not walk away from my words! Stay far from such women as I have described to you. Do not even allow your curiosity to cause you to come close for a peek. She wants you to peek, for she knows how to draw you in.”

“If you are taken in by her, it will cost you dearly. Let me tell you what she will steal from you. First, the precious sense of personal integrity that you will need to carry you through difficult times will be taken away. Immorality leaves within your heart a sense of degradation that you cannot escape. Second, years will be taken from your life, wasted in the pursuit of ever greater excitements with her. Third, your wealth will be spent to please her, lest she deny you her many pleasures. You will labor for your money, but she will take it from you with a sweet, fragrant smile. Fourth, even if you somehow manage not to contract the diseases that such women often carry, your body will prematurely age. Lastly, when your time to die draws near (your time will certainly come!), your foolishness will suddenly become apparent to you. You will cringe at memories of wicked deeds that you cannot expunge from your record; you will agonize over wrong choices you made; you will grind your teeth with remorse and hate yourself because of things you have done and because you did not give heed to the warnings you received as a youth. Shame and regret will rob your grieving soul of the peace for which you will pray during your last, struggling moments in this life. You will die, lamenting to

yourself, ‘Why did I not listen to instruction? Why did I despise my teachers? Why did I think I knew better than they?’ And as you feel life leaving your wasted body, you will cringe with the thought, ‘I was in the midst of righteous people, and I chose the path of sin!’ Then you will die, another fool slain by a wicked woman.”

5:15-19 “God created pleasure; He is not opposed to you having a happy life. *On the contrary, at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore!* But there is a time and a place for every experience under the sun. Immoral pleasure is often nothing more than perfectly good pleasure – enjoyed at the wrong time, in the wrong place, with the wrong person. In its time, every experience is beautiful, but any act done at the wrong time is sinful.”

Ps. 16:11

“Enjoy to the full the wife that God gives to you. Reserve your passions for her alone, and let your thirst for pleasure be satisfied at her well. Embrace her and be blessed by God; do not waste your strength on some woman who has no control over her own filthy spirit.”

5:20-23 “Remember, God is watching over all things and all people at all times. He records every word spoken and every deed done. He ponders the choices men make and determines the result of each one. He will bring every deed and word into judgment.”

“God’s righteousness assures that the wicked man’s sins will in time enwrap his spirit like a suffocating vine, so that wisdom will be impossible for him to obtain; he places his confidence in the guidance of other fools such as himself.”

6:1-5 “My son, do not value friendship so highly that you are taken advantage of by unwise friends. If a friend asks you to co-sign a loan for him, refuse to do it. Young people are often too trusting, too willing to share another’s burden, too eager to aid another in the fulfillment of a dream. Slick operators in this world may persuade your young friends to sign a contract that is unwise. Do not sign with him. Let God teach him wisdom and do not interfere. A wise friend will not ask you to place your own financial future at risk by signing a promissory note for him. Never co-sign on a loan. Take care of your own business and let others do the same.”

“If, however, you do make this mistake and find yourself chargeable for a debt that your friend cannot pay, do not be too proud to go to your friend and plead with him to do the right thing. Be adamant that he not leave you in the financial trouble into which he led you. Give him no rest day or night until your money is once again secure. And let that trouble teach you the critical difference between being a caring friend and being a sucker.”

6:6-11 “Do not fall for get-rich-quick schemes. In this life, nothing replaces honest, hard work. The money that comes from honest labor is secure. That is one lesson God intends for us to learn from nature. Look at the ant. Have you ever seen one of them lounging in

bed late in the morning, devising schemes for surviving the coming winter without having to labor in the summer heat? (Some people work harder at finding ways not to work than the work itself would be, if they would just do it!) A person who refuses to follow the ant's hard-working example and prepare for hard times is both foolish and lazy. Laziness is a thief. It steals time from you, time that is filled with golden opportunities to prepare for what lies ahead."

6:12-15 "The schemer, as with the whorish woman, has polished his craft so as to attract young people. He, too, is searching for ways to live off of other people's labor. The cunning words of such a lazy man are measuredly cocky, which many youths mistake for simple confidence and experience. He impresses young people with his underhanded savvy, his knowledge of what is marginally ethical and of what will escape the attention of the authorities."

"Do not be impressed with his ways of making money. He is adept at persuading others to take risks, while he profits from their foolishness. He constantly stirs up trouble, especially when those who have been taken in by him discover what he has done to them. God will see to it that he is suddenly and permanently broken (and He may use one of the victims of his deceit to break him)."

6:16-19 "There are seven things that are most abhorrent to the Lord. Avoid these seven things at all costs.

(1) God abhors people who think they are inherently worth more than others and who demonstrate their superior attitudes by how they dress and talk.

The world is attracted to the latest fashion because the latest fashion carries with it an appearance of superiority. But we are all God's creatures, and none of us is by nature worth more than others. Stylish fashion denies this eternal truth. Stylish fashion is a way for men to make false claims of superiority without opening their mouths.

(2) God abhors the man who uses God's wonderful gifts of thought and speech to deceive others.

(3) God abhors murderers.

(4) God abhors those who invent new ways to allure young people into sin.

(5) God abhors those who are eager to do evil. They are the ones who seize most quickly upon the latest rage in fashion and style so as to appear better than others, but the truth is that such are among the basest of people.

(6) God abhors those who betray a trust, especially those who lie to authorities and cause innocent people to suffer.

(7) God abhors the serpents among men who subtly sow seeds of strife and hatred among people who belong together."

6:20-22 "Son, take heed to the instructions your mother and I give to you. If you trust in them, your decisions will be wisely made, your sleep will be undisturbed by fear and

regret, and God's wisdom will greet you every morning, ready to continue its work of bringing you happiness."

6:23-35 "God's commandments are like a bright light on a dark trail; His Law is a lamp for your feet; and the path taken by wise men is the path of submitting to the reproof of instruction. Wise men are not insulted by correction."

"My instruction will save you from the adulterous woman, the attractive woman who artfully praises young men (when her husband is not listening). Her eyes subtly suggest things that her mouth will not say aloud."

"Such women cause men to spend themselves into poverty. Then, they will scorn the attention of those fools and continue to engage in their immoral avocation with other fools who still have some money, even right under their husbands' noses. Especially valued conquests to these women are young men such as yourself, whom God dearly loves."

"It is as impossible to escape destruction if you fall into an adulteress' arms as it is to escape pain if you take into your bosom a flaming torch. If you can walk across burning coals without harm, then you can escape God's wrath upon adulterers."

"If a man steals some bread because he is starving, people will feel compassion for him, even though he may have to pay a severe penalty for his crime. But people will not be merciful toward the man who commits adultery with another man's wife. The memory of that evil deed will stir up disgust among decent people as long as it is remembered. And a betrayed husband, moved by implacable, jealous anger, will not be satisfied with anything but your death. And if he maims or kills you, he will be remembered by people sympathetically, but you will still be despised."

7:1-5 "Son, remember what I am telling you. Choose to obey me and survive. Let my instruction be the most precious thing in your life. Act on it; think about it; adopt my wisdom and make it your own; protect it as you would protect your own sister or mother from being ravished by wicked men. My words will save you from the seductive women that are on the prowl for your life."

7:6-23 "Let me tell you what I saw one evening from the window of my house. I could not be seen from the street beneath me, although I was very close to it, so close in fact that I could both hear the conversation and distinguish the facial features of those who passed by."

"One evening as I stood by my window in the darkness, I noticed an unwary young man strolling along a nearby street. He approached a certain woman's house at the corner, and I watched as he continued walking toward it. There in the shadows she met him. (She is a loud and self-willed woman; she refuses to stay in the house and faithfully render her wifely duties to her own husband.) She was dressed to kill; she knew how to allure and to capture fresh prey. The lust within her was raging, and she calmed his youthful fear of it with flattery and cool confidence."

“He was awkward and hesitant, but she drew him close to her breasts and kissed him. Sensing his inner struggle with moral objections to this, she sought to quieten his conscience with small talk about her close relationship with God. She then flattered him by saying that she had been longing for him to come by her house and that she was thrilled that he had finally done so. She suggested that their divinely destined moment had come.”

“She described how she had diligently prepared her bed for him with delicate cloth and fragrant spices. ‘My husband is gone on a journey,’ she told the young fool, ‘and he will not return for a long while.’ She cleverly played on the young man’s sympathy, stressing the comfort that his presence would bring to her lonely home.”

“Finally, he surrendered and followed her like a dumb ox headed for the slaughter house, or like a fool to public disgrace. The poisoned arrow was drawn tight, waiting for his soul to come into range, and like an unsuspecting bird following a trail of seed to a hidden snare, the foolish young man passed through the door of the adulteress’ home.”

7:24-27 “Listen to me carefully, young men. Maintain your integrity; do not descend to the unfaithful woman’s beastly level of life. Happiness is not to be found with her. She has brought many otherwise mighty men into the depths of disgrace and despair. Those who travel the road that leads to hell pass through her doorway; death reserves rooms for them in its depths.”

8:1-36 “Wisdom loves the people whom God has created; he² cries aloud everywhere, at busy intersections, in market places, and at every entrance to public buildings. Of all God’s many creatures, man alone has been honored to have the voice of Wisdom plead with him. Listen to what Wisdom is saying to all of you:

‘To you, mankind, do I call. My voice is directed solely to you. Oh, that you fools would believe Me and be made wise! O foolish people! Let your heart receive My words! Listen carefully, for I will reveal truths that are beyond the comprehension of many. The words that come out of My mouth are always right. What comes out of My mouth is always true; My lips detest deceit; they will allow no such thing to pass through them. Every word that comes from My mouth springs from righteousness; there is not an ounce of self-exaltation in My words, not one distortion in them. Those who have an understanding heart trust what I am saying; those who sincerely seek for the knowledge of God acknowledge My doctrine as the only right one.

My instruction is more valuable than silver; the knowledge I give is more precious than gold. To possess Wisdom is better than to possess rare jewels. Indeed, the value of every precious thing on earth is small compared to Wisdom. I, the Wisdom of God, am always accompanied by prudence. When I enter a man’s heart, prudence directs his decisions, and his desire for peace and happiness is granted by God.

I am the One who has inspired the great inventions and discoveries of human history.

(The fear of the Lord will rescue you from all evil.)

I will not dwell in the heart of a proud and arrogant man. I refuse to walk with him down his evil pathway, for I despise a smug, sarcastic tongue.

There is no understanding in those who receive no counsel from Me. I am understanding. Where is there any wisdom without Me? The decisions that rulers of earth make are prudent only to the extent that they agree with My words. Their strength lies in their confidence in the knowledge that I have revealed to men.

I love those who love Me. And those who diligently seek Me shall find Me and be blessed. Enduring riches are in My hand; lasting honor is Mine alone to give. Righteousness is My favor to bestow. The gifts that I give are more precious than the finest gold, more to be desired than the choicest silver. Those who pursue Me find themselves walking in the way of righteousness; they find themselves surrounded and comforted by just men. My way will lead them to My home, where I will fill their souls to overflowing with everlasting treasures.

The Lord created Me first, before anything else existed. I predate everything – heaven, earth, everything. Everything, that is, except Jehovah, who created Me. When I was created by Him, there were no oceans, no springs of water, no mountains, no hills, no fields – nothing. When He created His majestic heavens, I was already there. When He determined that there would be east, west, north, and south, I was there. When He formed the clouds, I was there; when He laid the foundations of the oceans and set their boundaries, I was there. When He brought the land out of the water and appointed the great continent its place, I was there.

When all these things were created, I was beside Him as His Son. He was very pleased with Me, the firstborn of every creature, and I was thrilled to be alive with Him. I visited His earth and rejoiced at it all, including His wise decision to create mankind. I loved man, as He did.

Now then, listen to Me, because if you listen to Me and walk in My path, blessings will follow you throughout your life on earth – and beyond. Listen to the instruction that you are receiving; do not turn it down. It will make you wise. (Wisdom is choosing the road that leads to eternal happiness.)

Blessed is the man who daily listens for My instruction, the man who eagerly waits for Me to speak before making his decisions. Whoever finds Me finds life and obtains favor with My God, who created Me and loves Me. But whoever sins against Me destroys himself; all they who hate Me love death.”

9:1-6 “Wisdom provides a secure refuge for those who seek happiness in God’s way, a place of safety that rests upon seven eternal, unshakable truths.³ Wisdom has prepared a feast for those who desire the blessings he can give, and Wisdom has inspired many to go out and plead with men to come to the feast that God has prepared especially for them.”

“Do not be discouraged. Do you lack wisdom? Rejoice, for you are invited to the feast! Wisdom pleads with you to drink freely of his sweet wine and to be satiated with the food that God has prepared for you. Wisdom cries out to you, ‘Leave the foolish behind! Come walk with Me in the way of understanding!’”

9:7-12 “The difference between a wise man and a fool is demonstrated most clearly by their differing responses to instruction. A wise man is made even wiser by instruction, but a fool rejects the instruction that is offered to him.”

“You will make yourself look foolish if you attempt to instruct fools. And if you spend your time rebuking wicked men, you will gain a reputation for stupidity. They have no heart for correction, and when you try to feed it to them, they know how to make it look as if you are the fool. On the other hand, when a wise man is corrected, he will love you for correcting him. His heart’s desire is to find true happiness, and he understands that every right instruction he receives aids him in his efforts to find it.”

“The beginning of all wisdom is to fear God, who is the source of all that is truly good, and true understanding is nothing more than the knowledge of what truly is of God and what is not.”

9:13-18 “I warn you again of this very great danger to your young soul: a foolish, immoral woman. She has a loud mouth, and she is ignorant of the ways of God. She entices men to evil, either in her own house or in public places. She has no modesty, but brazenly approaches men who are minding their own business. Whoever is simple-minded will give her his attention.”

“To the young man who is stupid enough to listen to her, the adulteress suggests that the bed chamber of another man’s wife is more exciting than his own marriage bed. And the harlot tells the fool who comes in to her, ‘Ungodly things we can do in secret bring greater pleasures than good people know about.’”

“Such foolish young men do not know that her bed is a whitewashed tomb filled with dead souls, and her former guests are now being tormented in the depths of hell.”

“Come on and have some fun with us. Everybody does it. There’ll be no problems. No one will find out.”

Section Two

Solomon's Proverbs

Chapter 2

THE PEACEFUL AND THE CONTENTIOUS

17:1 Even if you have nothing but dried bread to eat, it is better to live in a home where there is peace than to live in a luxurious house where there is constant bickering and strife. *Strife is difficult to stop once it has started; therefore, the time to put an end to strife is before it begins. When you perceive that contention is about to commence, back off.* Do not be concerned about what others will think if you do not pursue a contentious matter and “defend your rights”. To refuse to be drawn into a quarrel is honorable and requires a special kind of courage.

19:11 A discreet man is slow to anger; his honorable character is demonstrated by his ability to overlook a transgression. *It takes a man of great understanding to be slow to anger, as God is, but the spirit of a quick-tempered man is quickly ignited; if a book were written about his way of life, it would be titled, “In Praise of Foolishness”.* A wise man restrains himself and is patient with his neighbors, *but a fool is quickly angered; he takes advantage of every mistake his neighbor makes in order to increase his own stature and wealth. A wise man would rather suffer a little inconvenience than to humiliate his neighbor because he made an error.*

12:16b
25:9-10 If you feel that you have been wronged by a neighbor, go work it out with him alone, saying nothing to anyone else. You will be humiliated if you falsely accuse him before others and later learn that you are the one who is really at fault. *Be very slow to enter into a controversy with anyone, for it will be an indelible stain upon your reputation if it is proved that your adversary, whom you publicly condemned, is in the right.*

25:8
20:3b Fools leap eagerly into heated quarrels; as a result, they often find themselves stuck in the middle of trouble that was none of their business to begin with. *Their meddlesome behavior is as senselessly irritating as that of a man who tries to pick up a dog by his ears.*

26:17 Do not fret yourself concerning what whisperers are saying about you. What others say is between them and God. If you sneak around, eavesdropping on others’ conversations in order to find out what they are saying about you, you may well hear one of your friends, employees, or even one of your own children cursing you. But you know in yourself that there have been times when you have spoken evil of someone in authority over you, but afterward you changed your mind and regretted your hasty words. So, do not be overly curious to hear what you already know is being said.

Eccl.
7:21-22

16:32 The man who has command of himself and is slow to become angry is greater than a mighty warrior; anyone who rules his own spirit is mightier than a conqueror of nations. *The man who has no control over his own spirit is like a city with no defenses; anything can and will come in and go out. He is swayed by whatever spirit comes along.* But the man who has control of himself is not overwhelmed by the spirits around him, and he uses peace as a weapon, quenching strife before it can burst forth as a raging flame. He is a peacemaker, a genuine son of God. *You will learn that when you are completely subdued under the hand of God, His unconquerable authority passes through you to rule over everything and everybody around you.* You cannot then be overcome by evil; instead, you will overcome evil with good.

25:28 *Avoid close associations with people whose mood swings are unpredictable and extreme. They can turn against you as quickly as they can befriend you. Their calamity is certain, and when they fall, they will try to drag as many as they can with them into destruction.* Do not befriend a man who is given to anger and regularly flies into uncontrollable rages, for as time passes, friends come to share traits, and if you become like him, your soul will find itself in chains. *A quick-tempered man speaks and acts hastily, like a fool.* His ungoverned anger makes him a living testimony of foolishness, advertising it to the world, *and anger that erupts from a proud spirit is especially cruel.* The man who engages in this evil is scornful of the coming Judgment.

15:18b & Mt. 5:9
16:7
Rom. 12:21
24:21b-22
22:24-25
14:17a
14:29b
21:24b
21:24a
26:24-26
10:18
10:12
11:17 & Mt. 5:7

Secret hatred, my son, is especially dangerous. It will show itself as love even as it draws you toward a hidden snare. The heart of such a man is a storehouse of cunning deceit. When a man hates you openly, you must beware, but at least you know where that man stands. Hidden hatred is a double danger. You must learn to be a perceptive judge of character, for some men know how to disguise hatred with fair words. When they speak, do not believe them, for everything that God hates is in the heart of a deceitful man. A deceiver thinks he is not recognized for what he really is, but that is only because he is blind to what the wise can see. He deceives himself and does not know that God will expose his wretchedness to the entire world. *The man who disguises hatred with lies and who slanders those who are good is a fool.*

Hatred motivates a man to publicize the faults of others; it needlessly stirs up strife, but a loving disposition enables a man to overlook transgressions of others and to strive for peace. *Those who are merciful to others are blessed, for they shall obtain mercy from God, but the cruel are cursed by God, for by cruelty a man sows seeds of sickness and trouble for himself.*

19:19 *A good man is compassionate, but your compassion must be guided by discretion, lest you become a dumping ground for someone else's problems. It is useless for you to help an irascible man out of trouble, for after he is delivered, his peevish personality will lead him right back into it. Such a man must be punished; leave him alone.* An habitually angry man stirs up trouble wherever he goes *and is constantly sinning; leave him to his trouble.* His words and actions are like coal and wood cast into a small fire; he makes tense situations worse. *Strife pleases him because he has a secret love of sin. He doesn't know that those who are looking for trouble are already in it.*

15:18a &
29:22a
29:22b
26:21
17:19a

By many proofs, I have learned that those with cooperative spirits receive special benefits in this life. Two who work peaceably together can accomplish more than two who work separately. If a man is injured while working with another, he will be quickly helped, but if a man is injured while working alone, there is no one there to help him, and his injury may be made worse. Two lying in bed together stay warmer on a cold night than one alone. A bandit can more easily surprise and prevail against a single traveler, while two traveling together can better withstand his attack. And in almost any endeavor, the work of three who labor diligently together in harmony is successful.

Eccl.
4:9-12

Chapter 3

THE DILIGENT AND THE SLOTHFUL

24:30-33 My son, I once strolled along a country road which lay along the field of a lazy and foolish man. From the road, I took note of the condition of his property. The stone wall surrounding his over-grown vineyard was in need of repair; briars and weeds grew in every direction. I paused in my journey to consider carefully the scene that was spread before me, and as I pondered over it, God taught me. He caused me to understand the meaning of what I saw with my eyes.

It was as though I could actually hear the man as he awoke in the morning, mumbling to himself as he turned in his bed, “Just a few more minutes, and I’ll get up. Just a little while longer to sleep.”

But where was the fruit of his vineyard? And where was the harvest from the field? No one maintained his property while he slept “just a little longer.”

Eccl. 10:18 By slothfulness, son, a building falls into ruin, and when hands are idle, a house rots through and collapses.

26:14 A lazy man turns in his bed like a door on its hinges, trying to find a comfortable position in which to kill himself with sleep. *He dreams away his life, wishing he possessed things that others have—things that he could very well acquire if he would only get up and go to work. But those who work honestly and hard find complete happiness in God’s reward for their labors.*

13:4 Sleepiness is not always caused by lack of sleep. Sleepiness can be an indication of a spiritual disease: slothfulness, the condition of not having the faith to joyfully meet the challenges of each day. *It may not seem possible, but it is true that a man who is given to the unclean spirit of laziness would rather starve than do just a little work.* Simply to lift his hand to his mouth to feed himself is a great inconvenience, and if he could, he would even have someone do that for him.

19:15a Listen to me, my son. Laziness is wastefulness. Slothfulness is a thief; it will rob you a few minutes at a time of the fleeting opportunities God gives you to prosper in this life. *Drowsiness will clothe a man in rags;* therefore, do not love sleep, lest poverty overtake you. You can earn money to buy your food only if your eyes are open. *Idleness produces hunger.*

24:34 *Poverty doesn’t rob a man of either wisdom or goodness. There are many poor men with integrity, men who understand that by the work of their*

23:21b
20:13
19:15b
13:23

hands their needs will be met. On the other hand, there are many whose lives are ruined because they do not see a connection between honest labor and having food to eat. The unwillingness of their own hands to work kills them; 21:25b-26 *they spend their days coveting the possessions of those who are diligent, never realizing that it is diligence, not luck, that has enriched them with enough to share with others.*

10:5 *The son who works in the summer and prepares for the cold days of winter is wise, but the parents of a son who sleeps when he should be bringing in the harvest must live with constant shame and disappointment.*

21:25a *What eventually kills the lazy young man is giving in to self-indulgent desires instead of doing what is right. Such foolish young men become*

21:17 *addicted to sensual pleasure, alcohol, or to fine things, and will in time become poor. Excessive indulgence in such things prevents a man from obtaining happiness and security. The young man who works hard and*

28:19 & 12:11 *faithfully will have enough food to satisfy him, but the one who follows the example of lazy men has no understanding and will have poverty enough to satisfy him. Both will have what they earn.*

14:23 *The man who is working so diligently that he has little time for idle chatter tends to become richer as time passes; there just is not much profit that comes from standing around talking. The man who is full of vain talk tends to become poorer as time goes by. If you want to improve your financial situation, you'll have to work at it, not just talk about it. If you pay*

12:24 *attention and be patient, you will notice that those who come to occupy positions of authority are, in the main, those who were working while others were "having fun" and that those who spend their youth playing games become servants to those who are sober minded and dutiful. God has*

12:14b & Gal. 6:7 *determined that each of us will reap exactly what we have sown, whether it be good or evil. Do not be deceived, for God never is. Whatever any man sows, that shall he also reap.*

10:4 *Take good care of the money God gives you. Carelessness leads to want; carefulness leads to plenty. Watch over all your possessions and never assume that they are safe. The goods of this life are not eternal and can be lost or stolen in a moment, especially if you neglect to do your part to protect*

27:23-27 *them. This is true of all earthly possessions, even those belonging to the most powerful men on earth. God has given you the money that is in your pocket, the clothes that cover your nakedness, the food on your table, and the home that keeps you warm. Be very careful that these blessings be not damaged, wasted, or stolen, and you will always have enough of them for yourself and*

12:27 *your family. Even when God provides the lazy man with possessions, he*

wastes them, but the diligent man esteems the rewards of his labor to be great riches and takes good care of them.

