

SOLOMON'S WISDOM



BY JOHN DAVID CLARK SR.

PROVERBS

A Description of
The Secret Pathway to Happiness

John David Clark, Sr.

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 only to acquaint the young reader with some of their beauty and wisdom.

Solomon's Wisdom: The Secret Pathway to Happiness

ISBN- - Second edition, 2010

copyright 1999, John Clark, Sr.

SOLOMON'S WISDOM
P. O. Box 99
Burlington, NC 27216-0099

visit these web sites:

www.GoingtoJesus.com
www.Isaiah58.com

and for good music all day long, go to:
www.SongsofRest.com

INTRODUCTION

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. And that same yearning for happiness drives you now to do whatever you do and whatever you say.

We are all desperate travelers in this confusing and tormented world. Old and young, rich and poor, wise and foolish, we are all striving and yearning together from the moment of birth for happiness. That longing for happiness drives all people at all times to do whatever they do; it drives the treasure hunter as well as the thief, to risk his life for gold; it inspires the astronaut to circle the earth, and it motivates the lazy bum to beg for a piece of bread. The irrepressible human longing for happiness motivates men to go fishing, to sleep late, to study microbes, to play games or to do work, to invent new materials or to vandalize masterpieces, to love and to cherish or to hate and kill, to write books or to read them, to become martyrs or to conquer empires, to believe in God or to deny that He exists. You are reading this 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.

In this book, you will not find any statements more complicated than these, for Solomon's wisdom is not philosophy; rather, it is an ability to perceive and to describe the simple, godly life that leads to happiness. One reason most people never find this good life is that they look for an esoteric path, a complex and sophisticated pathway. Few dare to believe that happiness is found only in the quiet, clean life to which our Creator calls us. It is there, in humbly and sincerely following His instructions, that young people find the secret pathway to happiness.

The difference between the few who find eternal happiness and the multitudes who do not is simply the choices made between doing good or doing evil. All of us at one time or another have been deceived into laying down our burden of doing good in hope of finding happiness by doing evil. In other words, as Paul said, "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." And another ancient servant of God, Isaiah, wrote, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." What both of these giants of faith understood, but neither of them actually wrote down, is that those who go astray do so because they do not believe that the path of righteousness will lead them to happiness. The wise are those who understand that there is no such thing as a short-cut to happiness, in spite of the world's propaganda to the contrary. There is only one way to happiness, and Solomon's principal purpose for recording his wise sayings was to show young adults where that hidden path lies.

During any given time in human history, the vast majority of people can be seen pursuing happiness in wrong ways. We find eternal happiness only if we take the path that leads to it! But most people decline to take that path, not because they don't care – everybody chooses a path, everybody is making an effort – but simply because they do not believe that the path that leads to lasting happiness is the right one. There *is* a right way to seek for happiness, a way that unfailingly leads to it, and guiding young adults to that hidden path is what the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and this book, are about.

What a gift, to have the instructions for young adults that the wisest of all men gave to his own children! Parents everywhere can study the advice David and Solomon gave to their children, and so, make their own children wiser and more likely to find the secret path to eternal happiness.

Targets

Solomon's proverbs are for young people, and they will profit no one as they profit the young. At the same time, the world's advertisements are also directed principally toward the young, but the world's ways will especially harm the young if they are taken in by the show. It is in the trenches around the hearts of

young people that the most vicious and desperate spiritual battles are being fought. This book is a part of that warfare for the hearts of the young.

Here is a sample of the counsel given later in the main section, "Sayings of the Wise" (chapters Two through Eleven). Please note that 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 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 yours alone, so choose the kind of life that will bring you eternal happiness. *If at any point, you are discouraged in your pursuit of happiness because someone opposes your walking in the right way, you don't have much strength in your soul – or much good sense in your head, either.*

14:10

24:10

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. No, there is no rest, no peace, to be found anywhere in this creation, even beneath the earth, for just as men's eyes never grow weary of seeing, so hell is ever greedy for more souls. Don't let yours be a soul 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 any 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.