15:19 *Someone who doesn't want to work can always find a reason not to do so, but righteousness enables a man to face and to manage life's responsibilities easily enough.* To a lazy man, if it is not too hot to work, then it's too cold. Because conditions seem to him never to be right for working, he comes to poverty and has to survive by depending upon the generosity of others. *Even if the weather is perfect, he will find some pretext for not working, such as, "I thought I heard a lion growling outside last night. I even saw him in the shadows. He might eat me if I go outside today."* Any excuse will satisfy his unclean spirit, even if it is transparently absurd to a reasonable man. A committee of seven geniuses couldn't convince a lazy man that his reasoning is wrong. He would consider them fools, and their warnings would seem to him to be nothing more than malevolent schemes to force him to do their will.

20:4

22:13 & 26:13

26:16

14:4 *The slothful fear the responsibilities and risks that come with having a business, but if you ever make any money, son, you'll have to spend some. Do not be overly concerned with the responsibilities and expenses necessary to run your business. It is true that those who own equipment have the responsibility to keep them maintained; but then, those who have few or no responsibilities also have little or nothing to eat.*

10:26 *When a slothful person is entrusted with an important task, he disappoints those who trust him and irritates them like a toothache, or smoke in the eyes; then, he is demoted to handle unimportant matters with other lazy, unprofitable people.* The man who strives for excellence in his work, however, will not have to labor among such base men; he will be given a position of authority in higher places. *Approach all your tasks with determination to accomplish them completely and well; sloppy, careless work amounts to nothing but wasted time.* Once diligence becomes a part of your character, even your thoughts tend to bring you profit. Diligence in labor, you will learn, does not necessarily imply speediness; a hasty man makes foolish mistakes that rob him of his profit and put him in a financial bind. A diligent man carefully considers his options and does not succumb to pressures to make quick decisions. In business, remember that hurry makes worry, and debt, regret.

22:29

18:9

21:5

Chapter 4

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

16:16 How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And how much more valuable than silver is understanding! *Understanding is an unceasing source of living water to him who has it, but fools cannot comprehend its value.* Every man with an understanding heart pursues the knowledge of God, *for it is not good for a man to be foolish and ignorant of the ways of righteousness.* Guard your heart against the influences of foolishness. A little leaven affects the whole lump of bread. *When perfume is being mixed, it may lose its sweetness if little bugs fall into the mixture and die. Likewise, a man who is admired for his wisdom and honor loses the respect of others when a little foolishness enters his heart and abides there.*

14:8b The folly of fools is that they trust in deceit and attempt to attain to happiness at the expense of the happiness of others. *A foolish man scorns the right ways of God; it is exciting to him to stir up trouble and to cause damage.* The very notion that there is such a thing as sin is a joke to those who are foolish. *While a prudent man is aware of the coming wrath and escapes it by submitting to the will of God, the unwise man pays no heed to God's warnings, walks arrogantly on, and is punished.* There is nothing that fools understand rightly. God withholds His wrath because He is merciful and longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, *but fools confuse God's patience with permission. When God is silent at their sin, they assume that He is just like them, sanctioning their iniquity.*

2Pet. 3:9 When a scorner is removed from a situation, the whole picture changes. Peace and harmony are restored, and good conduct is no longer ridiculed. *One who scorns decency and order is an abomination to good men because his very thoughts are sinful; such thoughts are a detriment to peace and happiness and are hated by the upright.*

17:24 Some fools flatter themselves because of their intellectual powers; they think that wisdom is the ability to comprehend and to pontificate upon exotic and complicated philosophies. What foolishness all of that is! They are blind to the truth that is right in front of them as they strain their intellect to cogitate over abstruse, esoteric thoughts. They stumble over the simple truth and do not even recognize it. Wisdom will open your eyes to see life as the Creator sees it and to learn of Him through what you see; it will enable you to live well and to deal with life's circumstances in a prudent manner. *The wisdom for which the prudent strive is the wisdom to discern*

14:8a

16:20 *the right way to live, for that way alone leads to happiness. They understand that if they deal with their situations wisely, trusting steadfastly in God, the results will be good, and they will be made happy. For this reason, every man with an understanding heart loves righteousness and walks in it.*

15:21b
13:19
21:16
29:1
15:10
15:12

Life is sweet to souls who refuse evil and find the right way. In spite of seeing others blessed for doing good, however, fools cannot bear to depart from evil to walk on the path that leads to true happiness. *Fools choose death rather than understanding.* No matter how often they are warned, fools would rather be destroyed than learn, and they will be. *When a foolish man wanders from the right way, it becomes difficult for him to humble himself and receive correction, even if he knows that death is the penalty for rejecting reproof.* And once such a man's heart becomes hardened, and he becomes scornful toward the ways of God, he no longer can love those who give him wise counsel. Instead, he goes to other fools for his advice because he knows what the wise will say, and he doesn't want to hear it.

THE HONOR OF GOVERNMENT

24:7
26:1
13:16b
26:6
26:8
27:3
17:12

A fool can neither appreciate nor use wisdom. That is why, when God loves a people, He does not give them fools as their judges. Honor given to a fool is like snowfall in the middle of summer. It is out of place, and even if it comes, it will not last *because a fool's own conduct proves to everyone that he is indeed a fool.* Trusting a fool to deliver an important message is like cutting off your feet before running a race. Trusting a fool with any important business is like drinking a cup of damage.

Honor bestowed upon a fool is like a loaded gun given to a mad man. To lift a large rock is difficult, and a load of sand is heavy, too, but to bear up under the wrath of a fool who is given authority is more difficult to bear than either. *When he feels free to be himself, it is more dangerous to have a fool in your house than a mother bear whose cubs have been taken from her.*

THE STUBBORNNESS OF A FOOL

27:22
19:29
26:3 &
10:13b

Under no circumstances will a fool be separated from his foolishness. If you were to throw a fool into a big bucket and clobber him with a sledge hammer until every bone in his body was broken, still, when he recovered from the beating, he would be a fool. *God decided to have a Judgment Day, and He created suffering, just for fools.* As bridles and whips were made specifically for horses and mules, so rods of correction were created for the backs of foolish people. *For all that, however, chastisement does not benefit*

17:10 *a fool. Just a word of warning will enter into a wise man's heart and correct him; just one warning is sufficient to turn him from a wrong path. But even if you beat a fool with a hundred lashes, he will still say and do foolish things.* He may for a time attempt to behave wisely, but goodness will not

26:11 make him happy; he will return to his foolishness, just as a dog returns to his own vomit to lick it up again. *Man's heart is his home, and regardless of*

27:8 *how far down a pathway different from his heart a man may wander, he will always return to live as his heart directs.* Foolishness is the joy of a fool's

15:21a heart; it is his home, and he cannot be content unless he is there, saying or doing something foolish.

23:9 *Do not waste your time trying to guide a fool to the secret pathway to true happiness; wisdom seems foolish to a fool.* The mere attempt to instruct

16:22b a fool is foolishness. *Whether you rail on him or laugh at him, you will be frustrated with your lack of success if you contend with a foolish man. There*

29:9 *is no such thing as reasoning with a fool.* If you quarrel with a fool, you will seem to be just like him to those looking on; yet, there are times when a fool

26:4-5 must be opposed. You will learn when it is time to reprove a fool and when it is time to ignore him.

LISTENING AND TALKING

15:20a *A wise son makes his father happy.* He is prudent and listens to his

15:5b father's instruction, *but a scorner foolishly pays no attention to his father's rebuke* and despises his mother's admonitions. *Poverty and public disgrace*

15:5a & *is God's reward to a young man who ignores the instruction he is given, but*

13:1 *both God and men will honor the young man who obeys his instructors.* The

15:20b final result of rejecting God's counsel is complete and eternal destruction,

13:18 but the reward for those who fear God and obey Him is complete and unending happiness.

13:13

21:8 Human nature, unrestrained, is beastly, and the world will fall at the feet of the man crafty enough to give justification for man's beastly nature to express itself without shame. Still, although it is man's nature to be arrogant and ungodly, some men choose to obey their Creator and walk in the path that He has chosen. *Such men wisely contemplate the ways of the wicked*

21:12a *and their judgments from God,* and because of that, God directs them around the pitfalls into which they have seen the foolish fall. *But no matter how*

21:29b *often the wicked observe the righteous as they are led safely past pitfalls by the Lord,* they harden their hearts against the truth of God *and learn nothing*

11:8a *from what they have witnessed. They walk into the very traps they have seen*

21:29a *the upright evade. There is no hope for a fool.*

11:8b

12:1b & Ps. 73:3, 22
12:15a
(28:26a)
12:15b
28:26b
12:1a

A foolish man hates instruction; his approach to life is no better than that of an animal. He believes that whatever he thinks is right; he is determined to ignore counsel and to make his own way to happiness. (Every fool trusts his own heart more than he trusts God.) A wise man is willing to change course if he finds that he is on the wrong road; he is humble and eager to hear good counsel and is delivered from death because he listens. No one can truly love knowledge without also truly loving instruction. They who love the humbling experience of being taught are they who truly love the exalted privilege of obtaining knowledge.

17:16
15:2b
14:6
15:7b
15:14b
17:7
26:7
26:9

Why does a fool waste his money on tuition for an education? Does he expect that an education will make him wise? Knowledge planted in the heart of a fool is like seed planted in a barren, rocky desert. Even if knowledge is deposited into his hardened heart, the fool cannot use it rightly. Oh, my son, listen carefully to me. The secret to obtaining wisdom is in knowing how to seek it. Wisdom cannot be found in any evil way. Some men who scorn righteousness strive greatly to become wise, but they will never attain to it. Only those who understand how to seek wisdom will ever find it. A fool may be intelligent enough to learn many facts, but he can never attain to true knowledge, nor can he pass such knowledge on to others. The best a fool can do is to spew out erudite foolishness because the mouth of a fool subsists on vain talk. As a lie is out of place in a ruler's mouth, so truth is out of place when proceeding from the mouth of a fool. A ruler errs whenever he lies, and a fool errs whenever he tells the truth.

A fool's parable is like a man with one leg shorter than the other. Whatever he is trying to say is either too much or too little. Whenever he tries to be profound, he makes himself look silly. A fool is as clumsy with a parable as a one-legged man on a tight rope. He wounds himself with his own words, as a drunkard who staggers into a thorn bush trying to walk straight.

Eccl. 10:2-3

Every man holds feelings and thoughts deep in his heart, but only a wise man knows how to control and use them for good. A fool cannot control himself. Even if he desires to be thought of as wise, his words and actions in every situation loudly proclaim to everyone that he is just a fool.

10:19b
17:28
18:2

A wise man is a quiet man. In general, people sense that this is true; therefore, they tend to consider any quiet person to be wise. If he remains silent, even a fool is presumed to be a man of understanding. But fools cannot keep their mouths shut. A fool's multitude of words expose him to be what he is, and he doesn't even mind, for he is not ashamed of foolishness and has no regard for the value of wisdom.

Eccl. 5:3b *A fool's voice is recognized by the multitude of his words.* He runs his
 10:8b, 10b mouth so much that he cannot hear instructions, and then he makes a mess
 of his life. *His words stir up strife where there is none, and he deserves the*
 18:6 *contempt and harm that come his way.* He ruins his own life with
 19:3 foolishness, and afterward he angrily frets against the Lord as if he were
 mistreated, *but a fool's blabbing mouth is his own destruction; his lips are*
 18:7 *the snare of his soul.* He does not govern his mouth; rather, he submissively
 10:14b follows his own tongue to the slippery brink of hell. *My son, foolishness*
 and sin are ever present in a multitude of words. No one can talk all the
 10:19a *time without lying. Spare your words, and spare your soul much trouble.*
 17:27a *A man who possesses true knowledge is a man of few words.* He listens
 10:14a and stores up knowledge, *and when young men who are searching for*
 10:13a *wisdom meet him, they find in his lips the wisdom they have longed for.* He
 11:30b guides those who are traveling in darkness to the right way, *correcting them*
 12:18 *without humiliating them, healing their lives while avoiding the cruel, sharp*
 tones of proud fools. The soul that takes heed to the voice of a prudent man
 15:31 will in time stand with him in honored glory among the wise.
 If you discover that an instructor has no knowledge of God, get away
 14:7 from him. *Do not be so naive as to think that you can continually listen to a*
 fool's words without them affecting you. Even if you know that what
 19:27 *someone is teaching is wrong, his words can turn your heart from the right*
 way if you persist in drinking them in. Do not be deceived; ungodly
 1Cor. 15:33 associations will corrupt a pure heart.
 15:7a Only a wise man can disperse knowledge of the right path to those who
 15:2a hear him *because only a wise man understands how to use knowledge in a*
 way that truly benefits others. The man who disperses true knowledge
 19:8a sincerely loves others, and the man who sincerely receives such knowledge
 loves himself. *But the man who refuses instruction is doubly a fool; he*
 15:32a *hates himself as well as his instructor.*
 A wise man acknowledges his dependence upon God and remains meek
 11:2 before Him, but pride makes a man stubborn and brings him into disgrace.
 The wise man also acknowledges his need of help from others, and he listens
 13:10 &
 10:8a *to instructions. Because he is not proud, he does not bicker with those who*
 admonish him; on the contrary, he humbly receives correction. Correction
 25:12 is like an ornament of gold to a wise man's soul. And when one godly man
 reproves another, they both are made richer. Such an example of receiving
 reproof is a welcome sight to those who are seeking the right way.
 22:17 The first step toward obtaining wisdom is to forsake your own vain
 thoughts and to humbly and carefully listen to a wise man. *The road to*

10:17a *happiness is the road of receiving instruction.* There is a highway that
14:12 & seems right to man, but at the end of it is eternal death. And there is a
16:25 pathway that seems wrong to man, but at the end of it is everlasting life.
13:14 *The basic law by which the wise live is “listen and learn”. Obeying this law*
10:29b *brings them happiness and protects them from eternal death* because every
14:15 *evil doer will perish. At the same time, though counsel is good, and no one*
will ever find true happiness without it, only a simpleton believes every bit
of advice he is given. A prudent man carefully screens all the criticism and
counsel that is offered to him.

23:12 Make every effort from your heart to be teachable; labor to be able to
19:20 hear and to grasp sound instruction. *Take counsel when you need it, so that*
22:18 *as you grow older, you will also grow wiser.* When that begins to happen,
10:17b words of wisdom will seem pleasant to your soul, and in not too long a time,
your lips, too, will be able to instruct others in the wisdom of God. *Those*
who will not receive correction are making a terrible mistake; they are on
the wrong road, and they will never find true happiness.

18:15 The ear of a wise man seeks for truth and knowledge, and his heart
20:5 seizes upon it when it is found. *But good counsel is not easy to find. It is*
12:23 *like cool, clean water hidden deep in the heart of the wise, but those of an*
14:33 *understanding heart will find ways to draw it up.* A foolish man babbles on
29:11 and on about everything he knows (or thinks he knows), but a prudent man
16:21b keeps his knowledge to himself, *for wisdom in a man’s heart is content to*
rest there quietly until someone comes who is sincerely and earnestly
looking for it. But there is nothing in the heart of a fool that remains
unknown for long. A fool blurts out whatever he is thinking, but a wise man
refrains his tongue until it can do some good.

16:21b The tone of your voice signals to others your attitude toward instruction.
By using a gentle, humble tone, you invite the wise to give you guidance.
14:3a *Arrogant young people speak sarcastically about instruction, as if*
instructors are their enemies. How foolish that is! Their greatest enemy is
their own ignorance, and instructors are there to help them escape it and to
find the hidden pathway to happiness. They hate anyone who attempts to
14:16 correct them, as they swagger confidently onward toward the Pit. Wise
14:3b young people understand that instructors are God’s servants, sent to help
16:23 them find the right way. They fear God and do good; *they speak respectfully*
to those in authority over them and avoid a thousand heartaches. You show
yourself to be wise when you instruct your lips to speak humbly, and the
wisdom you then receive from others will soon proceed out of your own
mouth.

21:22 A wise man sees through this world's delusions, and he fearlessly
exposes them as powerless to bring eternal happiness to anyone. *A wise
24:5-6 man has true strength, the kind that only increases with age. His wars are
never lost because they are never fought hastily or without wise counsel. He
understands that in much counsel there is safety,* and by taking wise
13:16a counsel, he is assured that all his efforts are guided by the knowledge of
God. *At the beginning of any significant endeavor, bow your ear to the
wisdom of righteous men. No endeavor will fail when the guidance of a
15:22 multitude of wise counselors is received, and no endeavor can succeed when
the counsel of wisdom is refused.* Everyone who makes ill-considered
19:2b decisions is on the wrong road because righteousness comes from both
listening to the upright and patiently following their counsel. *Every man
11:14 who refuses to heed wise counsel will fail in his pursuit of happiness.
Happiness is found only in the well-advised way.*

SHORT CUTS

20:1 When God's glory and power overshadow a man, he may stagger and
even fall prostrate upon the ground. Drunkenness can cause a man to act in
a similar manner, but that is just a mockery of the overwhelming glory of
God. All sin is a mockery of God's glory. The world promotes sin to young
people as a short cut to happiness, but those short cuts have never brought
lasting happiness to anyone. You can either trust God for a spouse and
(Heb. 13:4) rejoice with her (*for the marriage bed is undefiled*), or you can take the
world's short cut to happiness: fornication. But doing so will not make you
happy. You can work hard and honestly and save your money, or you can
take the world's short cut and steal from others in order to have money for
food and clothing. My son, take none of the short cuts offered to you by
this perverse world. There is only one road that leads to happiness; all other
ways end in confusion, sorrow, and death, though they are trusted by many
as sure and easy ways to happiness. Submit yourself to the glory of God
and be filled with His Spirit; do not resort to the world's substitutes for His
glory: blissful drunkenness. The passions which strong drink sets afire are
short-lived, and the deeds done in that state are always regretted. Nobody
but a fool pursues such shallow, delusive experiences. Take no short cuts!

REWARDS

10:21 A fool perishes because he lacks knowledge, even though while he
lived, he was surrounded by righteous men who openly proclaimed the
15:32b truth, *but the son who receives reproof will become a man of understanding.*

10:23b The world has honored many a fool as being a man of great understanding, but a man of understanding walks in the way of wisdom. *Be patient; do not let such events fret you. In time, every fool becomes servant to the wise.*

11:29 And in time, the wise shall be justly commended and forever blessed by the Blessed One while the perverse shall be forever held in contempt by Him.

12:8 My son, it is not honorable to be honored by those who dishonor God, and praise from the perverse in heart is a reproach. Flee from the favor of fools, and seek earnestly the honor that comes from God alone.

Jn. 5:44 *A man who walks with wise men will himself become wise, and the man who keeps company with fools will be destroyed with them after a while.*

13:20 A fool inherits foolishness from the fools who went before him and feels blessed to have inherited it, but wise men bequeath to those who follow in their footsteps the high honor of possessing the knowledge of God. *This is the enduring wealth of wise men, a crown which the prudent desire and obtain, but the treasure of fools is their foolishness.*

14:18

14:24

17:27b The wise man's spirit is of a superior quality to the spirits around him. *He understands that eternal life comes only from above and that, in pursuing the higher life, he will escape the damnation of hell.*

15:24 He longs for wisdom, dedicates his heart to it, and separates himself from those who do not want it. *And because the wise man understands this, God's favor rests upon him; he is admitted into God's storehouse of wisdom and is enamored of its beauty. Because he adheres to the understanding he receives, he is blessed with eternal happiness.*

18:1a

13:15a

18:1b

19:8b

22:19-21 The knowledge and the counsel I am giving you is superior to anything you will find on earth, and I am telling you these things for three reasons. First, so that you will not place your trust in things that can never make you happy, but that your trust might be in God, who alone grants eternal happiness to good men. Second, that you might be certain of what is right and wrong. And third, that you might be able to give to others the truth that I am giving to you. *When you have attained to wisdom, my son, you will enjoy it as you do the taste of honey. It will be difficult for you to find enough of it once you have learned its value, for you will know within your heart that the knowledge of wisdom will not disappoint you and that it will without fail guide you into everlasting happiness.*

24:13-14

Chapter 5

THE HUMBLE AND THE PROUD

16:18 &
29:23a
17:19b
16:5a
15:25a

The road of pride is a broad but crowded road that brings all who travel on it to sorrow and destruction. A proud man is like a turtle on a busy highway, boasting in the strength of his shell. *Pride is a prayer for punishment. People who are proud are virtually begging the Almighty to destroy them; their pride is like a malodorous incense rising heavenward from their hearts, petitioning their Maker for death and destruction.* God always hears and answers such prayers because He abhors proud people. *He will lay waste all their possessions, and their expectations of prosperity and peace will come to nothing.*

28:11
18:23
12:9

Great wealth tends to give men an exalted opinion of themselves; however, a poor wise man will expose the rich man's vanity. *The rich speak haughtily to those around them because they think they have no need of others, while the poor speak politely because they are at a disadvantage.* But you do not have to be wealthy to become proud. Even in poverty, some men become puffed up with a false sense of self-importance. The upright man who is despised, yet has a servant, is happier than the man who is full of self-importance but has none. Choose the right way; it is better to be happy, even if men hate you, than to be cursed by God and praise yourself.

26:12
21:4
16:5b

As I told you before, the aspirations of a fool for happiness are vain, and a fool's pursuit of honor is useless; still, there is more hope for a fool than for a proud man. *I warn you, my son; God loathes a proud man! So vehemently does God hate pride that He considers it a sin even to dress or to speak so as to make it appear that you are better than others. Do not even allow an expression of superiority to surface upon your face!* If all the people on earth were to join together in defense of pride, God would utterly destroy them all; there is no safety in numbers from the wrath of God.

BOASTING

25:14
20:6

Some men think that if they claim to have something from God, then they have it. This is foolish. Boasting of a gift from God does not make it so. The man who boasts of a gift that God has not given him is like a dark cloud that blows in like a strong storm but then produces no rain; he disappoints those who trust in him and ends up looking like a fool. *Most men speak more highly of themselves than the truth would allow. They trust the path of self-exaltation to lead them to happiness. It is extremely difficult*

- 27:1-2 *to find a man who sees himself as he is and leaves no false impressions with others concerning his worth. Do not be like them, my son Do not brag. Why boast before men of how wise or talented or good you are? Just live your life and let others praise you, if anyone does. Why risk your future happiness attempting to impress people? Can people give you happiness? If someone praises you, let it be anyone but yourself, preferably a stranger whom you have never met and whom you may never see again. Do not become a braggart, my son! Of what do you have to boast? You may not even wake up tomorrow morning. Everything is in the hands of God, who despises proud people. But even praise from the lips of others, from even the best of your friends, can be a burden; neither desire it nor put your trust in it. Praise from others, although sincerely offered, can put your heart through a fiery test, which many have failed. And the loftiest praise often produces the hottest fire.*
- 27:21 *Do not puff yourself up to pursue any high position. Pride is the way to disgrace and disappointment because the honors that men give, they can also take away at their convenience. If, in your efforts to obtain praise and honor from men, you are humiliated, those whose praise you sought will not care that you are hurting. They will show no compassion on you at all.*
- 25:6-7 & 11:2a *Listen to me, my son, for there is safety in my speech. The earthly glory that proud men covet for themselves is not real glory; it is fool's gold. But even if it were worth something, too much of anything is too much, and those who hoard up great earthly wealth and stature are certain to become spiritually sick because of it. The world may envy and praise such men while they live, but their souls will become emaciated through avarice, and they will die unprepared to meet their Maker.*
- 25:27 *A little humility will benefit a man more than a lot of pride, for humility leads the way to the honor that comes from God. The road of humility and fear of God leads to real happiness: eternal life, enduring riches, and everlasting honor. Man is not able either to obtain these blessings or to make them secure by his own power. Trusting in military might, men have attempted to protect their possessions and secure happiness for themselves and their children, but, in time, all such efforts fail because safety is only of the Lord. He alone is able to make men truly happy and secure. He protects the possessions of the humble widow from wicked and powerful men, for the security and happiness God promises to those who trust Him are not just for the future; the honor God bestows on the humble upholds them through every trouble they face while they are yet living on earth.*
- 15:33b
- 22:4
- 21:31
- 29:23b

18:12 Fearing the wrath of God that will certainly fall upon the proud, and desiring the blessings with which God will reward the humble, wise men choose the path of humility over everything this world can offer them. *All*

11:2b *wise men, whether rich or poor, fear God and cling to humility.* Consequently, they live peacefully with others because strife can arise only

13:10a where pride exists. *Without even trying, a proud man stirs up strife*

28:25a *wherever he goes, but an humble man lives in peace with those around him and is happy.*

Chapter 6

THE MERCIFUL AND THE CRUEL

- 14:21 *Contempt for a neighbor who is in need is a mark of cruel, sinful pride; it is the man who shows compassion on a needy neighbor who has found the path to true happiness. If you refuse to speak out for the poor and oppressed when the wealthy and powerful are taking from him his few blessings from God, if it inconveniences you too much to help an innocent person who is being unjustly condemned to die, if you excuse yourself after his death by saying, “I didn’t know what was happening”, or “I didn’t know what to say”, do you not know that He who created your heart knows what is in it? Do you not know that He who gives you your breath knows what you are saying? Or do you think that He, like man, will fail in His duty to judge righteously and render to all according to the deeds they have done—or failed to do? No, my son, He will bring every one of your deeds into judgment. And He will have no need to call witnesses to determine the truth of a matter, for He knows every thought that passes through man’s mind. He will certainly cause you and everyone else to reap exactly as you have sown. His justice is perfect in every way; He is incapable of error. Listen, my son. If you refuse to help a needy person, God will plague your life with many curses, but if you give to the poor, you will always have enough for yourself.*
- 24:11-12
- 28:27
- 14:31 & 17:5a
- 21:13
- 17:5a
- 19:17
- 22:9 & 2Cor. 9:7
- 22:9
- 17:5b
- You see, a man’s true attitude toward his Creator is revealed in his conduct toward those who are in need. A man who loves God cares for the poor, and a man who secretly hates God despises them. *Whoever covers his ears at the plaintiff cries of the poor will himself cry out for help but will not be heard.* The attempt to increase riches at the expense of the poor is a mockery of the plight of the poor, and mockery of the poor is taken by God as a personal insult.
- When you give to those who are unable to give to you, you are making a loan to God, who pays high interest on His debts and has never failed to repay a loan.* So, generously share your bounty from God with those who are in need, and God will generously share His bounty with you. Give to the poor with joy, for God loves a cheerful giver, being one Himself. *God will bless the man who is generous, the man who refuses to hoard up goods for himself when a poor person near him is in need.*
- One who is glad when someone else is hurting is offering a prayer to God for his own pain, and God will certainly fulfill that petition. If you rejoice when someone else is being punished by God, you are saying to God

that you enjoy the sight of suffering, and He will see to it that you are given plenty of it to enjoy. *Do not vex the soul of the brokenhearted with levity and song; it adds bitterness to their misery. It is like taking away someone's coat on a cold, windy day, or pouring vinegar on niter. Listen, my son. The pain that God inflicts upon any man is sufficient; add nothing to it.*

25:20

When someone does evil to you, and then God causes him to reap what he has sown, do not be glad at his suffering and loss. Remember that you too are weak. It will greatly displease the Lord for you to gloat over the pain and hardship of sinners whom He chastens for their wrongdoing. And if you thus provoke the Lord, He may turn His wrath from your enemy and bring it upon you instead, for God is far more concerned with keeping His own household in order than with correcting the wicked. *If you would belong to God and be happy, then love your enemies. Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who treat you with cruelty and persecute you.* If someone has done evil against you, leave vengeance completely in the hands of the One who knows all things. In doing so, you will demonstrate to God that you trust Him to be your Avenger, and He will all the more zealously avenge you, pouring coals of fire, so to speak, upon the head of the wicked and pouring out blessings upon you. *You can trust God. Be patient and wait for Him. Do not take His matters into your own hands. Never say, "I'll avenge the wrong that has been done to me." Wait on the Lord. Let Him defend you.*

24:17-18

Mt. 5:44

25:21-22

20:22 & Ps. 27:14

16:27

11:20a

14:2b

13:5b

13:12

15:30a

14:13

Lk. 4:18

15:13b

15:15a

An ungodly man researches old records to unearth past transgressions. His lips burn with a yearning to ruin the reputation of others by spreading rumors concerning sins which they may have committed in the past. The Lord despises the man who is arrogant and harsh with others, and such a man, deep in his perverse heart, despises God. Unknown to him, his ungodly ways are loathed by God and will lead him to open humiliation. The chasm of sarcasm is deep, and the soul whose tongue digs it will himself be cast into its suffocating depths.

Disappointment sickens the heart, but hope that is realized renews the heart's love of life and fills it with joy. A heart that is grieved cannot escape its grief by pretending to be happy, for when the laughter ceases, the pain always returns. Only God can mend a broken heart, and when someone comes to Him for mercy, healing the heart is His first concern. Some experiences in life are extraordinarily difficult to bear. Pray to escape them, and be kind to those who do not. Unrelieved sorrow can completely discourage someone's spirit. To those who are constantly suffering, there is nothing new in a new day. To them, dawn is a dreaded event, for they know

18:14 it will only bring more grief to their afflicted lives. *God created man with a spirit that can for a long time endure great sorrow of heart, but once a man's spirit is broken, it renders him helpless to bear life's burden.* When

17:22b someone's spirit is broken, his health deteriorates, and his whole life begins to fall apart.

15:13a Merriment in the heart expresses itself on the countenance, and *a person with a merry heart has a continual feast within himself.* His merry heart

15:15b acts as a medicine for his whole body. *Not everything that gives people joy*

17:22a *is good for them, however. A foolish man is made joyful by foolishness. You*

15:21a *must yourself be good in order for what is good to give you joy.* To the wise,

19:10 a fool's joy seems absurd. It is as unseemly for a fool to be happy as it would be for an ignorant, inebriated vagrant to be king.

19:22a What a man desires determines how gentle he is to others. If he desires the favor of God above all else, he will be merciful to others as he pursues it. If he desires anything of earth more than he desires the favor of God, he will be inconsiderate and unkind to others in his quest for it. Love for God enables a man to be like Him, for it opens the door to be loved and made whole by God. *No one can say, "I have cleansed my own heart from the stain of my sin." No, my son, God is the only one who knows how to make us happy and good.*

20:9

Chapter 7

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

SHORT CUTS

- 10:9a
11:30a
12:28
13:15b
- Because the way of an upright man is God's way, it is safe. *Those who walk with a righteous man are enriched by the experience, for they enjoy with him the sweetness of his way.* In the path of righteousness is unending life; death cannot touch it. *But the path of sin is a hard path, fraught with trouble.*
- 16:29
19:2b
12:12
17:11
13:21a
- Wicked men entice others to join them in their ungodliness with vain promises of happiness in sin. *They know how to pressure others into making ill-considered, hasty decisions, and those who do so are ensnared by evil.* Wicked men leave the impression that their ways will lead to happiness, and their vain speeches attract those whose hearts are impure, but the way of God's commandments is the only way that leads to happiness. *Because evil men believe that there is a path to happiness that circumvents God's commandments, they waste their whole lives searching for it, and because they spend their lives pursuing sin, cruel angels are sent to visit them.* Misery and destruction pursue in a circle of death all those who pursue happiness apart from God.
- 11:18
12:10
- A wicked man cunningly labors to make his evil works appear to be good, but they are not, and the happiness he hopes to gain by deceit is reserved by God for those whose work is truly good. *When a man is righteous, righteousness is expressed in everything he does. A righteous man is kind even to his animals. Likewise, everything a wicked man does is tainted with sin. Be wary of a wicked man most when he appears to be kind and good; such a man always has an ulterior, self-serving motive. Regardless of his smooth words, there is no concern whatsoever in his heart for your welfare, and once he obtains what he wants from you, you will mean no more to him than dirt.*
- 28:10
29:24a
25:26
- If a wicked man persuades one of God's children to follow him toward a cleverly hidden trap, he himself will fall into it, and the Lord will lead His sorrowful, errant child back to the right way and bless him. *However, the child of God who is deceived by a thief's promise of quick happiness and then consents to his wicked way despises his own soul; he is throwing away his hope of eternal life and happiness.* When a righteous man receives the counsel of the ungodly and follows it, wickedness is given credibility. Innocent souls are placed in peril because they trust the righteous man's

14:14 judgment and follow his example. *The man who is taught the right ways of the Lord and then turns away from them will himself be turned away by the Lord when he cries out for help, but God's rewards for faithfulness will completely satisfy the upright man.*

28:4 & Rom. 1:32 & Eph. 5:11
28:5 In time, those who are unfaithful to their covenant with God become perverse; they take pleasure in the wicked and promote the way of transgression. Those who love God are faithful to the covenant; they withstand the wicked and reprove the works of darkness. *Neither those who have forsaken the right way nor those who have never walked in it understand the judgments of the Lord, but the upright acknowledge the righteousness of the judgments that God executes in the earth.*

A SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

11:20b
14:2a
14:27
16:6b
19:23 The righteous man's integrity pleases God; *he fears Him*, and the fear of God produces in his heart life-giving thoughts and desires. It creates a hatred for the paths of sin *and prevents the upright from wandering off the safe path.* The man whose heart fears God has a sense for what leads toward eternal life, and he is content with where his heart leads him, knowing that he is safe from evil. To produce fruit does not strain the vineyard, and to do good does not strain the upright in heart. It is not necessary to try to be what one already is; it is the struggle to be what one is not that burdens the soul. Be good, and you will do good. We are faithful to God only as we are faithful to good. The principal goal of wisdom is not to make men theologically correct but to make them good.

11:3a
11:5a
11:6a
11:19a
10:16a
4:18 Even when the way is unclear, a righteous man's heart senses the direction of the secret pathway to happiness, and he chooses that way. He doesn't have to think about it, for it is his nature to do what is good. *Every heart that is perfect with God is guided by an unseen hand, one that is felt, not seen (to ignore your feelings is unwise),* and the purity of an upright man's heart delivers him, for it is repulsed by invitations to wander off the right path. *The integrity of an upright man causes him to make right choices even when he is confused concerning which path to take.* Everything a righteous man does tends to make the pathway to happiness clearer for him, *and as he goes along, the pathway grows brighter and brighter for him until he rests in peace with God.*

21:12b
21:7 The reason God punishes the wicked is because of their evil deeds; if they would receive His correction and turn from wickedness, He would accept them. *But the wicked cling to the goods they have stolen as if those things had been given to them by God. They know they have done wrong,*

11:3b *but they despise their precious, God-given opportunities to make things right. Their stubborn refusal to repent and restore the goods they have stolen is what really destroys them. It is their own twisted, unjust way of living that leads transgressors to the inescapable torments of the Pit. They stumble headlong into trouble because of their own stubborn wickedness. In*
 11:5b *transgressing God's commandments, their own naughtiness ensnares them.*
 11:6b *They need no enemies; their own sins work against them. Whatever the*
 13:6b *wicked do—without them even having to think about it—leads to further ungodliness; their spirits are corrupt; they carry in their very breath the disease of sin. The heart of the wicked is simply not worth much.*
 10:16b
 10:20b

RESULTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WICKEDNESS

14:30a *Among the many benefits of righteousness is that it makes the whole*
 10:29a *body healthier and produces strength for the soul, but the envious nature of*
 14:30b *sinner devours their health and peace like a cancer. A man who steadfastly*
 13:6a *lives a life of righteousness cannot be deceived or destroyed; not only is he*
 11:21b *himself protected by the Lord but his children also will escape many troubles because he trusts in God.*

10:28 *The wicked do not anticipate the destruction that God plans for them because they do not believe what God has said, but the righteous man's desire for happiness will be realized. The ungodly may expect blessings in the afterlife, but it will not come to pass; the hope of eternal blessing that the unrighteous hold perishes with them when they die. Trusting in one's own ways is like hiding from a raging fire in a storehouse filled with olive oil. The righteous is protected by God in this life and will be saved from the days of wrath that are to come, but the sinner will be suddenly and mercilessly destroyed. The just reward of fools and sinners is God's business alone; you are completely free to keep your mind on your own business and to pursue eternal happiness.*
 11:7
 28:18
 26:10

11:19b *Those who pursue an evil course are pursuing their own destruction. In time, the situation is reversed. Instead of them pursuing sin and death, sin and death begin to pursue them, and they will not escape. Destruction will be their reward from God. They will be filled with trouble as surely as those who pursue peace and goodness will live forever in God's loving favor. The righteous man's trust in the Lord will be proved right when God fills him to overflowing with happiness. He will receive his due reward, and nothing shall be lacking to him. It will be impossible for anyone to take from the upright the happiness that God has promised them, and it will be quite impossible to rescue the wicked from damnation when they face God in the Judgment. Remember this, my son; mark it well. Do not think that it is safe*
 11:27b
 21:15b
 12:21b
 11:27a
 28:25b
 13:21b
 10:30

11:21a & Ex. 23:2a to commit a sin because a multitude of people are doing so. If every person on earth chooses the path of wickedness, then every person on earth will be damned. There is no safety in numbers.

22:8 *In the field of iniquity, nothing of any lasting value is produced, even if the ungodly labor assiduously in their tasks. Sinners may angrily argue their case and demand much for their hard work, but their demands and their works will amount to nothing. The Creator is not intimidated by them.*

17:20a Nothing that an arrogant person hopes for will come to pass; all his dreams of happiness will end in nightmarish torment. *The sinful man may for a while gloat over his earthly success, but the brightness of his smile will dim when he watches all of his successes crumble into dust and sees the righteous man's joy shining steadily on his countenance.*

13:9

14:9b *The favor of God, my son, is found among those who are righteous. His blessings crown the just, but the cruel sufferings that afflict the wicked leave them speechless and ashamed. Do not be confused. Every circumstance in the life of the upright man is a part of God's plan for his eternal blessing, so let it be your joy to know simply that you are always doing the right thing. Regardless of any present circumstances, the righteous man holds in his heart the comforting knowledge that lasting peace and blessing are his because he wants nothing but what is good in God's sight; at the same time, the wicked man's heart senses that the day of God's wrath is coming upon him.*

10:6

12:21a

21:15a

11:23

10:24

12:3b

18:10

12:3a

28:1a

14:26a

28:1b

28:25b

29:6

29:25

28:14

You can rest assured that the good man's desires shall be granted in full and that the evil man's fear shall fully come upon him.

The Lord, in whom the righteous trust, is like a rock that cannot be moved. *He is an impregnable fortress to those who trust in Him.* But the wicked, trusting as they do in houses made of straw, never feel secure; *their guilty conscience makes them fearful even if no one is pursuing them.* In time, those who trust in the Rock are made like the Rock. Their confidence becomes unshakable; *they are completely unmoved by the vanities of multitudes of ungodly men;* their souls overflow with God's blessing. *So confident do they become whose hearts trust in God that they sing and rejoice as they walk past the most artfully disguised snares of the wicked. They enjoy, here and now, foretastes of the eternal happiness that awaits them at the end of the way.* They do not fear men; they trust in God and are safe. Whoever fears men commits sin, for that is the will of men; but whoever fears God does not sin, for that is the will of God. *The righteous fear of God will keep a man happy, while those who do not fear God follow paths that are full of trouble.*

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION

- 18:3
15:8a
28:9
21:27
21:4
15:8b
28:12a
12:20a
12:13
13:5a
16:6a &
Job 31:33
28:13b
28:13a
- Regardless of what the wicked do, God is displeased with them. God despises an ungodly man even when he worships Him. Son, if you refuse to obey God's voice, you will make even your prayer an abomination to the Lord. It is righteousness that makes worship worth anything. Praise without obedience is nothing more than flattery, and God is not a sucker for flattery, as some men are. Moreover, as much as God despises the worship offered to Him by the ungodly, He is even more provoked when an ungodly man's worship is part of some clever, evil scheme. God abhors the wicked man's confidence, his self-exalted attitude, and even his hopes for the future. It is the prayer of the upright that God desires, and when righteous men rejoice together before the Lord, there is joy both in heaven and on earth.*
- The curse of liars is to believe their own lies; the ones whom liars deceive most are themselves. In vain do liars hope that deceit will bring them happiness. A wicked man's trust in sinful ways entraps him; he becomes incurably addicted to vain efforts to become happy, and God will not set him free. But when the just and faithful man is in difficulties, God delivers him because that man, like God, hates lies and will not resort to deceit in an effort to obtain happiness.*
- Sin is purged from the heart by mercy and truth. The greatest error is the one still being made, for whoever confesses his sins and turns from them will obtain abundant mercy from God, and his sins will be forgotten. But those who try to hide their guilt in their breast like Adam will be found out, as he was, and will be punished. The way of truth is not something merely to be believed; it is a thing to be done.*

SCHEMES

- 14:22
16:30
28:17
- Men who devise unrighteous schemes are making a huge mistake, for the way to lasting happiness is revealed only to those who meditate on ways to do good. Even in their sleep, ungodly men labor to devise means to attain to happiness without God, and when they awake, they craft their words to set their evil schemes into motion. But even after successfully accomplishing his cruel plan against the innocent, a wicked man finds no peace; his heart trembles with fear of being discovered and held accountable for his deeds. God always makes certain that the path that such a man takes in his flight from justice leads down into the Pit. Do not meddle with God's judgment; let it happen.*

24:8 *An essential element of an evil schemer's plan is to maintain a high-profile appearance of goodness, but he will eventually be exposed to be the mischievous person he really is; it is not possible for him to escape forever the revealing light of truth. And if his foul plans are discovered before he can execute them, he may laugh, pretending that his scheme was intended only as a prank. Do not trust him. His heart is as inclined toward ruining others as a raging madman with cruel weapons in his hands.*

21:10 *An ungodly man's soul longs for sin, and he is determined to satisfy that longing even if it means hurting those nearest to him and losing everything worth having. His reward will be interminable terror; God will snatch the upright from the clutches of death and cast the wicked instead into the ravenous chambers of everlasting torment. Scheming to do evil to others is like pushing a huge boulder up an increasingly steep mountain; it is like digging a pitfall outside your own front door. The wicked will have their own violence and cruelty forced down their throats; they will be made to swallow the bitter, burning fruit of their own ungodly deeds.*

11:29a *The road of rebellion and frowardness leads through thickets of thorns and deadly pitfalls, but there are no such dangers on the right path. The pathway that leads to lasting happiness is a pleasant path (though lonely at times) that leads away from danger, sin, and disgrace. The one who single-mindedly perseveres along that pathway will save his soul from many a heartache. When you keep the commandment, you keep your soul from death, but the one who is careless in choosing his path will surely die. Wicked men do not lay their snares in a haphazard manner; they care deeply about accomplishing their wicked purposes, and you must take equal care to avoid them.*

USE OF WORDS

10:20a *The words of a righteous man are as precious as the purest silver. He considers carefully the effect his words might have on others before he allows words to proceed out of his mouth; his words generate life in those who hear him. The simple wisdom of the righteous is constantly and freely offered, like good food for the soul, to all; and when a righteous man speaks, souls who are hungry for truth are satisfied. The righteous man makes the wisdom of God understandable to those who sincerely desire it; but fools, claiming to be hungry for wisdom, will scorn to taste of it. Their pompous souls starve to death in a vain pursuit of profundity. There is something within the spirit of a righteous man that senses how to speak so as to please God and bless people; and because the righteous man's heart is*

15:29b pure, God rewards him by having compassion on him when he prays. God satisfies him even as he has satisfied other needy souls.

10:10a A wicked man, having no fear of God, speaks peaceably to a trusting victim while sending secret signals to an accomplice. *By one means or another he brings sorrow and strife to every person who trusts him.* But the loss and sadness that his crafty tongue causes others will someday come crashing down upon his own arrogant, unsuspecting head, and he will find no comfort in anything. *In that day, he will beg for relief from his distress, but God will not answer. When the wicked man's tearful eyes turn upward, he will find no way of escape from his suffering, for God is determined to reward the wicked man for his cruelty by cruelly ignoring him in his distress. The cruel man will plead in vain for deliverance from his suffering because it is God's wrath, not man's, that holds him fast.* No one can snatch the upright from God's mighty hand, and no one can rescue the wicked from it.

6:12-14
17:20

15:29a

Jn. 10:29;
Heb. 10:31

11:9 Even if you know he is unrighteous and wrong, his evil words will affect your heart if you continue to listen. *The wicked will mercilessly set up innocent people to be plundered and murdered.* Through self-serving counsel, which may appear altruistic, *wicked men can even bring about the collapse of whole societies.* However, those who trust the counsel of righteous men and shun evil companions will escape every snare that the wicked lay, no matter how cleverly they disguise them.

12:6a
12:5b
11:11b
12:6b

1Jn. 3:7 *Never forget this, my young son: only those who do good are good. Do not be fooled by fair speeches.* Many an impressive oration has been delivered by unprincipled men, and wanton women are seldom wanting for words. The wicked have learned how to shape their speech so as to gain the confidence of souls, but only the simple-minded trust them, for a wicked man's heart is a spiritual cesspool. *His speech infects with the sickness of sin those who listen to him, and it leads them toward a violent, terrifying death.* An evil man's words promote smugness and rebellion; *his words are seeds of strife that he hopes will gain him some advantage over others.* Watch and be patient; God will someday cut out his arrogant, self-assured tongue.