Isa.48:22

27:20

29:18

These proverbs and this wise counsel are designed by God specifically for young people, and the love and wisdom in them shines through as clearly in our day as when they were first spoken, three thousand years ago. May God make these truths alive to the young heart that reads them!

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT TRUE WISDOM IS

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

SOLOMON RECALLS HIS FATHER DAVID'S WORDS
CONCERNING THE VALUE OF WISDOM.

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. The distinctive characteristic of wisdom is this: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsels."

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. Likewise, a fool may be extremely intelligent, with celebrated degrees from prestigious universities; but then, he may as easily be uneducated, penniless, homeless, and shivering naked in the cold. One's earthly station, or his possession or lack of great intelligence, has no bearing whatsoever on the matter of wisdom.

Just as one must spend money in order to make money, so one 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 one stumbles in the dark. Success in the noble quest for God's hidden wisdom requires diligence, patience, and prudence. It demands an attitude of sincerity, humility, and fear of God. Wisdom, like happiness, must be sought the right way, or it will never be obtained.

Wisdom, and the happiness that it brings, is a prize which is unattainable for most people because they seek it in the wrong manner. The wise-hearted attain to true happiness, for they humble themselves to pursue it in the manner prescribed by their God--a manner thoroughly described for you here, in this volume of my wise sayings. The secret pathway to eternal happiness is the pathway of wisdom. If you recognize the Creator's patient and loving voice, and if you receive His words with meekness, then, and then only, are you truly 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 the ancient, renowned Greek philosophers. It is the knowledge of 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. To live an everlasting life of foolishness and sin would drive one insane. By "eternal life", I mean a *way* of living. Eternal life is the *way* the Creator lives, which will never be altered or destroyed.)

These wise sayings are dedicated to your education, young men, you who are about to set sail from the familiar shores of home and are embarking upon your journey through life, you who have a heart to pursue happiness the right way because your heart has been touched by God. Young people are naive concerning the ways of the world and are ignorant of the ways of the Creator, but the cure for that unhealthy simplicity is provided for you here.

All knowledge, apart from that which is received with fear of God, is vain. Only that pursuit of wisdom which springs from a sincere desire to please God will permanently benefit the seeker. Those who pursue wisdom as though it exists on its own without its Creator will never find it. Such people do not recognize wisdom, even if God mercifully sends someone to reveal it to them. They, in their foolish pride, treat the truth with disdain.

My son, listen intently to the instruction your wise father gives you; and live by the standards which governed 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 grace and eternal happiness.

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 fools who live around us. Listen to me, and I will show you the snares that others, whose hearts are not like yours, will craftily lay for 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 life. 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 their clique. 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. 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 don't 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.

Don't 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 others, and it will happen to many more young people 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.

(I am not giving you these warnings because you should worry that God's care for you will be insufficient. Even though the pure conscience of every person who loves the Creator is a highly sought prize of the Evil one, no one who follows my instructions has ever fallen victim to him. I am giving you these admonitions only because there are some things you must know, if you would be wise.)

Greedy and murderous sinners, whose life's work is to set clever traps for the innocent, don't 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.

Don't 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 the 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 will have 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 somewhere on a deserted island. On the contrary, wisdom shouts its truths loudly everyday, all day long, everywhere men go. Most people, however, are completely unaware that, because He dearly loves mankind, the Creator is crying out to them through every element of His creation, by every means conceivable. His heart's greatest desire is that men would requite His deep and abiding love for them. Oh, how He would rejoice, if men would only love Him!

1:24-31 There is a limit, however, to how long the Creator will offer to mankind His limitless love. 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 refuse His loving kindness, mock His wisdom, and reject His righteous ways. My earnest hope is that God never speaks these words to you, son.

"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 humbly 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 all the correction and guidance I offered you. Therefore, I have determined that you shall be rewarded fully for your self-willed arrogance. Do you demand your rights? You need not worry 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 to these things, my son. The unwillingness of some young people to listen to God will result in eternal death for them. If they prosper in this life, their own successes will destroy them, for the blessings that God gives to ungodly men to enjoy while on earth, the blessings for which they should thank the Creator and love Him, will weigh down their stubborn souls with condemnation, all the way down to hell. But every person who gives ear to God's tender voice shall escape His wrath and shall dwell forever in perfect peace and safety. After the Day of Judgment, the wise and obedient shall never again feel the feeling that is called "fear".

SOLOMON'S WORDS 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 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. Secondly, you must work at it. Let the desire to know God burn within you so that it overrides every other desire of your soul. Thirdly, 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 the way your God has prescribed, 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 will cease 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 will become less difficult to make. As the rising sun dissipates morning fog without a struggle, the light in your eyes will vaporize from within the confusing clutter of the many 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, as does everyone else, as you go through this life. Everyone is a feeler of spirits; but not everyone is a discerner of spirits. You will become a discerner of the spirits that are in the world if you listen to my instruction. And if you discern the spirits, they cannot deceive you.

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. They confusedly wrangle over exalted ideas that they themselves can never 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 don't even realize it. My son, titles bestow no truth upon a man; positions do not imply prudence; nor do degrees confer discernment.

But protection from the snares of intelligent fools will not be God's only reward for your pursuit of His ways. The other evil that you will escape when God grants your heart wisdom is that of desiring the pleasures offered to you by a backslidden woman. You will see right through her makeup to behold her wretched soul; and you will be so repulsed by the sight, the odor of her spirit, that her perfumed body will mean nothing to you.

Oh, she will coyly compliment you as being an engaging young man, but God will anoint your eyes to peer through her seductively parted lips, down her sweet-smelling throat, and into the disease-ridden pit that is 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 shall all spend eternity together, with no flesh to conceal their vile spirits.

Jehovah has named the wide, one-way street that leads to her house "Death Road", and that highway will not appeal to you at all when you become wise. No one who sells his soul to the kind of acts to which this nasty woman invites him is ever forgiven by the LORD.

2:20-22 This good counsel, my dear son, will guide you to the way of wise and righteous men, who live good lives and are blessed by the LORD. And to provoke you all the more to desire their kind of life, let me remind you of this wonderful promise of 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 a fire, while in that new and blessed world every righteous soul will have another righteous soul for a neighbor. What a pleasant life awaits you, because you desire to know the ways of your Creator and to walk in His light!

3:1-4 Son, if you remember my standards 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. These two things can especially be a blessing to you: *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; and if you sincerely desire to know the truth that God has to show you,

then you should prepare yourself now to suffer for it. 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.

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: To be promiscuously merciful is foolish. Forgiveness of sins not repented of an endorsement of them, and it will foster more sin. Mercy is cheapened when it is showered upon an unrepentant sinner.

You must demand of yourself and of those about you a just, 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*. Don't divide your faith. Put all your eggs into one basket, and trust your whole life to the care of the LORD.

Unwise people are they who search for ways to obtain happiness without God. 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 in God, and live by His direction.

Ps.86:11

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 is the guarantee of your happiness.

3:7-8 Those who survive by manipulation pride themselves on their accomplishments and abilities, but you stay humble and fear God's displeasure. If you do that, you will not resort to the world's ways of pursuing happiness, regardless of its pressures or enticements to do so; and, 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 leave them in 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.

It is covetousness or rebelliousness, or both, which hinder men from honoring God by financially supporting His servants whom He has sent to do His work. Don't believe any of their rationalizations for their wickedness. You know the truth; walk in it, and God will enrich your life.

Ps.37:25

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, 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 a pleasant rest.

3:25-26 Men, especially those in positions of authority, often manipulate others by exploiting men's fears; but do not be moved by the dread of catastrophes that they would plant in your heart. Catastrophes may happen, but they are for the destruction of the wicked and for the blessing of the righteous. Wisdom will persuade your heart to trust in God's faithfulness, and 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 wait until tomorrow to pay someone what you owe him, when you have it 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 eventually to trust your judgment.)