26:23

10:11b
10:23b
16:28a
10:31b

15:28b A wicked man's mouth is known by the ungodliness that floods out of it. *Actually, a wicked man does not even have to speak in order to be abhorrent to God; God despises even a politely quiet wicked person.*

15:26a

ASSOCIATION WITH RICHES

10:2 On a man's deathbed, wealth gained by wickedness will be of no help at
11:4 all, but even death itself cannot harm the one who walks uprightly before
the Lord. *And on the Day of Judgment, it will be righteousness, not earthly
station or wealth, that will save you from eternal damnation.* Just give it
11:28 time; men who trust in temporal treasures will plunge into timeless penury,
but the upright will overflow endlessly with blessings. *Do not fret yourself
when you see the wicked becoming rich. Wicked rich men are unwittingly
13:22b being used by God as they hoard up many goods. At God's direction, they
are gathering those riches in safe places so that He can later confiscate
them for distribution to the upright.*

17:23 One of the ways wicked men seek to pervert justice and to gain unfair
16:19 advantage over others is to offer bribes to those who are in authority. *Their
schemes to enrich themselves may succeed for a while, but in the end, all
people will learn that it is far better to be poor and principled than to be
13:25a super rich and supercilious. The righteous are given enough in this life by
13:22a God, and a good man's descendants are remembered by God after he dies.
13:25b But the wicked man, no matter how wealthy, will see the time when he
10:3 earnestly desires what he can never have. Even here in this life, God
undermines the wicked man's efforts to hold on to great riches, but God
12:7a & upholds the righteous, though he be poor. Everything the wicked manages
14:11a to acquire and build in his short lifetime will come to nothing, but the work
12:7b & of the righteous will prosper, and his possessions will endure.*

14:11b Seek eternal things, my son, and do not envy the wicked for their
24:1 & fleeting successes and prosperity, nor desire to be their friend and
Col. 3:1 companion. *They are perpetually up to no good; their tongues are always
24:2 advancing some new and mischievous scheme. Do not let it irritate you
when an ungodly person escapes justice or is honored or enjoys great
24:19-20 & success in amassing fortunes. Do not envy him because of these things.
Ps. 37:1-2 The only reward that matters is the one that lasts, and he will spend eternity
in a place where there is not one moment of happiness. The brightness and
Ps. 73:3, glory of the wicked is very short-lived, and the man who envies them is no
22 wiser than an animal.*

27:4 Anger can so provoke a man that he becomes unreasonable and inflicts
damage upon another. And wrath is worse still, for it is anger that is set on
fire. It will hardly be put out before it has cruelly scorched a life. But envy
is more destructive than either anger or wrath. If envy invades your heart,
you may commit acts that are crueler than even most sinners would stoop to
commit. *Jealousy is the fear of losing what rightfully belongs to you and is
Cant. 8:6 as cruel as the grave in fighting to keep it. (Even God is jealous over His
&*

Ex. 34:14 *chosen people.) But envy covets what rightfully belongs to others and is more ruthless than death in obtaining it. Guard your heart well against envy, my son; she is the mother of diabolical deeds. Envy is the queen of cruelty.*

22:4a *The man who fears God is both humble and merciful. He fervently pursues righteousness and is blessed not only with righteousness but also with eternal life, enduring riches, and everlasting honor.*
21:21a *A righteous man possesses many true riches such as these, but the unrighteous store up vanity and sorrow for the days ahead.*
21:21b & 22:4b *The wicked are rich in wrath.*

15:6 & Rom. 2:5 *Oh, wicked men! Do not lay your traps for the righteous, to rob them of their goods. Do not break into their homes to harm them and to take what God has given them! You cannot destroy them, though you plunder their homes and abuse them seven times, for God is with them and will raise them up again. And when God casts you into the pit of trouble, as He certainly will, who will act as your Redeemer, to raise you up again and relieve you of your misery?*

24:15-16

LOVE AND HATE

16:31 *How beautiful in the eyes of the Lord is the white hair of an aged man if his time on earth has been spent doing the will of God! As the upright man is dying, he possesses a secure hope of eternal happiness; but as soon as the wicked man's spirit leaves his body, he is driven into hell, far from the merciful presence of God. (You can die without the love of God, but you cannot live without it.) It is a joy to contemplate the life of a righteous man who has died, but the more one reflects upon the life of an ungodly man, the more unsavory his memory becomes.*
14:32 *The death of a wicked man is a blessing to everybody.*

10:7

11:10b

29:10

29:27

A hardhearted, avaricious man avoids the company of the upright because righteousness exposes his perverse ways, but a righteous man is a much-loved beacon of hope for those who are searching for truth. The violent hatred that wicked men feel for the upright, however, is easily matched by the righteous man's disgust for the wicked. Friendship with God is enmity with the world; and if you ever begin to think differently, go find yourself a quiet, solitary place and search your heart. Some will tell you that God loves everybody, and that He loves everybody equally, and that He will never hurt anybody; but those ideas are vain fantasies from the imaginations of perverse men. Listen to me, my son, and tremble! God is patient and is very merciful to repentant souls, but He is nobody's fool. Continual repentance is no repentance at all. Repentance is not a feeling; it

is a doing. Many sinners have been “pricked in their hearts” by the Spirit of the Lord without changing one whit their ungodly course in this life.

15:9b
Dan. 10:11 *God loves with a special kind of love those who obey His commandments.* But even among the righteous there are some who are dearer to His heart than others because they are wiser and more prudent in their ways. *But all who wander from the pathway of righteousness to do wickedly and all who are covetous make themselves abhorrent to Him,* and those whom God abhors He turns over to the power of darkness. *Be warned, my son. You have heard it said by some of the foolish that our Creator loves everyone on earth equally and unconditionally, but I tell you that He hates wicked men.* His soul detests their foolish thoughts *and their iniquitous ways.*

Lev. 26:30
& Ps. 10:3;
Ps. 106:40
22:14b
14:17b &
Ps. 5:5 &
Ps. 11:5
15:26a
15:9a

FEAR GOD

15:33a
Ecc. To fear the Lord is the sum of all that wisdom teaches us. O, my precious son, *keep the commandments of God, for God will bring every one of your deeds into judgment, whether they be good or evil.*

12:13-14

Chapter 8

THE RICH AND THE POOR

INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS

- 11:1
20:10
(14:17b)
20:23a
20:23b
22:22-23
15:25b &
Dt.
10:17-18
- Dishonesty and injustice are abhorrent to the Lord. He delights in integrity and justice. Especially detestable to the Lord (and to people, too, when they find it out) are crooked businessmen. Dishonest business practices will never bring you happiness; therefore, be careful to maintain integrity in all your business dealings. Especially is this true of business dealings with the poor. Because the poor are often unsophisticated and easily fooled, they are frequently targeted by dishonest businessmen; but remember, my son, that God is the avenger of the poor, and He will not overlook the deeds of those who spoil them. He is the Protector and the Avenger of the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner who visits your land. Be considerate of them.*
- 20:17
22:28
23:10a
23:4
10:2
11:4
28:20b
- As long as crooked businessmen escape justice, they enjoy immensely the pleasures purchased with money gained by deceit, but God will fill their mouths with gravel before He is finished with them and will force them to chew it. *Do not allow a desire for wealth to lead you to cheat others out of what is rightfully theirs. It is not right to take advantage of those who cannot defend themselves, even if no earthly authority will convict you for doing so. God's judgment is not bound by the imperfect standards of men, my son. There is a wisdom in knowing how to gain earthly wealth, but it is a worldly wisdom, temporal and tainted with sin. Do not pursue that path; it does not lead to enduring happiness. It will benefit you nothing to acquire a fortune through ungodly means. Only doing what is right leads to lasting happiness. No person motivated by a desire to get rich quick can keep from committing sin. Some may think that beating people out of their money will bring them happiness, but what do you think their chances for happiness will be when they stand before the Almighty to answer for their thievery?*
- 28:3
19:1
19:22b
28:6
- When a poor man resorts to the oppressive tactics of the wealthy to plunder another poor man, it is like a tornado striking a farm after a hurricane has passed over, robbing the farmer of the little that remains in his field. The poor man who refuses to resort to evil in order to escape poverty is better than the fool who deceives others in order to increase his earthly possessions. An honest poor man is better than a liar, though he be rich. He is better even in his poverty, if he is upright, than anyone who is perverse in his ways, whether rich or poor.*

20:14 Of course, customers can be as crooked as any businessman. Some of them will protest vociferously that a product is not worth much and coerce a weak salesman into selling it for less than he should; then, they will brag to others about the great bargain they negotiated. "It was a steal!" they say. And that is exactly what it is in the eyes of God—stealing. All such business practices are evil, for they are based upon deception and coercion. *Whenever you are dealing with the necessary business of this life, remember that men of earth are in business because their bellies demand food; they are not in business to do you a favor, no matter what they tell you. Whatever work any man is doing, he ultimately is doing for himself, that he might be happy. Then, seek counsel in all your business decisions and consider carefully all the possibilities.*

EMPLOYEES

13:17b A dependable employee relieves those he serves from burdens that can wear down their spirits and their bodies. *He relieves burdens from his employers as a cool breeze relieves weary field workers; he forwards the happiness of others.* But do not esteem even honest men too highly. Always
25:13 remember that God alone is the source of honesty and wisdom. All sound
16:11 judgment and honest dealing is the result of the influence of God's Spirit on men; there is no honesty, understanding, or justice apart from Him.

13:17a My son, walk in the right way and be faithful to those who trust you. In neglecting his duties, an unfaithful employee causes trouble for both himself and others. *And if such a man is given an important responsibility, he can cause enormous sorrow and regret for those who trust him; they would just as soon have a broken tooth or a bone out of joint as to trust in him again.*
25:19 To betray someone who has done good to you is one of the worst of sins.
17:13 God's punishment for that wickedness is a curse that nothing will reverse.

MERCY IN BUSINESS

11:26 *People will tremble when they see God's curse upon the man who refuses to sell his crops to the needy because of greed, but the Lord will bless the man who cares about others and sells his crops to the hungry.* The
23:10b-11 possessions of the poor are precious in God's sight; take nothing from them unjustly, for He is their Avenger. *In time, you will see that those who hoard up great wealth unjustly, either by charging interest on debts or by other wicked means, are only hoarding that wealth to be distributed to the poor.*

11:24 & There is such a thing as giving away earthly possessions, yet becoming

13:7 richer; and there is such a thing as hoarding up earthly wealth, yet becoming poorer. *The generous soul shall possess great riches, and he that relieves others of heavy burdens shall himself be relieved of his burdens by the Lord.*

11:25 A good man stores up blessings that are protected by God for his grandchildren, but the wealth that sinners store up is eventually given to those whom God loves.

13:22 *Even if they do not have an official title or hold a high public office, the rich in this world have learned that lending money and charging interest makes them masters and other men their servants. Those who borrow are slaves to those who lend.* The man who charges interest on loans will have fellowship with the poor man in his poverty. God will enlighten the lender to the fact that it is evil in His eyes to increase one's wealth by taking advantage of the need of others. And the poor man, seeing the judgment of God, will learn not to resort to the greedy man's way of pursuing happiness.

22:7 *Fortunes amassed at the expense of the happiness of others are taxed heavily by the Lord, but wages honestly earned are invested in Him.*

29:13

13:11

SURETY

11:15 Never co-sign a loan for someone who does not fear God. In fact, co-signing loans for anyone is unwise, for it needlessly places your property at risk. *A fool puts up his own property as collateral for his friends, who are also fools, without considering the consequences of trusting fools to do the right thing; He will lose both his fortune and his friends.* Live simply and

17:18 mind your own business, for if you place your property at risk to do someone a favor, you may lose that precious collateral. *If, however, someone offers you valuable property as collateral for a loan, and if the loan is not for himself but for an ungodly friend of his or for an immoral woman, make the deal quickly. You are about to become richer without having to do any work.*

22:26-27

20:16 & 27:13

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

14:20 The rich have many friends, but, oh, how lonely the impoverished life can become! *Yes, money produces many friends—as long as a man has plenty of it. But how quickly an empty wallet can drive away his neighbors, friends, and even his family!* He may humbly plead with them for

19:4 compassion, but to no avail. Purchased friendships vanish when the

19:7 purchasing power is gone.

10:15 The rich man's wealth insulates him from troubles that others

18:11a commonly suffer, while poverty exposes the poor man to complete ruin. *The rich man's wealth is like a strong fortress, protecting him from many of the world's distresses.* Earthly wealth can also extend the life of those who have it, either because a healthy diet is more available to the rich, or because medicine and medical care are more affordable for them, or because a judge is bribed to spare the life of a wicked, wealthy sinner. *The benefits of earthly wealth make it difficult for a wealthy man to feel his need of a Savior, and so he often becomes very proud.* Seeing all the benefits of wealth, however, the poor are sometimes lured into pursuing earthly riches as a means to happiness. Such foolish men will suffer a sudden and calamitous ruin, while those who trust in the Lord will remain safe and blessed.

BRIBES AND GET-RICH-QUICK SCHEMES

17:8 The man who uses bribery views his money as a magical stone, performing wonders for him wherever he carries it. *His heart is wicked; the bribes he brings out of his pocket are intended to corrupt officials and pervert justice,* and his bribes often succeed in accomplishing their insidious purposes. Bribery procures for wicked men appointments to high office and access to influential officials. *The wrath of many judges has been placated by a secret gifts, and many transgressors have escaped justice by offering a bribe.* (None of this means that wickedness has triumphed. For His own purposes, God determines who rules and who is condemned in court.) *One of the chief reasons wicked men seek high political office is that they know that many men will then seek their favor and that they will pay well for it.* Such a man is greedy and foolish. By taking bribes, he jeopardizes his family's happiness as well as his own, but the happiness of the man who trusts God and is not corrupted by bribes is secure. *He will abound with God's blessings and live forever in perfect happiness because he refuses to depart from the right path.*

17:23

18:16

21:14

29:26

19:6

15:27

28:20a

20:21 Some have murdered friends, relatives, and even their own parents in order to obtain an inheritance before God had ordained for them to receive it, but inheritance gained in such a fashion will never allow a man to be truly happy. *The man who robs his father or his mother and, after seeing their tears, thinks that there is nothing wrong with his treachery, is as senselessly cruel as a vandal, marring their happiness and destroying his own.* When men obtain riches by evil means, it is as if they are playing catch with dynamite while the fuse burns. *It's only a matter of time before what they have stolen destroys them.*

28:24

21:6

21:7a

Get-rich-quick schemes cause men to sin; leave such schemes alone.

28:20 Walk steadily up the good road, and be content with the many blessings that are obtained along that way. *The man who pursues quick riches is double-minded and confused; he wants happiness but is attracted to paths that take*

28:22 *him away from it. Along such dark pathways are pitfalls that he will not escape and in which he will lose everything.* The poor man who does not trust God will steal food when he is hungry, giving no heed to the consequences. (However, a poor man who is righteous would rather suffer than transgress God's commandments at any time.) *No food tastes good to those whose bellies are full, and they can hardly empathize with the poor man's plight. But to the hungry man, even bitter foods seem delicious, and hunger can drive a man to take great risks for just a mouthful of food.*

13:8b

27:7

Ps. 39:5 & Rom. 7:18 Do not think these things cannot happen to you! What I am about to tell you, my son, is painful, but it is a realization concerning your nature, and the nature of all men, to which every wise man, with a sense of deep shame, comes. My son, until we are established unmovable in the ways of our God, every one of us who belong to God has a price for which we would sell out our Savior. Did you not know this about yourself? Those who offer bribes understand it well, and you must understand it, too. For in acknowledging the truth concerning this common, tragic weakness in man's nature, your motivation to overcome it is strengthened. *Pray earnestly not to be led into temptations that are stronger than your commitment to God. (True fasting is when you become so hungry for God's strength against sin that you cannot eat.)* But God's care for you, my son is complete. You can safely trust the Lord always to protect you from temptations greater than your spiritual strength. You will be given plenty of time to mature in knowledge and to develop a perfect commitment to the right ways of God. Then, everything this world has to offer will seem as dung compared to the incorruptible, heavenly riches upon which your heart will be set. *Totally commit yourself to doing the will of God, and you will avoid the insecurity of many of your peers. A made-up mind is not easily confused or turned aside.*

Mt. 6:13

Phip. 3:8

16:3

TRUE RICHES

23:5 Why will you set your affection on money and trust in something to bring you happiness that can disappear overnight? Would you trust your future to a wild bird, whose very nature calls it to fly away from you? Money is like that; it has wings, and it can soar away as an eagle over the mountains. *Eternal happiness is the wise man's goal. That is worth everything. To possess true happiness and be poor is better than to be unhappy and have great riches.*

Ecc. 4:6

22:1 Make every effort to prove yourself upright and faithful, for a good reputation is more valuable than any amount of money, and to have the loving favor of God and of men is more precious than gold. *In hope of finding treasures of gold and rubies, men bore mines deep into the earth and laboriously sift through the sediments of streams, but if you find a man who knows God, you have found real treasure. With all your heart, bore deep into his knowledge and carefully sift through his words for wisdom.* With the acquisition of all earthly wealth comes problems. It is the blessing of the LORD that makes one truly rich, and He adds no sorrow with it. With true riches, there are no maintenance fees, no security concerns, and no leaving it all behind when you die.

20:15

10:22

15:16 It is better to be poverty-stricken and have peace with God than to live in luxurious misery. *It is better to have nothing to eat but a few herbs and live in a house filled with love than to dine on the finest cuisine in a troubled home.* A poor but upright man is far richer than the man who obtains great wealth through unjust means. *Consider the coming Judgment when you think of riches. It is better to dwell among the poor with an humble heart than to share great wealth with the proud.* It is appointed unto all people once to die. The rich and the poor, as well as the good and the evil, will eventually meet together in the grave. It is in preparation for the coming Judgment, which all must face after death, that wise men spend their time.

15:17

16:8

16:19

22:2 &
Heb. 9:27

20:25a *Above all, my young son, never steal from God. Bring your tithes and your offerings to Him with fear and thanksgiving. Whoever would have you to steal the Lord's portion is the enemy of your soul, leading you into a terrible trap. If a man would steal from God, there is no wickedness he would not do; he will lie, pillage, and murder. Whoever trusts him is a bigger fool than he is.* Bring all your tithes and offerings into His storehouse; put God to the test. You will find out for yourself whether or not the Almighty can be trusted to keep the promises He has made to His children.

Mal. 3:8-10

Chapter 9

GOD AND THE KING

JEHOVAH

All the suffering and fears of mankind are the result of wrong ideas about God; I will, therefore, teach you the truth about your Creator, truth that will protect and guide your heart as you begin your search for lasting happiness. My father taught me in wisdom concerning Jehovah, my son, and you must learn these things, too, if you would be truly wise.

9:10

These are the words of my father, King David. He taught me wisdom and said to me, "The knowledge of God is understanding, my son. No man can have true understanding who does not know his Creator. *There is no god but Jehovah*, and there will never be any other god but He. *He reigns in majesty upon a throne in heaven*, and He is very holy. *Everything He thinks, says, and does is perfect*. His presence is ubiquitous, and He knows everything all the time. *He created all things precisely as it pleased Him*; the whole earth is God's, and everything and everybody in it. *He controls both its weather and the events of its history.*"

Ps. 86:10

Ps. 102:12

Ps. 11:4; 99:9

Ps. 145:17

Ps. 139:1-16

32:6

24:1

Ps. 148:8;

22:28

Ps. 44:21

Ps. 9:7-8

Ps. 37:9

Ps. 146:8

Ps. 7:9; 11:7

Ps. 146-8;

5:4-6

"God knows every thought that is in the heart of man, *and He will bring every man into judgment for his conduct*, rewarding those who are good with eternal pleasures *but condemning the wicked with terrible punishments*. God puts the hearts of men through fiery trials so that they may know that He is God and that they are but men. *God loves righteousness and righteous people, but He hates wickedness and wicked people.*"

Ps. 66:14

My father taught me also that there are some prayers that God will hear. Remove yourself from vanity and cruelty, my son, so that your prayers may be among them. *He told me that upon occasion, God will even alter His intentions for the sake of His beloved who call on Him for mercy.* "God is good", he said, "*He is gentle, merciful, patient, and helpful when we are in need.* He is faithful to us and true to His word."

Ps. 106:44-45

Ps. 100:5;

86:15; 36:5

Ps. 135:4

Gen. 12:1-3

Lastly, my father taught me that out of all the peoples of this world, God chose us *to love, to protect, to guide, and to use both for His glory and for the blessing of all other nations.*

15:3

To all my father's wisdom I gave ear, my son, and I will now add these things so that you might know the true and living God and become wise. You will hear some say that Jehovah is so holy that He cannot look on sin. Do not believe that nonsense for a moment. The eyes of the Lord are in

15:9 every place, beholding both the good and the evil. *He hates the wicked and their ways, and He loves those who follow after righteousness, but how can*

15:11 *He know whom to love or whom to hate unless He sees the good and the evil that men are doing?* Think about it, my son. Hell and the Pit are always in plain sight before Him, and every thought of man's heart is known to Him.

20:12 How, then, could evil deeds be too horrid for Him to observe? *Does the Creator of the ear not hear every word? And does the Creator of the eye not see every deed?*

16:1 Men think that their plans and their accomplishments are their own, but God alone directs the course of history. *Men devise plans for security and conquest, but only after God plants those plans into their hearts.* No nation survives because of its military might. If the Lord determines that a nation will survive, no weapon can conquer it, and if the Lord determines that a nation will fall, no weapon can save it. *Any thought or word that contradicts the truth of God is foolish, stupid, and confused. There is no such thing as countervailing any of the judgments of the Lord. God uses all things and all people, the wicked as well as the righteous, to accomplish His inscrutable purposes.* God determines the outcome of quarrels between mighty men and nations, and once God has made a decision, who can add to it or detract from it? *Even if rulers become so confused that they agree to flip a coin to decide what course to take, God determines whether those men call "heads" or "tails" and then determines how the flipped coin will land.* Seeing, then, that all our ways are in the hand of the Lord, who is wise enough to find his own way to happiness?

18:18 Does this confuse you? It is the work of God. It is His glory to conceal the truth of a matter. *The Lord hides Himself and then demands that men humble themselves and seek Him,* and to those who do humble themselves

16:33 He reveals the secret of His covenant. *It glorifies God that He conceals truth, even from the king, and it is honorable for the king to humble himself to seek answers from God.* Hear my wisdom, son, for it will guide you securely in your search for His secret. The LORD can always be found in these two places: first, He can always be found in His high and holy place; second, He can always be found near the man who has a contrite and humble spirit.

20:24

25:2a

Isa. 45:15

Ps. 25:14

25:2

Isa. 57:15

20:27

17:3

God uses both the malice and the praise of men on earth to try our hearts; therefore, neither hold grudges against those who curse you nor show favoritism to those who praise you. They both are merely being used by God to test your heart. *God has provided ways for men to purge imperfections from precious metals. Then, should He not know how to*

16:4 *perfect those among His own children who submit their souls to Him?*
 Everything and everybody, both the good and the evil, are created by God and used by God for His glory and for the perfecting of His people.