3:31-32 Remember what I said. Do not envy the man who is successful in manipulating others. Such men have a 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 can't 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 publicly humiliated in the Judgment and cast aside without mercy.

SOLOMON RECALLS HIS FATHER DAVID'S WORDS
CONCERNING THE VALUE OF WISDOM.

4:1-5 Listen, children, to what David my father taught me, and learn from it. I am giving you wise counsel that will help you in every situation you will ever face. I was very close to my father, and my mother felt a special, tender love for me. I will now share with you the truth my father taught me. He said to me, "Son, keep my words safely hidden in your heart. Do as I teach you to do, and you will live forever. Follow my good advice."

"Seek to understand life rightly; and once you have obtained wisdom, don't let it go. Love God's wisdom, and you will be safe. God's wisdom will save you from much pain and trouble."

4:6-9 My father told me, "Let wisdom be your chief desire. As you are building your life, 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, she will lift you up with her. Marry her, and she will bring you honor. She will 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 this, 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 so that none of its problems or disappointments will dishearten you or turn your heart toward evil. Hold on tightly to instruction, my son, and never let it go. Guard it, for it is your life!"

4:14-17 "Part of your acquiring 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 successfully accomplish evil can become addicted to it. When that happens, they cannot rest unless they have done an evil deed or seduced some one 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 the path of sin never comprehend what God is really 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 instructions I am offering to you. Your life and your health depend upon it. Always keep these wise instructions at the center of all 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 your heart. From your heart will be made all your choices for good or for evil. Guard your heart!"

"Much evil will infiltrate your heart if you speak to those around you in an arrogant, insulting, or sarcastic tone. This is a 'froward tongue'; I and I will speak much more about it 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 a short cut to happiness, refuse them. They won't get you there. 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 speak to others, your words may have weight 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 disguise her deadly spirit and to hide the stench of her soul. *She is foolish; she does not even understand that it is better to be good than to smell good.* 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.)"

"Her final end will be as bitter as poison as it slowly eats through the belly; the pains 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 unclean spirits employed the same methods of alluring young people to sin from one generation to the next, if unclean spirits never changed styles, then sin would inevitably lose much of its appeal. Every generation is offered new styles for the same sins of the generation before them, but by new fashions foolish young people are led to believe they have attained to some new thing, a new height of sophistication to 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 fools in previous generations. Long-haired fools cannot recognize the foolishness of the short-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 this: Does your heart love life and good or death and evil? That simple choice is all there is to this life. Yet, 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! Don't walk away from my words! Stay far from such women as I have described to you. Don't even allow your curiosity to provoke 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. 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 to escape contracting 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, saying to yourself, 'Why did I not listen? 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 be thinking, 'I was in the midst of righteous people, and I chose the path of sin!' Then you will die."

Eccl. 7:1a

5:15-19 "Understand me. 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 thing under the sun. Immoral pleasure is often nothing more than perfectly good pleasure--but enjoyed at the wrong time, in the wrong place, with the wrong person. In its time, every thing is beautiful; but anything done at the wrong time is sinful."

"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, and don't waste your strength on some woman who has no control over her own filthy spirit."

Ps. 16:11

5:20-23 "Remember, God is watching over all, at all times. He records every word said and every deed done; He ponders the choices men make, and He will bring everything into judgment."

"God's righteous judgment 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. Don't you 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, don't 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 mess 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 "Don't fall for get-rich-quick schemes. In this life, nothing replaces honest, hard work. The money that comes from that is secure. That's one lesson God intends for us to learn from nature. Look at His creatures, such as the ant. Have you ever seen even 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 doesn't follow the ant's example and prepare for hard times is both foolish and lazy. Laziness is a thief. It steals time from you, time filled with golden opportunities to prepare for what lies ahead."

6:12-15 "The schemer, as with the whorish woman, has practiced his craft to attract foolish young people. He, too, is searching for ways to live off other people's labor. This lazy man's cunning words are measuredly cocky, which many youths mistake for honest confidence. 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."

"Don't be impressed with his ways of making money. He is adept at persuading others to take the risk, while he rakes in their money. He constantly stirs up trouble, as when his business partners finally 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 "Let me tell you the seven things that are most abhorrent to the LORD. These seven things especially infuriate our Creator:

(1) God abhors people who think they are 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 inherently worth more than others. Stylish fashion denies this eternal truth. Stylish fashion is a way for men to make a false statement 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 the ways of 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 quietly sow seeds which stir up strife and hatred among people who belong together."

6:20-22 "Son, take heed to the instructions your mother and I have given to you. If you cling to them, decisions will be made wisely, sleep will be undisturbed by fear and regret, and wisdom will greet you every morning, ready to continue its work of bringing you happiness."

6:23-35 "You see, God's commandments are like a bright light on a dark trail, and men who really desire happiness live by the instructions I am giving you."

"My instructions will save you from the adulterous woman, the attractive woman who will artfully praise you (when her husband isn't listening). Her eyes will subtly suggest things to you that her mouth will not say aloud."

"Such women can cause men to spend themselves into poverty. Then, they will scorn the attention of those fools, and continue to operate their immoral business with other men, right under their husbands' noses. Especially valued conquests to these women are young men such as yourself, whom God loves dearly."

"It is as impossible to escape destruction if you fall into an adulteress's trap as it is for a flaming match in your hip pocket not to scorch your pants. If you can walk across burning coals without feeling pain, then you can escape destruction for committing adultery."

"If a man steals some bread because he is starving, people will be understanding of his actions, 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. 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, and 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 wife or mother from being ravished by wicked men. My words will save you from the many 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 a nearby corner, and I watched as he continued walking toward it. There, in the shadows of that very dark night 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's 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."

8:1-3 "Wisdom loves men; 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 mankind:"

To you, mankind, do I call. My voice is directed solely to you. You are such foolish people! You are such fools! Believe Me, and you will be made wise. O, 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 truth; 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 recognize My doctrine as being right.

My instructions are 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 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, so that his desire for peace and happiness is accomplished.

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 do not and will not dwell in the heart of a man who is proud and arrogant. I refuse to walk with him down his evil pathway, for I despise the smugness of his 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 which the rulers of earth make are prudent decisions only to the extent that they agree with My words. Their strength lies in their confidence in the ways of truth which I have revealed.

I sincerely desire to bless those who sincerely desire Me. And those who diligently seek Me shall find Me and be blessed. Enduring riches are in My hand alone; 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, and 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 any thing else existed. I predate everything--heaven, earth, everything--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 the 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 and laid the foundations of the oceans and set their boundaries, I was there. When He appointed the continents their places, 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 there 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.)

The man who daily listens to My instruction, waiting for me to speak before making his decisions, will be forever blessed, because whoever seeks for and finds Me finds favor with My God, who created Me and loves Me. But whoever despises Me destroys himself. Those 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 awaits them."

"Do not be discouraged. Do you lack wisdom? 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!'"

9:6-12 "The difference between a wise man and a fool is demonstrated most clearly by their differing responses to instruction. A wise man is made wiser still by instruction, but a fool rejects instruction when it is offered to him."

"You make yourself look silly trying to instruct a fool; and in trying to reprove and correct a wicked man, you appear foolish yourself. 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're 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 do so."

"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 is of God and what is not of God."

9:13-18 "I will warn you again, for the last time, of this very great danger to your young soul: A foolish woman has a loud mouth, and she is ignorant of the ways of God. She entices men to evil, either as a seductress 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 their attention."

"To those who are stupid enough to listen to her, the adulteress suggests that the bed chamber of another man's wife is more exciting than the 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."

INSTRUCTION FOR THE YOUNG

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

CHAPTER TWO

THE PEACEFUL AND THE ANGRY

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 even begins. When you perceive that contention is about to commence, back off.* Don't 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 an honorable deed that requires a special kind of courage.