16:2 & 21:2 If two people are quarreling, you need not ask which one of them is right. I will tell you now who is right: they both are—in their own eyes. Every man believes that he is clean and his cause is holy. But God does not judge man either by his opinion of himself or by his reputation among others; rather, He considers the hidden thoughts of the heart and weighs the spirit of a man on the scales of His truth. *Do not judge as men do, by what you see and hear; learn to judge as God does, by what is in the heart.* God would much rather have a man to do what is right than to perform a rite in His honor, which is what men typically offer to God instead of obedience. Obedience is better than ceremony, and giving an ear to God is better than giving an offering to Him.

1Sam. 16:7; Isa. 11:3-4; Jn. 7:24

21:3 & 1Sam. 15:22b

THE KING

24:21a & Rom. 13:1 *My son, the powers that exist are ordained of God; there is no ruler anywhere but that God has placed him in office; therefore, fear the king as you fear God.* The king is God's instrument; He has set the king on his throne. Whoever resists the king resists the rule of God and will receive damnation for his rebellion. *Take whatever the king decrees as from the mouth of the Lord,* for God has the king's heart in His hand; every decision he makes accomplishes only what God has predetermined to be done. *You can no more rightly judge the king than you can rightly judge God; therefore, do not meddle with the king's business.* My advice to you is to obey every commandment of the king unless his commandment contradicts the expressed will of God. Always obey the higher power.

Rom. 13:2 16:10 21:1 25:3

Eccl. 8:2 *When you are in the presence of the king, never depart hastily; be very careful that he is ready for you to leave, for his will is more important than yours. Follow no one in doing evil, for the king is bound by nothing, and when he discovers your sin and is provoked to wrath, who will plead for you against him? The power of the whole kingdom moves at his command; who has authority to question his motives or his wisdom? Obey the king's commandments, and you will suffer no harm.*

Eccl. 8:3-5a

Eccl. 10:20 Be careful never to speak nor even to think evil against the king. Nor is it wise to speak evil of those who are in high positions in his kingdom. You will be surprised how far and how quickly words spoken in secret can travel.

16:14a The king's wrath, as God's, is a harbinger of death. *It is like the roar of*
19:12a *an approaching lion*, but a wise man will humble himself and pacify it. *If a*
19:4b *ruler becomes angry with you, do not run away; submit yourself to his*
Eccl. 10:4 *authority and you will pacify his wrath, even if you have committed a great*
20:2 *offence. Wise men fear the king's displeasure as they would fear a hungry*
 lion charging toward them, for the king stands in God's place on earth.
 Whoever is so foolish as to provoke the king's wrath has sinned against his
 own soul.

Patiently endure the rebuke of a ruler when he finds you to be in error,
25:15 *and speak to him humbly; that is the key to regaining his favor. A soft word,*
 sincerely and humbly spoken, has the power to break the bones of a mighty
15:1 *man. An humble response pacifies the wrath of the king, but a brash,*
 backbiting answer will provoke him to even greater wrath. As a dry wind
25:23 *from the north clears the sky of clouds, so the angry countenance of a*
20:8 *righteous king can silence a froward tongue. His eyes scatter wickedness as*
 a strong gust of wind scatters dust across the ground. A rebellious and
10:32b *wicked man is known by the insolent tone of his voice, but God will hold*
10:31b *him down and cut out his impudent tongue.*

In the presence of the king there is safety, and his favor is as rain upon
16:15 *parched ground. The king's favor is like a dew of happiness descending*
19:12b *softly upon everything in your life, making all of it brighter and better.*

 The lips of a righteous man please the king because nothing perverse
16:13 passes through them. The king loves the man who speaks right things and
 will promote him to honor. *If a king believes lies, all his servants will*
29:12 *become liars. A king who can be deceived makes all his advisers deceivers.*
20:18b Learn from this, my son. A wise leader embarks upon no important
 endeavor without first diligently seeking prudent counsel. *A people ruled by*
11:14a *men who are guided by counsel from fools is a people that will be destroyed.*

 When the dross is removed from the silver, the refiner has material for
25:4-5 an excellent vessel, and when wicked advisers are removed from office, the
 king's throne is made secure in righteousness. *A king's throne is secure only*
16:12 *when righteousness is its base; therefore, a wise ruler abhors ungodly words*
 and deeds. But a wicked man undermines the kingdom by helping the
29:24b *ungodly escape the king's judgment. He doesn't report evildoing to the*
 authorities.

GOOD AND EVIL RULERS

2Sam. *God taught my father, and my father repeated His words to me. I*
23:3-4 *remember my father saying these words on his deathbed: "The God of*
 Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He that ruleth over men must be

just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.’”

11:10a If any governor protects the righteous and provides them with liberty to obey God, then God will bless his government, and all the people will be happy. *When a king does good to God’s elect, his kingdom will be exalted by God above other kingdoms*, but sinfulness is a disgrace to any nation. By it, even the greatest of kingdoms is brought to ruin and shame. It is by doing what is right, noble, and wise that a kingdom is blessed by God with safety, prosperity, and power over other kingdoms. *Wicked rulers, by their example, lead the people down the path that leads to sorrow, but honorable rulers lead them into joy. The security and happiness of a people is dependent upon the integrity of their rulers.* Righteous rulers compassionately consider the needs of the poor and do good for them, but ungodly men care only for themselves.

11:11a

14:34

When wicked men are elevated to positions of authority, they quickly become skilled in stifling the influence of the upright. *In that case, there is nothing the righteous can do but to sit still and wait on God.* But be of good cheer! Here on earth, the righteous will be blessed by God, and the wicked will be cursed *because the Lord invariably loves those who do good and always condemns evildoers.* God manipulates the circumstances of life so that the evil eventually bow before the good. So, be patient, my son; the judgment of the righteous will prevail over all the power of the wicked.

It is tragic for any nation when the king is a child and when its rulers are self-indulgent. How blessed is a country when a well-trained young man ascends to the throne and when rulers eat and drink when it is time to do so—for strength rather than for gluttony and drunkenness!

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

It may happen that sinners escape earthly punishment for committing the same wickedness a thousand times and that they live in health to a ripe old age; still, I know that in the end, the upright will find lasting happiness, and the wicked will not. When he meets the day of his death, and the Day of Judgment that God has determined for him, the sinner will be unable to finagle a delay in the court proceedings. His long earthly life will seem to him to have been but for a moment, and he will pay the full, final price for wasting all those precious years pursuing selfish gain without the fear of God.

A wise king strikes terror in the heart of the wicked and has no qualms about punishing them severely and swiftly. Swiftmess of punishment is greater part of its effect. It is because rulers do not swiftly punish evil doers that many young men are emboldened to do wickedness. Delayed justice is

no justice; it promotes lawlessness instead of restraining it. Men become devoted to paths of wickedness when punishment for transgressions is delayed. Earthly rulers who do not swiftly punish transgressors are undermining their own authority. Forbearance with fools is folly, because fools do not understand mercy; they view a ruler's patience as impotence and then proceed with their foolishness as if there were no power over them.

When the wicked multiply, lawlessness increases; nevertheless, the righteous will survive both them and it, and they will be blessed. *When God finally removes the wicked forever, the righteous will flourish.* They will at last find the undisturbed happiness for which they have longed because whoever humbles himself to the higher power submits himself to God, *who will reward all men according to their deeds.*

The wise king understands that only by swift and painful judgment is evil purged from the heart. Swift stripes on the back improve the heart. Wickedness never voluntarily departs; it must be driven out. (Beware the sinner who ceases from sin but not through fear of judgment, for evil never willingly leaves unless it is in hope of accomplishing a greater evil.) Furthermore, when a man who scorns authority is publicly and swiftly punished, young people who witness his punishment become wiser. His pain will instruct their hearts in the fear of God; they will submit to the authority over them, and the whole community will reap the benefit. *Punishing a scorner will not turn him from his scornful way because he is a fool, but it will instruct the young people who are watching. On the other hand, when a wise man is reproved, both he and those who are watching benefit from it.* It is precisely for providing security and tranquility for the people that civil authority exists, and where there is a king who deals with transgressors swiftly and justly, there is a secure and peaceful kingdom.

By civil and military authorities, evildoers are punished and kept under control, but such authorities alone cannot lengthen the days of a nation; only by a man of understanding and knowledge can any state long endure. *When men who are contemptuous of God's ways govern, they lead the people into trouble, but wise men know how to humble themselves and turn God away from His wrath.*

In his own time and for his own purposes, a good king shows favor to faithful servants and punishes servants who behave foolishly. *Never puff yourself up to grasp after a position of honor before the king. It is not honor if you have covetously sought it. It is better to be promoted by the will of God than to assume a position that is reserved for a better man and then be demoted when he shows up.*

An especially abhorrent abuse of power is for those in authority to acquit an evildoer or to condemn a righteous man. Every man in authority is placed there by God, and to use one's power to help the wicked and to harm the good is a betrayal of a sacred trust; it is a crime against the Almighty Himself. And who will plead your cause for you when you stand before His judgment seat? *Nor is it good to punish a just man, nor to penalize rulers for refusing to take bribes and pervert justice.* Wicked men maneuver to obtain special privileges, for they fear being judged impartially. Their ways are evil, but by their

bribes and cunning deceit, justice is denied to the upright and is twisted to favor the ungodly. *It is not good to veer off the perfect path of justice in order to show respect to any man. Judges who do so are contemptible. When a man's decisions are for sale, he is auctioning his soul to the highest bidder. In time, his worthlessness will become obvious to all, and he will become willing to sell himself for a piece of bread, if anyone will take him up on the offer.*

A wicked king terrorizes and oppresses the poor among his own people and leaves them scarred and plundered. *It is foolish for a king to oppress his own people and reduce their numbers. The more subjects a king commands, the greater his stature. What kind of glory is it for a king to reign over a kingdom of a few people?* It is for the king to provide justice for the poor, and if he does so, God will bless both him and his kingdom. *A foolish ruler constantly raises taxes, but the king who is not covetous of his subjects' money will enjoy a long and happy reign.* A bribe-taking king is an enemy of his own kingdom, and he will overthrow it; but the ruler who makes just judgments secures his people's happiness. *Mercy and truth save the king from damage and destruction; his throne is made secure by mercy, for God renders even to the king according to that which he has sown.* Remember this, my son. There are two ways to assure yourself of poverty and ruin at the hands of God: giving to the rich, who need nothing, and refusing to give to the poor.

These things belong in a wise man's heart, my son; take them into yours:

Never make a judgment in favor of a rich man because he is rich. Neither should you make a judgment in favor of a poor man because he is poor. Wealth itself is not wickedness, and poverty itself is not purity. Judge all things according to God's commandments, without regard to a man's social or financial status.

If a man is evil, say so. If you proclaim that a man is righteous when he is not, the saints will curse your name as they do his; multitudes will come to abhor you with him. A wicked soul is a sinking vessel; do not board it. If a man does evil, rebuke him and have no part in his filthy ways. So shall the favor and blessing of both God and men come upon you.

If you are required to dine with someone in high political office, carefully consider what is offered you. Do whatever it takes to keep your hunger firmly under control, and do not gorge yourself on his delicacies. Such men always have ulterior motives for their displays of generosity and friendship. An essential ingredient of a ruler's banquet is deceit.

Other ungodly men, as well, will try the integrity of your heart with invitations to their feasts. Do not allow your natural lust for good food to control your actions. The free, good food and entertainment are in truth neither free nor good; they are intended to blind you to what is really happening. Eat nothing that such a man offers you; otherwise, his efforts to influence and pervert your sound judgment may succeed. "Eat and drink", he smilingly says, but if you think he cares one whit about whether you are hungry or

thirsty, you are very foolish. If you accept his invitation and give in to his carefully planned seduction of your soul, you will see the day that you vomit up his sweet delicacies, and with them will come out of your belly the flattering words you paid him for his favor.

For a little while, and by the use of evil practices, the wicked man may wax powerful and strike terror in the hearts of men, but like a swiftly passing storm, he shall fade away and never bother the righteous again. (His days will be shortened by God.) On the other hand, when the righteous man comes to the end of his time on earth, he will live forever in continual happiness because while he was here, he feared God and did good to others.

Chapter 10

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS

THE WIFE

Listen, my son, to the words of Lemuel, my wise friend. He described the kind of woman you want for your wife:

“The value of a prudent, godly wife can hardly be described,” he said. “Who can find such a rare jewel? She watches carefully over the goods and money her husband entrusts to her. She will do him good and not evil as long as she lives. His heart safely trusts in her diligence and judgment and is at peace.”

“She purchases what she needs, and she willingly works with her hands. She minds her own business and is not ashamed to humble herself to any necessary task. Her diligence provides her family with blessings they do not anticipate, and she is prepared to meet the needs of her household on any given day. She always has enough money to give to the poor and enough time to do good deeds for them.”

“The purchases she makes are wise purchases, and by them she increases her husband’s wealth. She uses her time to do things that produce more income for the family, and she uses any profit from her business dealings to bless the family rather than to squander it on self-indulgent frivolities. Shopping for the sake of shopping holds no attraction for her. Her heart is set upon the welfare of her family. She does not eat the bread of idleness.”

“The prudent wife’s business is the welfare of her family, and she takes good care of herself so that she may better serve them. She provides good clothes for herself as well as for her family. And because she never neglects her duties, the peace of the home is not disturbed by unnecessary and unexpected problems. She is not afraid of emergencies or any future needs because she has fully prepared her family to be able to deal with them.”

“Her husband is honored in the community and serves it well, but were it not for her faithfulness, he would have no time to serve the community at all. Had he a contentious, self-indulgent, self-willed woman at home, his time would be consumed with making enough money to please her.”

“The prudent woman is clothed with honor and strength from God. She is on the road to eternal happiness. When she opens her mouth, she does so wisely; the law of kindness is in her tongue. When her children are grown, they hold her in great reverence, and her husband adds to their reverence his praise for her virtues. There are many young women who have conducted themselves with integrity and moral virtue, but such a woman as this excels even them.”

“A shapely body is deceitful; it says nothing about the heart. And a lovely face endures for just a little while; it is nothing to love. Neither of those things is worth much

at all. But a woman who fears the Lord will be praised by both God and men. Let her reap what she has sown, and she will be happy. Let what she has done be brought to judgment, and she will be praised by the Judge.”

My son, a wise woman blesses everyone and everything she touches; her house increases with every good thing. But a foolish woman is a curse to herself and everyone around her; without even trying, she brings her home to ruin. A woman who walks in the grace of God never surrenders her integrity, and a man with real strength never lowers his guard against the corruption of his soul. A virtuous, prudent woman is an excellent adornment to her husband's life. Whoever has such a wife has been shown great favor by God; he has found a good thing from the Lord.

A beautiful woman with a wicked heart is like a golden ring in a pig's slimy nose. Regardless of how beautiful a wife is, if she is faithless and ill-tempered, she drains her husband of his self-respect and lessens the respect that others have for him; she is like a cancer in his bones. There are few calamities more taxing to a man's spirit than a belligerent wife who will not restrain her tongue. It is better to live in the corner of a drafty attic than to share a mansion with a loud-mouthed, contentious woman. Living alone in the middle of a desert is more pleasant than living with a bad-tempered woman when she is angry. Living with a contentious woman is like having to listen to rain drip from your ceiling. The man who makes excuses for such a woman is trying to hide a hurricane. He is trying to convince others that they do not smell the perfume he just splashed on his face.

A home worth having is one that is established upon understanding, and genuine security for a home is obtained through wisdom. By the knowledge of God, its rooms are filled with true, enduring riches. *There are good, desirable things in the house of the wise, and care is given to have the necessities, but the foolish cannot save a thing; they spend every penny they have, and then some. A fool wastes all that comes into his hand; he has nothing with which to bless his guests and nothing to leave his children as an inheritance.*

CHILDREN

The father who does not whip his children when they need it hates them, but the father who loves his children whips them while they are young, while a good whipping can still do them some good. *If you correct your children while they are young enough for correction to do them some good, they later will delight your heart and give rest to your soul.* There is not much hope in trying to eradicate foolishness from children when they are nearly grown; it must be dealt with early. Ignore your children's pleas for you to stop when you are chastening them, and drive that destructive foolishness out of their hearts! *Judge your children (and everyone else for that matter) by what they do, not by what they say. Otherwise, you may fail to provide them with the guidance they desperately need.*

Do not allow your children to play on your compassion and weaken your resolve to do the right thing for them; children are foolish and do not know what they need. Despite how they act when they are being whipped, you are not killing them; however, you may well be putting to death their association with spirits that can take them into hell: arrogance, stubbornness, and lack of self-control. *The spirit of foolishness is stubborn, and it is an inborn element of human nature. If foolishness is not driven out of children by their parents, it will mold them into immoral, stubborn adults, and such a generation is a curse to the whole earth. Foolishness never voluntarily departs from the hearts of children, but it can and must be driven out of them.* When a child is justly scolded or given a deserved whipping, it makes him wiser; but a child who is left alone to find the way to happiness by himself will always take the wrong path and disgrace his mother.

The father who fears God and humbles himself to rear his children in the way of right is blessed by God and has confidence that God will guide his children's lives. By submitting himself and his children to the authority of God, a wise father provides for his little ones a refuge from the world. Children who have been nurtured by a righteous man will not be forgotten by God; even when they are old, God will stir up in their hearts remembrances of the right way. *When a man conducts himself with integrity, God both rewards him and watches over and blesses his children after him.* Begin now, while you are young, to live the kind of life that will cause your offspring, if God ever blesses you with any, to feel honored to have you as their father. Children, in time, can sense whether or not their father has conducted himself with integrity.

Start out in life keeping first things first. Make certain you have a steady, dependable income before you purchase such things as a house. A wise son works when it is time to work so that he is prepared for the future; a son who plays games when he ought to be laying the foundation for the rest of his life brings disgrace and poverty upon his parents and himself. *He wastes his father's money, fails to take good care of his father's possessions, and is a constant drain on his resources.* As God grieved in the days of Noah that He had created man, even so a father and a mother can be made to bitterly regret that they produced a son if he turns out to be a fool. *The days of a man who begets a fool are full of continual sorrow; there is no joy in his life.* The father of a wise son, however, is a very happy man.

A wise son is one who walks in the way of God's law. *He loves wisdom, and he makes his father's heart rejoice.* When his father is accused of being an evil or foolish man, he can point to the prudent conduct of his son as testimony that he is not—and the accuser is proved to be the fool! Here is wisdom that will reveal much to you throughout your life, my son: a false accusation is a confession. If you are falsely accused, and if you truly are completely innocent of the charge, the one who has accused you is himself guilty of that same evil. Only liars accuse an honest man of lying; only adulterers accuse the pure in heart of adultery; and only false teachers persecute God's servants as being deceivers.

My son, you can hardly know how happy you will make your mother and me if you prove to be a wise man. It will rejoice our hearts to hear sober and righteous judgments coming from your mouth. When you learn to love righteousness, you will be a source of continual joy to us.

Though sinners can often seem to be blessed, they are despised and utterly miserable. Learn to see them as God sees them. Do not envy them, my son, nor strive to be like them, but always remember the coming Day of God's Judgment and fear Him. That is the way to happiness.

There is a legitimate reason for my giving you this counsel; there is a point in warning you to stay on the right path. The message of eternal happiness and of eternal damnation is not a fable. Buy the truth, and never surrender it for any price, for it is your life. Wisdom and understanding are purchased with fear and obedience; instruction is purchased with humility. Watch me, and live as I live.

Give your heart to me, my son, and not to loud, lazy young fools who will pressure you to spend your money and your time partying with them. Give your heart to me and not to the whorish woman who weaves webs around young hearts. Such a woman is a deep ditch. A woman who has neither the knowledge nor the fear of God is a narrow pit, out of which a young man cannot climb once he has fallen into it. She ambushes innocent young men like you with her experienced charm, and many young men have fallen into her sweet smelling snare and found their hearts enslaved to her desire—until they have no money left to buy so much as a used shirt.

Many who did not heed my wise counsel became addicted to drunkenness, though none of them thought they would. They brought needless sorrows upon themselves; they became embroiled in fights that should never have occurred; they injured themselves doing simple tasks; they babbled endlessly to people who wished they would just be quiet; they suffered many painful after-effects of their revelry.

The drinks that revelers offer are made to appear delicious and appealing; you must refuse them and get away. Wine is like the whorish woman who knows how to cover the stench of her soul with sweet perfumes. It is like a venomous serpent as it swirls slowly and rhythmically in the glass. It is full of deadly poison and can kill and maim.

Getting high with young fools will confuse you as it has confused them, and then wretched women will begin to seem attractive to you. You will hear words coming out of your mouth that you thought you would never say. You will awake, surprised to find that you fell asleep in a mud puddle or in some other strange or dangerous place. You will have bloody wounds, but you will not remember receiving them. "Somebody must have beaten me up!" you will say, "and I don't even remember being hit. But, I'm doing just fine."

Then, you will stagger to your feet, with blurred vision and a crushing headache, to search for somewhere decent to lie down and rest a little, before going out in the evening to find another party and to party even more wildly than the night before.

The young man who chases after silly women wastes his father's money, *and his riotous behavior makes it difficult for his father to hold his head up in public.* He is arrogant toward his mother and brings the family name into disgrace. *And the son or daughter who has so little fear of God that he not only embarrasses but curses his father or his mother will be cast away like trash into outer darkness in the coming Judgment.*

A brother is born to help during times of trouble. *If your brother loses all that he has, do not be among those who take advantage of his misfortune. He will always remember it, and once a brother's heart has been alienated, for whatever reason, just or unjust, his affection is most difficult to regain.* When love turns to hate, there is no forgiveness. It is all but impossible to resist an offended brother's arguments because he knows your weaknesses and past errors and will use them to make his case against you strong as steel. *Happily, there is such a thing as a friend who is less demanding and more faithful than any brother.*

THE ELDERLY

Grandchildren are a grandparent's grandest earthly blessing. They are a blessing that God affectionately bestows upon the elderly, whether or not they have done good in their lifetimes. *If an old man has walked with God, the gray hair of his head is like a glorious crown.* It is a beautiful sight, both to God and to those who know Him. Eternal happiness awaits him on the other side of his last breath. If, on the other hand, he has lived an ungodly life, his gray hair is a grievous testimony against him. It declares to everyone that God blessed him with long life, yet he despised the precious opportunity to go the right way.

SLAVES

A servant is like a child; mere words will not drive laziness and foolishness out of him. He may understand what to do, but without fear of swift punishment he will not respect your commands. *The slave who finds favor with his master is meticulously cared for by him and in time is loved and adopted into the family.* The servant who faithfully tends the fields shares in the harvest, and the servant who assiduously does his master's bidding shares in the honor he brings to his master.

It is a joy to a just man to do what is right. Like God, he impartially rewards those around him according to their deeds. When a wise servant enriches a master who is just, he will share the inheritance with his master's sons because that is his due. A just man will even promote a prudent and diligent slave above his own son if his son has been foolish and slothful. *Therefore, be faithful to God, my son. And do not fear men. You will be blessed by God for your prudence, if you do not fear a reputation among fools for being prudish. Diligence in righteousness leads to lasting happiness.*

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

A friend is faithful in every circumstance. He does not become friendlier if you become wealthy or popular, and he is not less friendly if you become poor and despised. *This does not imply that a friend will never criticize you. A true friend will correct you every time you stray from the right path, even if doing so causes you pain. He will never tire of doing what he can to help you find the path to eternal happiness. The wounds he gives are better than the flattery and kisses of the friend who will go with you down a wrong road.* To be openly reproved may be embarrassing and hard to swallow at the time, but open rebuke is better than secret love. An opponent you can see is better than an invisible friend who wishes you happiness but never does anything to help you obtain it. Rebuke can be beneficial; well-wishing is worthless.

If you want faithful friends, you must first prove yourself to be one. Such riches as true friendships are always earned; they are never merely stumbled upon. Never forsake either your own friend or someone who has been a faithful friend to your father.

When your heart is willing to receive guidance in the ways of God, the counsel of a friend will be as pleasant to you as the fragrance of a young bride. Your counsel, too, will be received, and the two of you will sharpen each other's wit as years go by. Sharing fellowship in the light, you will learn to trust each other, and you will know in your heart that the picture of yourself that your friend paints for you is true, because he is. For a friend to point out your good traits is sweet to the soul, especially when you feel low. But the flattery you will receive from some who will appear to be friends is nothing more than a disguised effort to turn your heart from the right path onto another way. Always remember, my son, that the hottest trials of your life will not come through criticisms you receive from enemies but through praise you will receive from the lips of false friends.

A righteous man induces his neighbors to strive to be better and wiser than they are, but an evil man entices them to wander away from integrity and explore dark pathways. Be a paragon of virtue and goodness to those around you. Be temperate in all things. Too much of a good thing is not good. It is, for example, good to spend time with your friend, but you can wear out your welcome if you never give him a break from you. Be sensible; respect your neighbor's privacy. Do not wear him out with your company and make him dread seeing you approach his door.

You will feel strong and robust at times, and you understandably will want to revel in your youthful vigor, but restrain yourself and do not overwhelm your friend with your exuberance. No matter how cheerfully you greet him early in the morning, if your friend does not awake as early or as happily as you do, he will welcome your loud salutation about as eagerly as he would a sprained ankle, and he might even pray that you lose your voice!

Chapter 11

WORDS

GOOD WORDS

Words are expressions of the heart, revealing thoughts that are hidden deep within; out of an understanding heart, good words spring forth like a fountain of clean, refreshing water. Taking in the words of a righteous man is like drinking from the River of Life itself. Such words, welling up out of a pure heart, are pleasant. They are a foretaste of the fruit of the Tree of Life; whoever eats this fruit will live forever.

Great earthly wealth has its benefits, but lips that disperse the knowledge of God are more precious than all earthly treasures. The tongue of a just man is like choice silver; the wisdom that comes out of his mouth is pleasant and sweet. In time, all people will acknowledge the value of the man who speaks right things.

The pleasant words of a wise man are as honey to a soul searching for wisdom, and because his words refresh the soul, the body itself is strengthened and spared many of the ravages of sin. Right words spoken at the right time can do marvelous things; they can even restore hope to a discouraged heart. What wonderful blessings result from godly words spoken at just the right time! They are precious, like apples of sparkling gold framed with silver.

A good report rejoices and encourages a longing heart the way good food satisfies a starving soul. *But not all that seems good is good. Do not be too eager to hear encouraging news. Good news, long waited for, refreshes and rejoices the heart as cool water renews the spirit of a wanderer in the desert, but always make certain that good news is truly good before committing your heart to it.* Know the man who is talking, and you will know how to take the news. A messenger you have learned to trust makes your whole life easier, but an unreliable ambassador causes distress both to himself and to those who put confidence in him.

EVIL WORDS

Perverseness in a man's words reveals a breach in his spirit, through which unclean spirits come and go freely. Every word that proceeds from the mouth of an ungodly man eventually leads to violence. By the words of his mouth he brings destruction upon a trusting neighbor, but a just man knows better than to trust the ungodly, and by that knowledge he escapes harm.

If he is within striking range, a deadly serpent is likely to bite you unless you can enchant him. The same is true of a babbling, loud-mouthed fool. If he is within the range of your ears, you are likely to be poisoned by his tongue unless you know how to turn his attention to something other than his own foolish thoughts. A wise man's tongue

helps others, but a fool destroys others as well as himself with his mouth. There is madness in a fool's method. His conversation begins with foolishness and concludes only when he has persuaded another to join him in some mischief. His mind is full of words, and they all come gushing through his flapping lips. No one knows what he will do next, regardless of what he says. Then, who can warn him of the consequences of his actions? The fool wearies every soul who tries to guide him because his self-willed heart makes it impossible for him to follow directions. He trusts no one, except those who lie to him.

If no one throws wood on the fire, it will dwindle to ashes, and when no talebearer is around, hard feelings fade away. A talebearer is someone who is obsessed with repeating every crumb of news about others, whether it be true or false, that he can gather, and the person who enjoys listening to such tales also enjoys repeating them. Be wise. Never trust a news monger with a secret. A faithful man will encourage you with good words instead of tickling your ears with gossip, and he will have no interest at all in hearing useless prattle concerning the affairs of others. Your heart will let you know that such a man can be trusted to keep a secret. *But be discerning, for a talebearer will imitate the faithful man. In order to gain your confidence, he will flatter you with words that seem good, but his heart is not with you as is the heart of the upright. All he really wants is to obtain some bit of confidential information from you,* and his fine words are nothing more than a covered snare. *The man who does not broadcast another's fault is loved by God, but a talebearer repeats things he should not and can cause even the best of friends to turn against each other.* His words are like sharp knives that stab mercilessly at the most sensitive parts of the heart, leaving scars that will not easily heal. He is addicted to ungodly talk and cannot cease from sin. A talebearer's tale is troublesome; do not receive it.

The talebearer's flattery seems sincere; his lips burn with desire to compliment and to probe everyone for information, for his heart is corrupt. But he is like a worthless piece of broken pottery, concealed by a patina of junk silver. His flattery appeals to the simple minded and excites them, but it ruins the life of every person who receives it. *Young men whom God abhors are turned over to the delusive flattery of godless women. The flattering mouth of such a woman is a deep pit into which God casts young men who reject His counsel, and out of that pit they will not escape.*

Be patient, my son. If you reprove a man for doing evil, you will sooner or later have his respect, and he will come to detest the flatterers who consoled him with false compassion when your wise reproof made him uncomfortable. *You see, the words of the wise inflict pain as they cut sin out of the soul, but after the wound heals, the heart is made better. After sin is removed from a sinner's heart, he will honor the surgeon and condemn those who offered him the artificial comfort of fellowship in his wickedness. Circumcision of the heart, my son, is no less painful than circumcision of the flesh and is*

more to be desired. Always remember that those whom God uses to rid the heart of sin are worthy of greater honor than are they who can only help to rid the body of disease.

TRUTH AND LIES

Whoever speaks the truth is lighting the pathway to righteousness for others, *and truth, once revealed, abides as a beacon of hope for succeeding generations. But ungodly advice is worthless and perishes with those who give it.* Neither labor for, nor expect, nor even desire any big thing. Let the Lord's approval be the contentment of your heart, and let the truth itself be the joy of your soul. Otherwise, you may become bitter because of the loneliness of your way, for few will ever love the truth and discover the hidden pathway to happiness. In time, though, God will reveal who is right, and He will expose the speeches of the wicked to be as worthless as you already know them to be.

The legacy of an accomplished liar is that he teaches others how to lie effectively. By his example, he trains his disciples to deceive others, and then he is cast into the Pit. *However, you need never fear that you will be deceived as long as you do not attempt to deceive others. It takes a liar to believe one. Only sinners follow the ungodly example of other sinners, and only liars believe lies. Those who love the truth cannot believe a lie, and those who obey God cannot follow the example of the wicked.* Nor need you ever fear anyone's curse but God's. The power to curse or to bless is His alone. Nobody else has either the power to curse or the wisdom to know who should be cursed. Any curse uttered by any *creature is like a wild bird, soaring high into the sky; you need not worry that it will descend and perch on your head.*

RESULTS

The man who controls his tongue controls his future, but the man with a wide-open mouth falls into his own crater and meets destruction. Ungodly people talk themselves into more trouble than they can handle; *their own perverse tongues lead them to commit crimes which call for punishment,* but the just escape such calamities. *Spare your tongue, and spare your soul from troubles.*

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of governing your tongue. Your future will be determined in large measure by the way you use words. Generally speaking, the less you use your mouth, the brighter your future will be. The control of your mouth is a life and death issue, my son. Do not let your tongue run rampant! Those who love to talk will someday have nothing to save them but their own vain words. And how happy will they be on that day? *But the man who loves pureness of heart governs his words. In time, such a man will become a companion of noble men; even the king will be his friend.*

BEARING WITNESS

God delights in hearing true words spoken. *A faithful man will not lie, and when guided by testimony from such men, judges are able to make right judgments, protect the innocent, and secure prosperity and peace. A witness who tells the truth delivers innocent souls from suffering unjustly and will be rewarded by God, but a false witness subverts justice and cares nothing for the innocent.* In his heart, he scoffs at the judge's power, especially when the judge is deceived by him. *A liar respects no one who believes him; he holds in contempt anyone who does not discern what he really is.* But in time, he will certainly be discovered and justly punished for his duplicity. He may escape punishment at the hands of men, but he most assuredly will not escape the judgment of God.

A man who testifies falsely against his neighbor is a threat to all people. Have nothing to do with him, except as may become necessary, and leave his judgment to God. Even if your neighbor has done evil toward you, do not testify falsely against him. It is God's place to reward the good and the evil, and lying against your neighbor will bring you no happiness at all.

A liar will lie even when there is no earthly benefit in doing so. He will lie even when he knows that the person to whom he is lying knows that he is lying. A liar feels compelled to lie at all times, and he will lie even when he is told that he is in danger of eternal damnation for doing so. The father of lies is his god, and he trusts in the way of deceitfulness to bring him happiness. The liar's mouth dines on deceit, and he feels content only when he has lied to someone. *But he will not deceive God and escape sorrow and death, for the Almighty knows those who are liars and loathes every one of them. God will permanently seal the false witness's mouth in death, but the man who hears and obeys God's voice will live and speak with Him forever.*

COUNSEL

Nothing you do will fail if you patiently take enough counsel before you set your hand to the task. *Both good and evil men will offer advice, with both good and evil motives, but only counsel from God will stand the test of time and guide you to happiness. Know your counsellors first, and then you will know the value of their counsel.* In a multitude of good counsellors there is much safety, *but the words of the wicked are about as valuable as mud.*

A man who hastily announces a decision, one reached without hearing all the evidence, is foolish. He may be ashamed of his ill-considered words when all the evidence is made known. *Remember, the man who speaks first always seems right, but his story will appear in a different light after his neighbor is given a chance to ask him questions.* Even as hopeless as a fool is, there is more hope for him than there is for a man who draws hasty conclusions and then blurts them out publicly.

Take counsel; find out if what you plan to do is right or wrong. The man who acts first and asks questions later is a fool. Seek counsel from upright men, for their thoughts are directed by God. *The lips of a righteous man understand what is acceptable to God*

and good for you, and he does not say more than that, but you cannot trust the counsel of a wicked man. He may appear sincere, but his heart is far from caring about your well-being.

The man who knows the truth and understands when and how to express it brings happiness to his own soul, for good counsel blesses not only those who listen but also those who give it. Such good words please God, and seeds of righteousness sown by the tongue of the upright man produce a full, satisfying harvest of happiness from the Almighty, both for himself and for others. God rewards with great joy those whose wise counsel makes peace where there once was strife.

Section Three

Ecclesiastes:
Solomon's Personal Testimony

Chapter 12

ECCLESIASTES: SOLOMON'S PERSONAL TESTIMONY

The Curse of Ceaseless Labor Under The Sun

Eccl. 1:1 I am Solomon, King in Jerusalem, the son of David, and these are my observations on this creation that God has cursed, based upon my own experiences. And this is my counsel concerning how you, my son, should live in this world until you die.

Eccl. 1:2-9 Nothing in this life is eternal. Everything under the sun is cursed with time. I have searched it out, and you will never be able to contradict what I am telling you. *Heaven and earth and everything in them will pass away* because this entire creation is temporal. Nothing that a man works for and obtains in this life is of any eternal benefit to him at all. After he is dead, what benefits are provided to a man by all his earthly labor? Think about it. One generation comes and then another, while the earth just sits there, watching each generation rise from the womb to go to work and then collapse into the grave to be completely forgotten.

Mt. 24:35; 2Pet. 3:10

The sun itself is constantly working, traveling round and round the earth—never getting anywhere, just marking the passage of time. The winds tirelessly roam about; they blow one way and then another, getting nowhere, aimlessly dancing about the landscape to the music of time and place. The rivers labor night and day, pouring themselves into the oceans; yet, the oceans always demand more. The waters then leave the oceans and return to the clouds; the winds carry the clouds over the hills, where they relieve themselves of their watery burden. Then the rains run down the hills and return to the valleys, where the whole wearisome process begins anew. Nothing about any of it is eternal. It is all cursed with time.

Every person and everything under the sun is cursed with ceaseless labor, never able to stop and, yet, never able to get anywhere but the place it has already been! The greatest accomplishment for anyone or anything in this cursed world is to survive long enough to be able to start again. To describe adequately the ceaseless, futile effort being expended under the sun is far beyond the ability of mortals.

Everything on earth is imprisoned within a cycle of frustrating labor. The eye sees but is never satisfied with seeing; the ear hears but cannot rest from hearing. Eyes and ears always want more, like the insatiable oceans, greedily swallowing all the water that the

rivers deliver but never full and never happy. Nothing here is at rest! There is no peace anywhere to be found in this cursed life.

Eccl. 1:10 There is nothing new under the sun; whatever has been will be, and whatever is, has already been. Show me one new thing anywhere if you can! I will show you that it has already existed in some form before us and that it will be seen again in the future in some new form. Men have “new and improved” many of the elements of God’s creation into different shapes, but they have never created so much as a speck of dust. Nothing in this cursed creation is new. This is a sick and dying universe, and everything within its grasp is sick and dying with it.

Eccl. 1:11 The memory of what has happened on earth before our time has faded away, and present events will be forgotten by those who will come after us. So, what is the point of pursuing earthly glory and wealth? Who in the future will care what titles you held and what possessions were yours? No one. And after you die, none of it will ever again matter to you, either. It all amounts to about zero.

SOLOMON’S SEARCH FOR SOMETHING ETERNAL ON EARTH

Eccl. 1:12-15 Let me tell you, my son, about my earnest, thorough, and useless search to find something in this world that would be of eternal benefit to me. I dedicated my whole being to the task. “If there is anything under heaven that is of any benefit to my soul”, I said to myself, “I must find it and possess it!” What I learned was that God has condemned this creation and everybody in it to interminable, frustrating toil, and that He has done this in order to teach man to tremble before Him.

I tell you, I have seen it all, and none of it is of any eternal benefit to man! Give your soul to nothing under the sun, for nothing here is worth that price. If you do such a foolish thing, it will lead to bitterness and regret, vexation and anger. I have seen more crookedness and injustice on earth than can ever be made right by man, and there is more need on earth than earth itself can ever supply.

Eccl. 1:16-18 Then, I pondered over my situation. “I am become very rich and powerful”, I told myself. “And I am wiser than any before me in Jerusalem!” I routinely contemplated profound matters that most people are never discerning enough to consider at all. And I determined in my heart to become thoroughly acquainted with wisdom, but it was very frustrating.

I observed life. And after doing so, it appeared to me that many people were half-witted but were happy about it! And many others were unmitigated fools but seemed

perfectly content to remain that way. So, I decided to experience madness and foolishness for myself, to see if that kind of life made people happy, to see if it held any eternal value, but I quickly found that both insanity and foolishness were altogether worthless.

But this I did learn, and if you become wise, you will learn it too: in much wisdom is much grief, and whoever increases in knowledge increases in sorrow. Do not ask me to explain that now; you will find out soon enough what I mean.

Ecc. 2:1-2 As I said, I fully purposed in my heart to find something eternal on earth. And after the failures I just mentioned, I decided to try to find happiness by giving in to various pleasures and to laughter. Of laughter, I concluded it was a mark of insanity. I experienced the most humorous entertainment that earth could afford, extravagant entertainment that few have ever been able to enjoy, and when it was over, I sat back and asked myself, “What good did that do me?” And the truthful answer was, nothing. Entertainment and laughter, like madness and foolishness, will pass away; they are worthless to me beyond the grave.

Ecc. 2:3 During my frustrating search for lasting happiness, I noticed that many had chosen the pathway of drunkenness, and I wondered if possibly they had discovered some good secret that was unknown to me. I sincerely wanted to find out what was good to do while on earth. I wanted to know how we might best deal with life in this vexing world. So, I devoted myself to drunkenness—at the same time being careful that it would not become my master so that if it turned out to be nothing, I could forsake it. I decided to see if the power that foolishness held over drunkards was a special kind of foolishness in which I might find something good and eternal. It was not. It was just drunken foolishness instead of sober foolishness. I became disgusted with it and quit.

Ecc. 2:4-12 I also observed that very many were pursuing earthly wealth, and wondering if great earthly possessions might provide a way to lasting happiness, I decided to multiply my worldly possessions. If an abundance of wealth brought men true happiness, it was obvious to me that I was about to experience unspeakable joy because I knew that God had given me knowledge to become the richest man on earth, and compared to the riches and majesty that God gave me (*as he had promised*), the wealthiest men on earth seemed but paupers. *I had so much gold and silver brought into Jerusalem that little children playing in the streets were as likely to pick up a nugget of gold or silver for their slingshots as they were to pick up a stone.*

1Kgs. 3:13

2Chron. 1:15

I built houses, the finest that could possibly be built. *The purest silver was not even good enough to be used to make cups in my royal house in Lebanon; all my drinking vessels were made of gold, and all the other vessels were of pure gold. Silver was unworthy of the lips of my guests.* I planted gardens and vineyards of the very highest quality. To them, I added orchards in which were trees producing fruit of every kind. I devised clever works, such as the pools I designed specifically to water the wood which produced trees for my agricultural endeavors. I had multitudes of slaves, both male and female. I developed herds of specially bred cattle, sheep, and goats. *I took for myself seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.* There was absolutely nothing that I wanted that I did not acquire. (God saw to that, for He was teaching me through it all for your sake.) *None of the kings who came before me possessed such wealth as I gained by wisdom, and to none who come after me will God give such wealth again.*

2Chron. 9:20

1Kgs. 11:3

2Chron. 1:12

For my pleasure, specially trained singers, both men and women, were brought into my palace to soothe me to sleep at night with pleasant songs, and throughout the day, they filled the perfumed air of my palaces with their intricate harmonies and sweet voices. Every kind of musical instrument was played as I desired. The most agreeable music on earth was produced in my palace, solely for my comfort and pleasure.

Cunningly woven tapestries and masterful works of art adorned my windows and walls, and every plush, inviting fabric covered my couches. My guests were overwhelmed with loveliness, harmony, and luxury; no unpleasant sight, sound, or smell was allowed to disturb or annoy them as long as they abode in my house. My servants were trained to treat them with perfect care and were themselves happy, well fed, and clothed in expensive, beautiful garments. Sweetness and nourishment burst from the foods served at my table. In no palace on earth had there ever been the like, nor will there ever be the like again. There simply are no words to describe adequately the multitude of undisturbed pleasures that were available in my home, and I thoroughly enjoyed them all; I held nothing back from myself.

My palaces were the epitome of opulence; they were stunning in splendor and perpetually peaceful. Exotic plants and animals, exquisite gold from distant lands, as well as silver and the unique treasures of kings and governors—all sorts of riches—continually poured into my hands like a rushing, mighty river. And I was like the ocean, swallowing all those riches and waiting for luxury and wealth to fill me up and satisfy the longing of my soul, as they so fully satisfied all the senses of my body. But they never did.

On a certain day, I paused in my enjoyment of all this pleasure and comfort, and I considered my many possessions and the spectacular works that I had produced. When I meditated over them all, I had to acknowledge that the contentment I had discerned among wealthy men was a very real feeling. At the same time, I admitted to myself that there was nothing eternal about any of it, that it would all pass away, that none of it had profited my soul in the least, and that nothing of all that I owned or experienced could go with me beyond the grave to keep me happy forever. Unless God satisfies your soul's longing for happiness, my son, you will never be satisfied. Nothing under the sun can satisfy the soul of the man who desires peace. I learned this, and it is true.

And I also learned that because great wealth can procure for a man immense prestige, power, pleasures, and praise under the sun, a fool who becomes rich can easily be made to think that he has no need of God or of His righteousness. There is nothing on earth that bears more potential danger to a man's soul than the acquisition of enormous wealth. *For this reason, my friend Agur prayed that God would not curse him with either poverty or great wealth, and I saw that he, too, was wise.*
Prov. 30:7-9

I reflected then upon the massive amount of time and labor that both I and my servants had expended to design and to construct my majestic, magnificent works, and it crushed me to have to admit to myself that all of it amounted to nothing. All my possessions were just like the restless wind that spends all its time ceaselessly rushing up hills, only to plummet into valleys and then to rush up the hills again, or like the sun, always running like a powerful athlete in a race but at the end of his day finding no winner's laurel. Instead, he finds the same old starting block, with the Judge of all creation standing there commanding him to start the race again. There is no finish line in this life! There is no resting place under the sun. There is no lasting happiness anywhere in this creation because it is all cursed with time and because there is no enduring relief from the labor that must be done.

I wanted to cry. All I owned, I admitted, was a burden to maintain and to protect from decay and plunder. My many, mighty possessions began to bear down with more weight upon my soul than could be assuaged by the pleasures they afforded my body. I was devastated and felt once more that familiar, gnawing, empty feeling. Again I cried out, "Everything in this life is worthless! Everything in this whole world is a burdensome irritation, and there is nothing on this earth that is eternal!" How my heart ached because I could find nothing eternal under the sun!

Heavy with grief, I mulled over my labor and my possessions I had acquired in my search for enduring happiness and peace on earth. I thought about wisdom and foolishness and the insanity of entertainment. I thought about drunkenness and sobriety, possessions, pleasure, and fame. Who could ever possibly do more than I had done in my effort to find true and lasting happiness under the sun? There is no monarch, no emperor, no magnate, who will ever surpass the spectacular beauty, riches, and glory that were mine. And yet I concluded, with deep regret, that everything I had experienced and everything I had acquired was ephemeral; all of it was unprofitable in the pursuit of lasting happiness. After all was said and done, the great riches I had amassed had accomplished nothing but to tease my weary, yearning heart with a vain hope of peace.

SOLOMON PONDERES THE ONE COMMON EVENT

Ecc. 2:13-17 As I mused on this, I began to understand that wisdom excels foolishness as much as light excels darkness. A wise man sees this life under the sun as it really is. The eyes he has in his head are really there, doing him some good, because he sees things as God sees them. Even though all he sees on this earth amounts to nothing, at least he sees the truth about it and can adjust his manner of life accordingly. But a fool never attains to this knowledge and squanders his whole life pursuing happiness down pathways that can never lead him to it. A fool never learns. He has eyes, but they might as well be in a shoe box in his grandmother's attic, for all the good they do him. He sees nothing rightly, and that means he sees nothing at all.