17:1

17:14

20:3a

Don't worry about whisperers. If you snoop around, listening to others' conversation in order to find out what they are saying about you, you may hear one of your friends, employees, or even one of your children cursing you. But you know in yourself that there have been times that you have spoken evil of someone in authority over you, and afterward changed your mind and regretted your hasty words. So, don't be curious to hear what you already know is being said.

Ecc. 7:21-22

Fools leap fearlessly into heated debates, and, 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 carry a dog by his ears.*

20:3b

26:17

If you feel that you have been wronged by a neighbor, work it out with him alone, saying nothing to anyone else. You will be humiliated if you talk to others first, and then learn that you are the one who was really at fault. *You should be slow to enter into any controversy, lest you be disgraced when you learn that your adversary is in the right.*

25:9-10

25:8

Be wise with your compassion, my son, 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. 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 have already found it*. Do not befriend a man given to anger, one who 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 arises from a proud spirit is especially cruel*. The man who engages in that evil is scornful of God's justice.

19:19

15:18a; 29:22a

29:22

26:21

17:19a

22:24-25

14:17a

14:29b

21:24b

21:24a

Hatred motivates a man to publicize the faults of others; it needlessly stirs up strife; but a loving disposition enables a man to overlook the transgression of another and to strive for peace. *The man who disguises hatred with lies, and who slanders those who are good, is nothing but a fool*. But 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.

10:12

10:18

11:17; Mt. 5:7

Avoid any close association with people whose mood swings are unpredictable and extreme. They will turn against you as quickly as they befriended you. Their calamity is certain, and when they fall, they will take into the Pit with them as many as they can. *But there is something far more dangerous than this, and that is secret hatred. It shows itself as love, but it will take you toward the Pit. A man with such a heart is a storehouse of cunning deceit. When someone 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 deceitful men. A deceiver thinks he is not recognized for what he really is, but that is only because he doesn't know what the wise can see. He has deceived himself, and doesn't know that God fully intends to expose him to open shame before the entire world.*

24:21b-22

26:24-26

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*, and 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.*

19:11

14:29

11:12b

12:16a

11:12a

12:16b

Two working together can accomplish more than two working separately. Besides, 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.

There are many proofs that those with a cooperative spirit receive special benefits in this life. Two lying 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

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 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 submissive to God and please Him, 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.

16:32

25:28

15:18b; Mt.5:9

16:7

Rom.12:21

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DILIGENT AND THE SLOTHFUL

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 overgrown vineyard was badly 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 was seeing 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."

By slothfulness, son, a building falls into ruin; and when hands are idle, a house rots through and collapses.

24:30-33

Eccl.10:18

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.

26:14

13:4

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

23:21b

20:13

19:15b

Sleepiness isn't 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

19:24

26:15

Poverty doesn't rob a man of wisdom. Many a poor man is wise enough to understand that by the work of his hands his belly will be full. At the same time, there are many whose lives are ruined because they don't see a connection between honest labor and having food to eat. *The unwillingness of their own hands to work kills them; they spend their days coveting the possessions of those who are diligent, never realizing that it is diligence that has provided them with enough to share with others.* This is the long and short of it: the one who works hard and faithfully will have enough food to satisfy him, and the one who follows the example of lazy men will have poverty enough to satisfy him. Both will have what they earn.

13:23

21:25b-26

28:19

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. What eventually kills the lazy young man is giving in to self-indulgent desires instead of doing what is right. *Such a one becomes 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 diligently will have enough to eat, but the one who follows the lazy example of fools has no foresight.

10:5

21:25a

21:17

12:11

The man who is working so diligently that he has little time for idle chatter tends to become richer as time passes; there just isn't 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 attention, you will notice that those who occupy positions of authority are, in the main, those who were working while others were concentrating on "having fun", and that those who spent their youth playing games are servants to those who did not. *God has 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.*

14:23

12:24

12:14b; Gal. 6:7

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 them. This is true of all earthly possessions, even those belonging to the most powerful men on earth. God has given you the money you have 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 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.