But then, a simple, but paralyzingly awful realization completely seized my thoughts: whether wise or foolish, good or evil, rich or poor, every man under the sun will die. My soul's focus was frozen on this one incontestable, inescapable fact. The same wretched, humiliating event happens to both wise men and to fools! The thought was almost unbearable to my aching heart. "The fool will die, and I will die. Why then has God made me wiser than he? What's the point?"

In my distress, this indomitable truth rose up to comfort my aching heart: only in this cursed creation do the same events happen to the wise and the foolish. After death, nothing even remotely similar happens to the wise and the foolish, for in judging them, God will make an eternal and absolute difference.

Under the sun, many wise men have died, along with multitudes of fools. Yet, who can tell me their names? What did they love and hate in this life, and how did they live? No one knows. God alone keeps such records; He quietly keeps them all in His heart until the Day of Judgment. In this world, no one receives any eternal benefit either from wisdom or foolishness, and all people, with all their works, are forgotten.

This understanding caused me to hate this life and all the futile works that man is cursed to perform while living under the sun. Everything under the sun is cursed with futility; everything here is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Ecc. 2:18-19 I now viewed all my works with scorn. The ambrosial beauty which surrounded me seemed at once dull and maliferous because I now was beholding it with eyes that were open, seeing earthly goods for what they really are. I learned that *the possession of earthly riches is a most deceitful thing.*

Mt. 13:22; 19:23

But the worst that all my possessions were, was that they were not eternally mine! I had built them, but I could not have them. I had designed and developed them, but death would deprive me of them. I purchased slaves. I clothed, fed, and educated them, but they would soon be free from me forever. Either death would liberate them, or I would die and leave them to . . . to whom? Oh, what a despairing thought! Who would inherit my possessions that I had gained by wisdom? What kind of man would come and possess all that I had labored so wisely and earnestly to obtain? Oh, the deep frustration that tore at my soul! Whether he be a prudent man or an abject fool, a man that would come after me would have absolute control over all my wealth and my property! I accumulated this massive estate through my own hard work and by wisdom from God, yet that man will have it all handed to him on a golden platter to do with as he will.

Ecc. 2:20-23 This was by far the most disheartening truth with which my wisdom had ever confronted me. Now, everything I had built and labored to accomplish seemed like a gigantic waste of precious time. I had done my very best; I had labored earnestly; I had used wisdom; I had put all my knowledge to its best use; I had been just in my treatment of the souls who labored for me. Yet, one day, I would leave all I had to a man who may prove to be an utter fool, and I knew that I was powerless to prevent it from happening. To my broken heart this seemed a very great injustice—and it is—but it is the common lot of men on this earth. What one man sows, another may reap, and no matter what happens, no matter who it crushes, that cruel wheel of injustice rolls on, relentlessly pursuing its painful course through each succeeding generation.

You tell me. What can a man take with him when he dies? He labors his whole life, but then what does he really have? All his short life, he suffers through pain and heartache to keep working, fighting off depression and misery every day as he struggles on his way to death. Even in sleep he finds no enduring rest because his belly demands that he awake in the morning and go to work so that he can feed it. He lives and labors to keep his dying body alive as long as he can, and when, in spite of all his efforts to

continue living, his body finally drops dead, men recommit it to the ground, and it returns to dust, and he is forgotten.

When these thoughts flooded my heart, the only comfort I could find was in the knowledge that there is a place of true and lasting rest and that the monstrous injustices that I and all men must suffer happen only on this side of the grave. After death, no one but I will receive what is my due. And no one there can take from me my reward from God, ever. Here in this life, one man can work and another come along and benefit freely from all his back-breaking labor, but beyond the grave, God's perfect, immutable justice will reign forever and totally. The only possessions anyone in that realm will be allowed to have—and have them forever—are those rewards that he himself has earned.

Eccl. 8:8 There is no one who has power to escape the appointment with death that God has made for him. No one has power to determine when his body will finally give up its useless struggle to keep on living. The warfare between the body's will to live and God's will for it to die is one in which all men are engaged from the moment of their birth. From birth, it is man's nature to struggle against the will of God.

In Israel, the Law of God has provided for exemptions from military service. And among the Gentile nations, there are some who are excused from fighting the wars of their country. However, in the battle between man and death, there are no exemptions and no discharges. And all the efforts of man's nature to resist the onslaught of darkness are fruitless; none of his ideas or efforts provide any security at all against the day of his death and of the Judgment.

Dt. 20:5-9; 24:5

Eccl. 10:5-7 I have seen that, under the sun, rulers make errors of judgment, but no such thing is seen by those who are already dead. The rulers of the world to come are perfect in wisdom and in their work, and everything is exactly and forever as it should be. So many things in this tormented world are out of place! I have seen foolishness exalted with great fanfare and ceremony. I have seen rich men sitting in seats reserved for slaves. I have seen princes walking like servants along the street, and I have seen servants riding like princes on horses. But nothing out of place will ever be seen in the eternal home that awaits all men beyond the grave.

Eccl. 8:14 One especially outrageous injustice on earth that I have witnessed is this: I observed a just and good man unto whom things happened that should have happened to an evil man instead. And again, I observed an evil man upon whom blessings fell like rain. But the wisdom of God comforted me because He caused me to understand that both undeserved suffering and undeserved blessing are experienced only in this world.

One step beyond the bounds of this vexing life, and all things change forever. From the moment of one's death, he is confronted with an irreversible change: all things are just as they should be, and they will remain that way forever.

Eccl. 7:15 In my time under the sun, I have seen everything because God gave me the eyes to see it! I have seen a righteous man die young, and I have seen a very wicked man live a long, prosperous life. How good it is to know that such things are only seen here on earth!

Eccl. 6:1-5 There is another very great and common evil that I have seen. I have seen God give to some men incredible wealth, but then He took away their health, and they helplessly watched their fortunes, for which they labored, consumed by strangers rather than by their children. Rulers, lawyers, physicians, and others seized their goods for their own children instead.

This, too, never happens beyond the grave, but it is an evil disease that afflicts many in this world.

But even if a man is blessed with a hundred children and a long life, if he is not at heart a good man, and if when he dies no one even loves him enough to bury him, then I say that a miscarried child has had a better life, for he is brought out of the womb for nothing and departs in darkness, leaving not so much as a name behind. Moreover, he departs with no knowledge or memory of the evils done under the sun. In death, the stillborn child has more rest than the aged sinner.

Eccl. 7:1b-6, 8a For all these reasons, I say that in this world, the end of a thing is better than the beginning because when you reach the end of a matter you are finished with one more piece of vanity. It is better to die than to be born, for when you die, you are finished forever with everything that is not eternal, but when you are born, you are born to labor throughout your whole life for what amounts to nothing. For this reason, it is better to visit a bereaved family than to go to a party, for while you are with those who are grieved, your heart is instructed in wisdom as it considers the brevity of life and the certainty of death.

Sorrow is worth more to your soul than laughter, for by sadness and tears the heart is made better. The thoughts and feelings of the wise are with those who are grieving over the loss of someone dear to them, but the desire of fools is only to have fun. Stay away from them. It is better to hear a wise man's reproof than to listen to the jokes of fools. Son, if you are wise, you will hide yourself as quickly as you can whenever you hear fools laughing because whatever they are laughing about is sinful. The laughter of fools

is a sure indication that something evil is being cooked up. The laughter of fools is applause for wickedness.

Ecc. 6:6 My instruction, son, is not the rambling of a depressed, embittered old man. Listen and learn. Nothing of all I am telling you could be proved wrong, even if a man were to live two thousand years and observe the lives of billions of people from all over the world. Regardless of how long any man lives on this earth, he will find nothing that is eternal in it. Do not all men end up in the dirt?

Ecc. 6:7-9 Every ounce of strength that men expend in labor is for food, yet the belly is never satisfied—no, not with the kind of satisfaction that wise men seek, for the comfort of a full belly does not last. This is true of the labor of wise men and of fools, of the rich and the poor, of the good and the evil. In terms of life and death, though, there are no rich or poor, for all must pay the same awful debt for sin, and all men have the same amount to pay. So, enjoy while you can what God has given you, rather than spend your days longing for what He has given to others.

Ecc. 9:1-6 I pondered all these things in my heart, and I decided that I should emphasize to you this unchangeable truth: the righteousness of the righteous, and the wisdom of the wise, and the goodness of the good, are from God alone. He is the only source of what is right, true, and good. Men cannot even understand what to love or what to hate unless God shows them.

In this world, all things happen alike to all. The same events happen both to the righteous and to the wicked, to the clean and to the unclean, to those who worship God and to those who refuse to worship God, to the good and to the sinful, to those who swear and to those who fear to swear. This is a pervasive cruelty on this earth; nothing here can escape its cruel clutches. And because God mercifully delays executing His fearsome wrath upon sinners, blessing the evil and the good alike while they are under the sun, the wicked see no difference between themselves and the upright; nor do they see any special benefit in being good. Consequently, their hearts are completely given to evil. Men have made themselves mad with wickedness while they live under the sun; they spend their lives in a frenzy of foolishness, and then they go to the dead—just like the righteous.

After death, all men are wise. All dead men, both the blessed and the damned, understand the truth and love it. But only among the living is there hope of obtaining mercy from God. A despised vagabond who is still alive is better than an honored hero in the grave, who can no more turn from his sin and be forgiven.

The living know that death is coming and may yet prepare for the Judgment that follows, but the dead know nothing of what is happening under the sun. *For them, the events that take place in time are finished. Their children are greatly blessed or greatly distressed, and they will know nothing of it.* Nor can they ever again do anything for which God will reward them in the coming Judgment. Only in this life is there hope of anything. When men die, their influence begins to die as well; their loves and their hatreds fade from the memory of those who knew them. Never again will they have any part in anything under the sun. Man is given but one chance to get it right, and after that, he dies.

Job 14:21

THE WAY TO HAPPINESS:
SUBMISSION TO GOD'S CURSE OF CONTINUAL LABOR

Eccl. 10:8-10 With all the labor that man is condemned to do under the sun comes a measure of danger. The man who digs a pit may fall into it himself. The man who breaks down a hedge may be bitten by a serpent hiding in it. The man who moves stones can be hurt by them, and the woodcutter is endangered by his own ax. If he sharpens his tools as he should, he is in even greater danger, but if he does not sharpen them, then he must work harder to get his work done. In all labor, wisdom is profitable to the worker. There is both a wise and a foolish way to do any of the work that man is condemned to do under the sun.

Eccl. 2:24-26 The best that a man can do is to discipline himself to do his work humbly and patiently and to be content with enough to eat and drink until he dies. But with an attitude of humility before God you can find good even in this, for the frustrating earthly toil to which all on earth have been sentenced is from the hand of God, and submission to His chastening hand is the way that leads to lasting happiness.

The way of duty and integrity leads to happiness. I have the best food and the best accommodations on earth, and yet I tell you that the honest-hearted pauper who trusts in God and humbles himself to His chastening hand finds as much rest in the night as I with my full belly, warm bed, and sings sweetly laboring to calm my troubled mind so that I can sleep. Peace is a matter of the heart, my son, not merely of the condition of the body.

Eccl. 5:12 Oh, how sweet is the rest of a hard-working, honest man, whether he eat little or much! His weary body gives itself completely to slumber, and he rests undisturbed. But the abundance of a rich man keeps him up at night; business demands his life, and it cares nothing about his health, his family, or his soul.

To be able to rest a little in this miserable life is a gift from God, and it is a matter of the heart, not of wealth or station. The heart that is pure is blessed by God with wisdom, knowledge, and joy; and a clear conscience is blessed with sweet rest in the night. *But God has irreversibly determined that there shall be no peace to the wicked on this earth,* and even less of it in the world to come. He sentences transgressors to especially hard labor, and although He may prosper the ungodly man's work for a time, in a little while the hand of God takes his fortune and distributes it to the upright in heart. But even that happens only in this life. In the world to come, God will leave the sinner to his fortune—*his fortune of wrath*, and it will never be taken from him and given to anyone else.

Isa. 48:22

Rom. 2:5

Ecc. 3:1-8 Everything that happens on earth is transitory; all is cursed with time. Still, all the things that happen serve the manifold purposes of the Creator, and because events in our lives are so full of meaning from God, it is wise not to think of them as mere events but to understand them as the purposes of God, in action.

Nothing cursed with time can benefit or harm a man beyond the grave. Time is death, and death is an enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed; and then time shall be no more.

1Cor. 15:26

It is good that the evil things of earth are cursed with time because we know that they will end, but it can be dispiriting to understand that the good and pleasant things of earth are also cursed with time because we know that all pleasantness that is under the sun will, too, pass away. There is a time to be born, but that is distressing because it is not an eternal birth. There is a time to die, but that gives hope because death under the sun is not the eternal *Second Death*.

Rev. 20:14

In times of destruction, it is comforting to understand that, although under the sun there is a time to kill and destroy, there is only a time for them, and their times will surely pass. In times of safety and health, it is sorrowful to consider that under the sun there is time, but only a time, for rest and healing and that no condition of well-being under the sun is eternal. In dangerous times, it is heartening to remember that there is only a time for danger; there is no everlasting terror under the sun. And that there is a time to build can be disheartening to a wise builder because he knows that whatever he builds under the sun must fall into ruin when the time of devastation and decay returns.

My son, rejoice that there is a time to weep, for sorrow under the sun cannot continue forever. But mourn that there is only a time to laugh, for all earthly joy is fleeting. Be

thankful to your Creator that there is a time to mourn, for all earthly sorrow is cursed, and joyous times must return. But be grieved that there is a time to dance, for no earthly jubilation can endure.

There is a time to gain, but when you have gained, tremble before God, for what on earth can be gained and kept? And there is a time to lose, but when you lose be thankful that there is nothing to lose under the sun that is eternal. There is a time to keep, but only a time. There is a time to throw away what once we valued, but our spirits are encouraged by knowing that the time of receiving will come again.

Sadly, there is a time to love, for in this life there is only a time for it. And there is, happily, a time to hate, for in this life hatred cannot be unending. We are blessed that there is a time for war under the sun, for none of us could survive the carnage of perpetual warfare; but, alas, there is a time for peace, and we know that wars shall begin again.

Eccl. 3:9-11 Every purpose of God has its place and its time in this world, and in its time, every purpose of God is a beautiful thing. In its own time, sowing seed is good, but to plant a crop in the time of harvest is unseemly. It is right for a man to harvest his field when the crop is ready to be harvested, but to reap a crop in the middle of its growing season is disorderly and wasteful. So it is with all the purposes of God, gathering stones or casting them away, embracing or not embracing, tearing or mending, speaking or being silent. In the proper time, they are all good.

It is not the act itself that is either good or bad; it is the timing of it. *Nothing, of itself, is either clean or unclean.* When it is time to hate, it is sin to love. When it is time for peace, it is sin to make war. Even prayer is good only if it is time to pray. At the Red Sea, God reproved Moses, and later, in the camp at Gilgal, He reproved Joshua, because they prayed when it was time to do something else. And God rejected the house of Saul the son of Kish and chose my father to be king in his stead because when it was time to be still and wait on God, King Saul took it upon himself to make a sacrifice to the Lord. *Or consider the relationship of a man and his wife. The marriage bed is undefiled in the sight of the Lord, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* In its proper time and place, everything is pure and lovely. Out of its time and place, anything can be sin.

Rom. 14:14

Heb. 13:4

A wise man, my son, understands what it is time for, *and the times of a good man are always in the hands of God, for he trusts God to direct his steps, regardless of the times.*

Ps. 31:15; 37:23; 62:8

Still, even if a man conducts his affairs wisely, nothing on earth is eternal; then, what benefit to his soul is there in all his labor under the sun? The incessant labor imposed upon fallen man is the discipline of God, and He has turned man's sad heart to darkness so that he cannot find the way out of it. *The way to happiness must be revealed; no man can find it by himself.* Then, seek God, my son, while there is time for it. Man cannot so much as imagine anything beyond this cursed creation. How then can he find the secret pathway out of it?

1Cor. 2:9-10, 14

Eccl. 8:5b-7 A wise man discerns when to do what, and he discerns God's hand in the results of whatever is done. For everything, there is both a proper time and a result determined by God alone, but a foolish man is discontent with this. He does not know what it is time for, and he does not discern the hand of God in the results of actions. *No one can possibly attain to the knowledge of God without acknowledging His mighty hand at work in all things having to do with this life. It is only by acknowledging God's judgments in the earth that men can ever come to know Him and His righteousness.*

Ps. 9:16 & Isa. 26:9

Eccl. 3:12-17 The very best of anything under the sun is bad enough because there is no eternal good in the best of things that happen to people on earth. Therefore, the very best for a man to do is to live simply, to be content to do what is good in God's sight and to enjoy the earthly blessings that God gives him for his labor. To be able to enjoy living a simple life is a gift from God, and any man who has that gift is rich.

Fools waste their lives attempting to circumvent that simple truth, laboring incessantly either to avoid the unpleasant realities about life on earth since God rearranged it because of man's sin or to add to His ways something they would prefer. But theirs is a thoroughly useless endeavor. The wise observe their foolish, obstinate struggle and learn to fear God. The way God set things up when He first cursed both man and the earth is the way it is now, and the way it is now is the way it will continue to be until the end of time. And God will judge a man tomorrow for the things he does today. He will neither change nor forget.

I am not blind, my son. I know that there are corrupt judges. I have watched patiently as poor, innocent people tearfully implored the wicked for justice, only to be turned away, abused, and cheated. Moreover, I have seen men in God's holy service who were secretly wicked, men who for their own profit and pleasure perverted the faith of those who came to them for instruction in the ways of God. There is more corruption than there is integrity among those who rule the earth, and no man will ever change that.

But remember this: there is no escaping the coming judgment of God. He patiently and mercifully allows evil men to continue in their wickedness until His purposes are fulfilled, but an evil end will suddenly come upon them.

There is a time and a purpose for every work on earth, not only for the works of just men but also for the works of sinners. God uses all men for the good of His chosen people, and He will judge them all according to the deeds they have done.

Ecc. 3:18-22 The wisdom with which God filled my heart makes for a lonely life, and I have longed occasionally to have fellowship in this wisdom with others. I carried a prayer in my heart that God would enable others to see this truth that He had enlarged my heart to fully comprehend: we all will die. Men are no better than beasts in this regard. As animals die, so do men, because nothing in this creation is eternal. Animals came from and return to dirt, and men came from and return to dirt. After death, there is a difference, for the spirit of man returns upward to God who gave it, whereas the spirit of a beast goes to the earth with its corpse. *But until death, vain man differs nothing from a beast.*

Ps. 49:20

For this reason, I concluded that there is nothing better for a man than to do his work joyfully and humbly and to patiently wait for the end. That is his earthly portion from God, and after he is dead, nothing of earth will matter to him. Neither will anyone bring him back to earth to show him what is happening.

You may have heard that those who die look down on us from heaven. Forget it. Whether they are cast into hell or are borne into paradise, the dead neither see earth nor communicate in any way with those living on earth anymore. Stay far from soothsayers who, with the aid of demon spirits, enrich themselves by making fools believe they are communicating again with departed loved ones. Trust me, my son. Their deceased loved ones know nothing about that conversation.

OBSERVATIONS OF LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Ecc. 4:1-3 After contemplating on this a while, I returned once more to observe the oppressions that fill the earth, the bribe-taking judges, the crooked businessmen, and the lying priests. I saw the tears of the oppressed, and I saw that they had no political or military might with which to protect or avenge themselves. The oppressors held the reins of influence and power, while the poor were stuck fast in misery and held there by those with money.

Considering these situations, and the fact that they will never change so long as the world lasts, it seemed to me that those who are already dead are more blessed than they who are still living here in this mess. But then I realized that there is a group that is even more blessed than the dead; namely, those who have not yet been born and have not yet seen the evils that are done on earth.

Ecc. 4:4-5 Then I thoroughly reconsidered the burdensome labors that all men are condemned by God to perform, leaving nothing out, and the only new thing I saw was something bad. I saw a righteous man work hard and do good and be blessed by God for it, and then I saw his neighbor envy him instead of learning from the righteous man's example so that God would bless him, too. The envious fool would not get up and submit himself to the labor that God has imposed upon fallen man. He just lay there with his hands folded until all he had was consumed, and then he whined and grumbled about how hard his life had been. This sort of wickedness will pass away when the curse of time is removed, but for now it deeply and constantly vexes my soul.

Ecc. 4:7-8 Later, I again pondered over the things I saw under the sun, and I noticed a man who lived alone. He had neither child nor any relative for whom he had to provide; still, he gave himself no rest and labored constantly to heap to himself riches. No amount of money satisfied him. And he never stopped to ask himself, "For whom am I heaping up all this wealth?" or "Why do I never pause to enjoy what I have earned?" I think this man's kind of labor is especially hard, for he is enslaved to a senseless desire to increase in wealth. There is nothing eternal about his kind of life. Once time has ended, it will never be seen again.

Ecc. 10:19 A feast is made to provoke laughter in the midst of this world of perpetual toil, and wine causes people to temporarily forget their troubles, but riches make people forget more troubles for a longer time than anything else under the sun.

Ecc. 7:7, 8b-9 Bribery has utterly destroyed all sense of right and wrong in the hearts of many rulers, and money has more influence over most men than does wise counsel. When a wise man is afflicted by injustice and can do nothing about it, it is enough to drive him to distraction. Whether it be a greedy ruler who demands more taxes than is proper or a clever, dishonest businessman who takes advantage of the poor, it is maddening to the wise either to be a witness to oppression or to experience it himself.

But the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit, and there is peace for the wise in the knowledge that God will judge all things rightly, in His time. It is tempting to give in to the angry desire to punish the ungodly of this world before the time appointed by God, but that is the path taken only by an impatient spirit. Trust God and wait for Him

to do His work. There is more wrong here on earth than you, or an army of wise men, will ever be able to correct. Do not be hasty; do not meddle in God's business.

Eccl. 5:8-11 When you see the rich oppressing the poor, or rulers violently abusing people and perverting justice, do not be surprised. He that is higher than the highest ruler on earth sees what is happening, and He has other rulers who will exercise His judgment upon them in His time.

Those who oppress the poor are thieves, for God created the earth, with its harvests of the fields, its fruits, and its vineyards, for the good of all people, princes and paupers alike. The man who is obsessed with money never has enough, and the man who is obsessed with owning land can never be satisfied. Enduring happiness is as far from greedy men as they are from the heart of God.

My son, when goods increase, people around you will increase to help you consume them, and then what good are those goods to you? The most frequent benefit to the man who owns many goods is that he catches fleeting glimpses of them before they disappear into the pockets and mouths of his family and friends.

Eccl. 5:13-17 As I observed men in their dealings with money and property, I learned that a man can strangle himself by squeezing his money too tightly. A man can ruin his hope of prosperity by refusing to spend money for things necessary to make his business prosper. Then his money is lost through some accident or need, and a son is born to take whatever he has remaining. He himself returns naked to the earth, just as he arrived from his mother's womb, taking nothing of all the things for which he labored.