10:4

27:23-27

12:27

Someone who doesn't want to work can always find a reason not to do so; but righteousness enables a man to manage life's problems easily enough. To a lazy man, if it is isn't too hot to work, then it's too cold. And 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 to be nothing more than malevolent schemes to force him to do their will.

15:19

20:4

22:13; 26:13

26:16

The slothful fear the responsibilities that come with having a business, but if you ever make any money, you'll have to spend some. Don't 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 no responsibilities also have little to eat.

14:4

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.

10:26

22:29

18:9

21:5

CHAPTER SIX

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

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.* It is not good for a man to be foolish, and ignorant of the ways of righteousness. *Every man with an understanding heart pursues the knowledge of God.* But guard your heart against the influences of foolishness. A little leaven affects the whole lump of bread. *Perfume loses its sweetness when little bugs fall into it and die; so a man who is held in high esteem for wisdom and honor loses respect when a little foolishness invades his heart.*

16:16

16:22a

19:2a

15:14a

1Cor.5:6

Eccl. 10:1

A prudent man is aware of the coming wrath and escapes it by submitting to the will of God, but unwise men pay no heed to the warnings, walk on, and are punished. *The very notion that there is such a thing as sin is a joke to those who are foolish.*

22:3; 27:12

14:9

Some fools flatter themselves because of their intellectual prowess; they think that wisdom is the ability to pontificate upon exotic and complicated philosophies. What foolishness all that is! They are blind to the truth and life that is right in front of them, as they strain their intellect to cogitate over esoteric thoughts. They stumble over the truth and don't even recognize it. Wisdom opens your eyes to see life as the Creator sees it, and to learn of Him through what you see; it enables you to live well and to deal with life's circumstances in a prudent manner. *The wisdom for which the prudent strive is simply the wisdom to discern the way that leads to happiness; and if you handle a situation wisely, trusting steadfastly in God, the results will be good, and you will be made happy. For this reason, every man with an understanding heart lives the right way.*

17:24

14:8a

16:20

15:21b

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.* When a scorner is removed, the whole situation 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; they are a detriment to peace and happiness and are hated by the upright.*

14:8b

10:23a

22:10

24:9

Life becomes sweet to every soul who departs from evil and finds the right road. In spite of seeing others blessed by God for doing so, however, fools cannot bear the thought of departing from evil to walk on the road that leads to true happiness. *When a man with a foolish heart has wandered off the right way, it is very difficult for him to humble himself and receive correction, even though he knows that death is the penalty for rejecting God's reproof.* And once such a man's heart becomes hardened, and he becomes scornful toward the ways of God, he no longer loves those who give 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.

13:19

15:10

15:12

The Honor of Government

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 won't 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.

24:7

26:1

13:16b

26:6

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 try to bear up under the wrath of a fool who is in authority is more difficult to bear than either. It is more dangerous to have a fool in your house, when he feels free to be himself, than a mother bear whose cubs have been taken from her.

26:8

27:3

17:12

The Stubbornness of a Fool

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 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 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 you can beat a fool with a hundred lashes and he will still say and do foolish things. He may, for a time, attempt to behave wisely, but goodness will not make him happy; he will return to his foolishness, just as a dog returns to his own vomit to lick it up again. A man's heart is his home, and no matter how far down a pathway that is different from his heart that he wanders, every man always returns to live as his heart directs. Foolishness is the joy of a fool's heart; he cannot be content unless he is there, saying or doing something wrong.*

27:22

19:29

26:3; 10:13b

17:10

26:11

27:8

15:21a

Do not waste your time trying to guide a fool to the way of true happiness; wisdom seems foolish to a fool. Just to attempt to instruct a fool is itself foolishness. Whether you rail on him or laugh at him, if you contend with a foolish man you will be frustrated with your lack of success. There 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; they will assume that you, too, are a fool. On the other hand, there are times when a fool must be opposed. You will learn when it is time to reprove a fool, and when it is time to ignore him.