It is a very great evil, afflicting the whole earth, that nothing under the sun is eternal and that we must leave this world just as we came, no matter how wisely or arduously we labor. What good does it do man to labor for things under the sun? All he inherits is the wind . . . if he can catch it. All his days, he labors for his food, not knowing when he will die, nor what happened to those who lived on earth before him, nor yet what will happen after he, too, returns to dust. And in his last days, he suffers with sadness and sickness because of the wrath of God on all this vain creation.

Eccl. 5:18-20 Son, pay attention to the wisdom I have gained by observing all these things with the eyes God gave me. It is altogether good and appropriate for a man to work and to enjoy the benefits of his labor throughout the days God gives him on earth. It is his portion from God. This is true of both the rich and the poor. If a man is made wealthy by God and is given health and length of days to enjoy it, it is his portion from God to rejoice in his labor and the fruits of it. It is his gift from God. But all portions in

this life, whether large or small, will pass away and will not be remembered by the generations that follow, nor in the world to come, because God has cursed this creation with time and with judgment.

SOLOMON PRAISES WISDOM

Eccl. 7:19 It is better to have no war than to win one. The counsel of one wise man is more beneficial to a nation than the strength of ten mighty warriors.

Eccl. 9:13-16a; 18a; 16b-17; 18b Some time ago, I learned of a rare and wonderful wisdom that impressed me deeply. Against a certain small city came a mighty king with a huge army, and he besieged the city and built bulwarks against it. But within those troubled walls there was an obscure, poverty-stricken wise man who by the use of his wisdom persuaded the mighty king to remove his army and depart from the city. Later, when the army departed and the city was saved from certain destruction, the people rejoiced because of their deliverance but forgot that it was the poor man's wisdom that had brought peace and safety to them. His name, in time, was forgotten by them and is now unknown to the descendants of those people whom he by wisdom saved from certain destruction.

I said to myself, when I had seen all this and reflected upon it, "Wisdom is better than strength. Wisdom is better than weapons of war. Yet, the poor man's wisdom is despised because he is poor, and his words are forgotten. He is not honored, his children are not rewarded, and his precious, wise words are not repeated for the benefit of the next generation."

Most men are fools, completely deaf to the voice of wisdom. The ears of the prudent give more heed to the whispers of wise men than fools give to the loud cries of their own rulers. Here, under the sun, one sinner can have more influence than a multitude of wise men. One sinner can undo much of the good that many wise men have labored together to accomplish.

Eccl. 4:13-16 It is better to be an indigent child who is willing to learn than to be a mighty king who will no longer listen to counsel. As long as you will listen, God will speak. And as long as you will follow, He will guide. The wise obey, and God brings them as paupers out of dungeons to sit upon thrones, but the foolish go their own way, and God casts them out of their high positions and strips them of their riches.

I considered carefully all the living who walk under the sun. In particular, I contemplated God's reward of the wise pauper. There is no counting of the people living

on earth or of those who lived before, and there is no numbering of the people yet to be born; still, throughout all generations, men have not and will not celebrate the wise pauper's good work, though God blessed him while he lived. Only in the world to come will he be recognized for the good he did. Nothing of earth is eternal, and all of it irritates the sincere soul that longs for lasting happiness and honor.

Ecc. 7:11-14 It is a special blessing to receive both wisdom from God and an inheritance from parents because then there are two lines of defense against the troubles of this world. Wisdom is a defense against unhappiness because it protects from being deceived and abused. Money is a defense against unhappiness on earth because with it a man can purchase food, clothing, and shelter. The superiority of wisdom to money, however, is that by wisdom, men discover the secret pathway to eternal happiness, whereas money reveals nothing of God to man.

Stop and consider the work of God. Who can alter any of His plans? If He makes your pathway smooth and plain, or if He makes it rough and hard, who can change it? Go ahead and rejoice (*with fear and trembling*) when He gives you an abundance of health and provisions; it is your portion from God. But in the days when He makes your way hard, get still and think it over.

Ps. 2:11

Both good and bad things will happen to you in this life. In wisdom, God has designed life under the sun that way, to the end that man cannot attain to any truth by his own intelligence. Man does not know what will happen next, no matter what is happening now. When God has done a work, the most that a man can say is that God has done it. He knows nothing else, and he does not even know that, unless it is revealed to him by God.

Ecc. 7:23 - 8:1 All these things I have proved by wisdom, and they are true. At one time, I thought, "I will make myself wise", but I learned very quickly that it was far beyond me to do so. God has many mysteries hidden from man, and they are exceedingly deep; no one can find them out.

I humbled my heart to know the truth, to make earnest effort to obtain wisdom from God, to learn the reason for things, and to understand the wickedness of foolishness and insanity. And I found more bitter than death the heart of a perverse, immoral woman. Her spirit is a filthy trap, and her soft, perfumed hands are as strong as the chains of death. Those who please God escape her alluring glance to live another day, and those who displease Him are attracted to her siren call.

Listen to my wisdom, my son. I diligently, carefully, and earnestly made this search. What I am about to tell you, I know to be true.

One by one, I examined the lives of those around me to learn what was right. After examining the hearts of a thousand men, I found only one of a thousand whom I knew would be faithful to God and steadfast in righteousness, regardless of what I said or did, or what circumstances developed around him. And after I examined the hearts of a thousand women, I found none who were unmovable from what is right. As pathetic as men are, *women remain the weaker vessel*; their hearts are more easily deceived.

1Pet. 3:7

God created man upright, but man was discontent with His Creator's design and sought for himself other ways to happiness. Now, he is completely lost, and only by trusting God's wisdom will man ever find happiness again.

I wondered, "Who is a wise man?" and "Who really understands the hidden meaning of things?" And I learned by observation that there is a singular expression on the faces of those who possess wisdom. Wisdom brightens a man's countenance; it beams humbly, but confidently, through his eyes.

Eccl. 8:15-17 When I gave myself to the search for wisdom, to see all the business that takes place on earth, I learned that there is such a thing as being unable to sleep night or day because of the many cares of this life. And then I ran headlong into another obstacle in my pursuit of wisdom when I beheld the vastness of man's works on earth and the scale and multitude of the wonderful works of God. I saw that it is impossible for a man to search through each one of them. Even if a wise man labors his whole life, he will not be able to consider all the works of man, much less all the works of God. All things were created solely for God's pleasure, not for man's knowledge and benefit. Be content, then, with the things you can know, and keep the commandments that are given to you. *Secret things belong to God, not to us.*

Dt. 29:29

Then I knew in my heart that to enjoy eating and drinking what God provides and simply to have a good time with one's friends makes for the happiest life on earth. Those unadorned, modest pleasures are God's reward for faithful labor and for surrendering the vain hope that work can be avoided in this life. *Seek first, therefore, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the things you really need will be added to you.* Until you are content with your portion under the sun, you can be moved from the right ways of God, *but godliness with contentment is great gain.*

Mt. 6:33

1Tim. 6:6

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

Eccl. 7:20 No one can ever become wise and good, my son, unless he understands this: there is no one on earth who is good and just unless he has been made that way by God. There is no one who has ceased from sin unless God has reached down in His great mercy and delivered him from sin's power. God is the only source of goodness.

Eccl. 6:10-12 There is nothing new for man to create, for there is one Creator, who has created all things already, including man. And there is absolutely nothing that man can do about that, despite the many vain hopes of the wicked. Man has designed and constructed a vast array of buildings and machinery, but he has created nothing new. All that has resulted from those mighty labors of man is an increase in the number of things that will pass away. How have any of his innumerable inventions made man one whit better?

Who knows what is good for man to do on earth? He lives his whole baffling life under the shadow of the long home to which he must go. When he is gone, who will go to him and let him know what is happening on earth? No one, for he has no more part at all with anything under the sun.

Eccl. 5:1-7 The worship of God is of supreme importance. Be prudent and sober-minded when you approach Him. Do not be hasty to participate in any religious act. Be slow even to offer praise to God, for it is better not to praise Him than to offer praise that angers Him because your works are evil. Know yourself; be honest and listen to your conscience before you worship God. It is dangerous to worship God contrary to the commandment. Son, it is dangerous to worship God with an unclean heart. Fools do not understand that ungodly worship is a mockery of God's holiness and that it will be a testimony against them when they stand before the Judge.

A quick tongue is a short cut to damnation. Think it over before you utter any word before God. He is in heaven, and you are on earth. There is not much that you have to say to Him, and when you have said those few things, be silent. *Do not be foolish, thinking that by much speaking you will get your prayer heard by God.* A fool's voice is known by the river of words that constantly pours out of his mouth. Nobody praises God more, or more loudly, than a fool.

Mt. 6:7

If you commit your ways to God, He will communicate with you by various means of His own choosing. A dream from God is the result of your being diligent concerning the labor He has imposed upon you. Just do not become carried away with such things. Many claim to have dreams given to them by God, when it is only their own imaginations at work. In a multitude of words and in many dreams there are also a multitude of false statements and vain hopes. *If God does give you a dream, however, do not be afraid to tell it. There is no comparison between truth and error, between God's word and man's imagination. Do not allow the many who boast of false messages from God to discourage you from testifying to what God has truly given you.*

Jer. 23:28

If you ever make a vow before God, do not delay to fulfill it. God takes no delight in fools. Do quickly what you have vowed to do, or do not vow at all. It is better never to make a vow before the Lord than to make a vow and then fail to perform it. Such an ungoverned mouth can cause your whole body to sin. And when God sends His angel to collect on the vow you made, do not dare to say to that angel, "It was a mistake." In doing that, you will provoke God to great wrath, and He will then destroy those things for which you have labored long and hard.

Ecc. 8:9-10 I saw all these things, and I applied my heart to examine every work done under the sun. I beheld and saw that there is a time when one man rules over another to his own hurt, and it would have been better for both if the other had ruled instead. I have also seen deeply religious, wicked men buried and forgotten by the very people who had shared both their religious opinions and their wicked deeds. Those who worshipped with the wicked and partook in their evil deeds continued worshipping as they had done before and continued doing evil. The wicked learn nothing from God's judgment because they do not see God's chastening hand in man's experience of death.

Ecc. 7:10 Watch out for people who lament that the "good old days" are gone. They are just trying to manipulate you to become entangled with their social or political agenda. It is unwise to think that former days were better than these. When has God ever changed? The life He gave to those in the past who trusted in Him, He gives now to those who do the same. The good old days are past only if God has ceased to be good.

Ecc. 7:16-18 Do not be overly religious, son. Just obey God's commandments. That is enough. And do not strain to become very wise. Why destroy yourself? And if you find yourself walking in an evil way, do not give up hope and surrender your soul to that unclean thing. Have faith in God's tender mercies and change your direction. One bad move is enough. God has a perfect time chosen for the good and the upright to die. But

if you go astray from the right path and then surrender your soul to wickedness and foolishness, He will choose another time for you to die that will not be to your liking.

It is good for you to take this in. My knowledge will keep you if you hold on to it. You need not be especially religious, nor profound or scholarly, in order to do God's will and escape the coming wrath. The way to happiness is a way of simplicity and faith. No matter what the issues are, no matter how confusing the circumstances of life become, no matter who proclaims what doctrine, those who in their hearts fear God will survive all of the dangers and troubles under the sun. All you really need to know is the will of God, and all you really need to do is obey Him. The fear of God is not only the beginning of wisdom; it is also the conclusion of it.

GOD'S SECRET CONCERNING EACH YOUNG PERSON

Ecc. 9:7-10 Now, my son, go your way. Eat your food with thanksgiving and joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for now is the time, while you yet live on earth, to humble yourself to do the things that please God. Wear the clothes you like to wear, and keep your body clean. Set apart time for nothing but to enjoy the wife God gives you, and spend your days with her happily while your vain life is used up in labor under the sun. These are God's rewards for the labor that you must do while on earth.

God knows a secret about you, my son, a secret that He will reveal to no one but you. You know that you must labor your whole life under the sun. God's secret concerns what kind of labor will bring you the most contentment. He will not reveal that secret to me or to any wise man. Only you can find it, and there is only one way for you to do that; to wit, **whatsoever you are given to do while you are young, do it with all your might.** Only in striving with your whole heart to please the guides of your youth will you discover God's secret that will give you a thoroughly fulfilled life.

When you were a toddler, you strove with your whole heart for what you wanted, but soon, the world teased you, hurt you, divided and confused your heart, and made you ashamed of your precious sincerity. Become as a child again, my dear son, and pursue happiness again with all your heart. That is what you really want. When you were young, you were not ashamed of what you felt. Dare to be that way again.

Do not be like the cold multitudes who failed to strive with their whole heart to do their best while they were young and now have to muddle through life with whatever jobs they can find. Earnestly labor to discover that perfect work for you! God wants you to have it! Now is the time for you to do it, my son, and you will never have this opportunity again. Dig deep into the things your instructors demand of you, and if they

demand more, give more. It is God's blessing you seek, not theirs! Your teachers are your servants, sent by God to help you find His secret. Somewhere in all the labor that is required of you by your elders is hidden the key to the kind of labor you would choose for yourself if you knew all things, as God does.

Many foolish people, young and old, mock sincerity and hard work. Just a few people will ever encourage you to pursue happiness the right way, and if your heart is not made up, then the encouragement of those few people will not be sufficient to shore up your young heart against the onslaught of fools. It must come from you, my son! The desire to be happy must spring from your own heart! No one can make the effort or reap its benefits for you. How happy do you want to be? Consider it, and answer me. And consider how unhappy the scoffers are who wasted their youth on lust and rebellion and who now mock the sincerity of those who diligently seek true happiness.

When you study the stars, you are searching for the secret concerning the labor that God has for you. When you study the earth and its history, you are asking God, "Is it here?" When you labor over mathematical formulas, or when you examine the ways of creatures small and great, God is watching and waiting for you to find His secret, hidden somewhere in that maze for you, and you alone. Even if you are given a small task, do it with all your strength and zeal, for it is often in unexpected places that God waits for the diligent worker to come. The lazy, the rebellious, and the careless, will never find either Him or the hidden pathway to happiness. They do not clean out the corners.

There are some subjects in which you will not have much interest. And there are, of course, some tasks given to you that you will not enjoy. All of that is acceptable. You are not required to enjoy what you do not enjoy. But if you *are* given an assignment or entrusted with a task that is not what you enjoy, still pursue it wholeheartedly. (It will help you to remember that nothing here lasts forever.) The hidden key to your happiest future may lie in the words of the last paragraph of that boring text or in the back corner of the barn you are sent to clean. Read it all. Clean the corners. God is waiting for you somewhere in your work with the key to a happiness that none but those who are both young and wise are given.

How happy and content do you really want to be? Now is the time for you to lay the foundation for the life you really want, both here and hereafter. There is no work, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you are going. Now is the time, while you are young, to discipline yourself to be diligent and obedient in all your tasks, trusting God to judge you in His righteousness.

Ecc. 9:11-12 Later in their lives, some people realize their error and try to make up for the lost opportunities of their youth. As adults, they begin their search for the kind of labor that will make their time on earth most bearable for them, but it cannot be found then. All who repent from wickedness and seek the pathway of lasting happiness when they are older are forgiven and blessed by God, but the labor they will be given under the sun will only be God's second best for them. Now, my son, while you are still young, is the only time you will ever be given to find that perfect, precious secret for your life. Most young people foolishly squander their youth on vanity, but you be diligent and wise, and in just a little while you will know what the foolish never will know, and you will be given what they will never have.

In contemplating the things done under the sun, I saw that the fastest runners do not always win the race, nor do the strongest always win the battle. The wise do not always have bread to eat; those with understanding are not always given riches; and the most skilful are sometimes overlooked in favor of lesser qualified men. Time and chance happen to all. You must trust your future to God and put everything you have into whatever you do. Do not be puffed up by your skills, your attractiveness, your strength, or your intelligence, nor trust in such things to bring you happiness. God will not bless a man who trusts in himself with the kind of labor that will keep him perfectly content while he lives on earth.

Ecc. 11:1-3 If you patiently continue to do what is right, you will soon learn for yourself the lesson that many never learn at all; to wit, whatever any man sows, he most certainly will reap. This is one of the most important truths about life under the sun that you can learn because if you take this truth into your heart, you will never run out of patience or be lured away from the pathway of righteousness.

Keep doing good! Over and over, day in and day out, do what is good, and you will reap a harvest of blessing that you cannot yet imagine. I understand that you cannot know for certain that I am telling you the truth about this. For that reason, you must trust my words until enough time passes for you to see for yourself that for every purpose under the sun there is a time, and after that, there is an inescapable, everlasting, perfect judgment from God.

Sow good seed; be merciful to others; be generous to the poor. Doing this is the best insurance against poverty and loss. You will reap a harvest from your good deeds as certainly as rain drops from the clouds to earth.

When a tree falls down, it stays down. The truth that I am telling you, son, is as simple and obvious as that. Patiently continue doing what is right in God's sight, and you

will be rewarded by God as certainly as a fallen tree stays fallen. And you will learn by experience to ignore the transitory circumstances of earth that sometimes may seem to contradict God's eternal, unchangeable truth.

Eccl. 11:4-6 Those who are fearful and lazy try to excuse their slothfulness by pointing to the difficult circumstances they face. But if a farmer spent his time watching the sky and worrying about the weather, he would never sow his crop. And just as it is impossible to plant a crop with your eyes constantly turned toward the clouds, so it is impossible to do what you are supposed to do if you keep worrying about the people who oppose righteousness. Keep your mind on your goal and keep plowing. Do not come out of the rain until it begins to fall.

And do not be troubled if God hides Himself and His work from your eyes for a little while. You are not commanded to watch over God; He has promised to watch over you. You may continue both morning and evening to do what is right, fully confident that wherever God is and whatever He is doing, it is good. God's ways are often hidden and very mysterious, but they are even now being revealed to you, and you may be assured that He is preparing a reward for all that you do. Every moment, the Creator is performing a myriad of works, both small and great; yet, He is never so occupied by them that He forgets any man or his deeds. It does not strain the Almighty to do great things.

Eccl. 11:7-8 Son, it is a wonderful thing to be alive and to see the marvelous works of God. But even if a man lives a very long and prosperous life and has no evils befall him during all his days, yet his days are but a few in comparison to the length of days that will follow his death. Consider it, my son; consider it carefully. Regardless of how many years one lives under the sun, they are few in comparison to what comes afterward. Will not a wise man, then, prepare for the days to come after he is dead? for they will be very many.

It is unwise not to work for the money you will need for yourself and your family. Yes, there is more to life than life under the sun, but while you live here, you must deal with it. Prudent men are mindful of their earthly responsibilities; they are concerned for the health and safety of their families. None of that, however, diminishes their ability to see beyond this life or their concern with guiding others to the right path.

SOLOMON'S FINAL INSTRUCTION TO HIS SON

Eccl. 11:9-10 While you can, enjoy your youthful health and exuberance, young man. Have a good time, be cheerful, and do with gusto whatever you like to do. At the same time, know that for every deed you perform God will bring you into judgment. So, cast

out of your young heart all rebelliousness, and refuse the pathways of sin. Begin now to prepare for the time to come. This whole life is short, but childhood and youth are even shorter.

NOTE: This remarkable parable of old age that Solomon gave to his son is one of the most inspiring found in the Old Testament. How many of Solomon's symbols of old age can you interpret? I provide footnotes for the few that I can understand.

Eccl. 12:1-7 (KJV):

1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, "I have no pleasure in them",
2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened,⁴ nor the clouds return after the rain:
3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,⁵ and the strong men shall bow themselves,⁶ and the grinders cease because they are few,⁷ and those that look out of the windows be darkened,⁸
4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;
5. Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish,⁹ and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail,¹⁰ because man goeth to his long home,¹¹ and the mourners go about the streets.
6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed,¹² or the golden bowl be broken,¹³ or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,¹⁴ or the wheel broken at the cistern.¹⁵
7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Eccl. 12:8 Nothing in this life is eternal. Everything under the sun is cursed with time. I have searched it out, and you will never be able to contradict what I am telling you. Heaven and earth and everything in them will pass away because this entire creation is temporal.

Eccl. 12:9-12 (Because the preacher was wise, he constantly taught the people of God the knowledge of God. He labored diligently to know the truth and to write it down for others in simple proverbs. These proverbs are like a sharp prick, against which it is

unwise and painful to kick. They are like nails fashioned by the hand of God and driven in by master craftsmen, almost unseen, yet expertly placed and secure.)

Let me warn you now, my son, that as long as men live on earth they will be writing books, and it will wear you out to study the books written by men. Be judicious, then, in your choice of what to read while you live under the sun.

SOLOMON'S CONCLUSION ABOUT LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Ecc. 12:13-14 This is the conclusion of everything I have known, and everything I have observed and experienced during the days of my life under the sun. This is the sum of all the wisdom that God has revealed to me in the days of my vanity. The conclusion of the whole matter, my son, is this:

Fear God, and keep His commandments. There is nothing else that man must do, for God will bring every deed of man into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

Footnotes

(All scriptures are from Proverbs unless otherwise noted.)

¹ (3:1-4) For example: Judas caused Jesus more suffering by admitting to the elders of Israel that he knew Jesus and his whereabouts (the truth), than did Peter, who cursed and swore before them all that he did not know the Lord Jesus (a lie). In the hands of some men, truth is far more harmful than a lie could ever be.

² (8:1-36) In Hebrew, *wisdom* is a feminine word. I depart from the grammar rule here and use the masculine pronoun *he* because in this new covenant the truth has been revealed that a man, Christ Jesus of Nazareth, is “the wisdom of God” personified. (1Cor. 1:24).

³ (9:1) God revealed through His servant Paul what these seven pillars of the faith are. We may read of them in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian saints (4:4-6).

Solomon’s Parable of Old Age (Eccl. 12:1-7)

⁴ In Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9-10, the sun and the moon referred to his father and mother. So, this reference to the sun and the moon still shining (not yet being darkened) may refer to a young person’s parents still being alive, the stars referring to brothers and sisters (again, as we find in Joseph’s dream).

⁵ The “keepers of the house” are the hands, which take care of the body as we go through life. Often in old age, they tremble.

⁶ The “strong men” I take to refer to the shoulders, which often “bow themselves” as one reaches an advanced age.

⁷ The “grinders”, of course, are the teeth, which usually become fewer in number as we age.

⁸ “Those that look out of the windows” are the eyes.

⁹ An almond tree in full bloom (“flourishing”) is full of white blossoms, a reference to the white hair of older people.

10 “Failing desire” is a decrease of interest in intimate marital pleasure.

11 Our “long home” is the grave.

12 Beginning with an injury to “the silver cord”, which I take to be a reference to the spinal cord, Solomon describes various ways that men may die other than from old age.

13 The “golden bowl” would refer to the skull, the “bowl” in which lies the brain, and the bowl upon which would rest a crown, thus “golden”. By “broken” Solomon appears to mean that it becomes dysfunctional, whether by an accidental injury, or in battle, or through sickness, or by any other means.

14 The “pitcher” may refer to the stomach, which receives into it what comes from the fountain. Solomon again uses “broken” in the sense of becoming incapable, by whatever means, of supporting life.

15 The “wheel at the cistern” may refer to the heart, from which liquid flows.

These are my suggestions for the meaning of some of the elements of Solomon’s wonderful parable. As time passes, I hope to understand these symbols more perfectly, and I would be grateful for any suggestions or insights that the reader may forward to me concerning it.

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