23:9

16:22b

29:9

26:4-5

Listening and Talking

A wise son makes his father happy. He is prudent and listens to his 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 is God's reward to a young man who ignores the instruction he is given, but both God and men will honor the young man who obeys his instructors. The final result of rejecting God's counsel is complete and eternal destruction, but the reward for those who fear God and obey Him is complete and unending happiness.

15:20a

15:5b

15:5a; 13:1

15:20b

13:18

13:13

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, though 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 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 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 from what they have witnessed. They walk into the very traps they have seen the upright evade. There is no hope for a fool.*

21:8

21:12a

21:29b

11:8a

21:29a

11:8b

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. If you love the humbling experience of being taught, you will also love the exalting privilege of obtaining knowledge.

12:1b

12:15a

(28:26a)

12:15b

28:26b

12:1a

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 precious seed planted in a barren, rocky desert. Even if he obtains some knowledge, he won't be able to use it rightly. Oh, my son, listen carefully to me now. The secret to becoming wise is in knowing how to seek for it. It cannot be found in the way of evil. Men who scorn the right path sometimes strive greatly to become wise, but they can never attain to it. Only those who understand how to seek wisdom 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 fools 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 says something right.

17:16

15:2b

14:6

15:7b

15:14b

17:7

Everyone has feelings and thoughts in his heart, but only a wise man knows how to control and use them for good. A fool just doesn't know how to control himself. Regardless of his desire to be thought of as wise, in every situation, all the time, his words and actions loudly proclaim to all that he is a fool.

Eccl.10:2-3

As soon as you discover that an instructor has no knowledge of God, get away from him. *Don't be so naive as to think that you can listen to a fool's ungodly words without them affecting you. Even if you know that what someone is teaching is wrong, those words can turn your heart from the right way if you continue to listen to them. Do not be deceived; ungodly associations will corrupt a pure heart.*

14:7

19:27; 1Cor. 15:33

A wise man disperses knowledge of the right path to those who hear him, *because it takes a wise man to use knowledge in a way that truly benefits others.* The man who disperses true knowledge sincerely loves others, and the man who sincerely receives such knowledge loves himself. *But the man who refuses instruction is doubly a fool; he hates himself as well as his instructor.*

15:7a

15:2a

19:8a

15:32a

A fool's voice is recognized by the multitude of his words. He runs his 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 contempt and harm that come his way.* He ruins his own life with foolishness and, afterward, he angrily frets against the LORD, as if he has been wronged; *but a fool's blabbing mouth is his own destruction; his lips are the snare of his soul.* He does not govern his mouth; rather, he submissively follows his own tongue to the slippery brink of hell. *My son, in a multitude of words foolishness and sin are present. No one can talk all the time without lying. Be quiet, and you will be innocent.*

Eccl. 5:3b

10:8b, 10b

18:6

19:3

18:7

10:14b

10:19a

A wise man is a quiet man. In general, people sense that this is true and, so, they tend to consider any quiet person to be wise. Even a fool, if he remains silent, 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.*

10:19b

17:28

18:2

A man who possesses true knowledge is a man of few words. He listens and stores up knowledge, *and when young men who are searching for wisdom meet him, they find in his lips the wisdom they have longed for.* He guides those who are traveling in darkness to the right way, *correcting them without humiliating them, healing their whole*

lives, and avoiding the cruel, sharp tones of fools. The soul that takes heed to such a wise man will in time stand with him in honored glory among the wise.

17:27a

10:14a

10:13a

11:30b

12:18

15:31

A wise man acknowledges his dependence upon God and remains meek 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 to instructions. He does not bicker with those who admonish him, because he is not proud;* on the contrary, when a godly man reproves a godly man, they both become richer. Such reproof, and the receiving of it, is a beautiful sight to those who are seeking the right way. Correction is like an ornament of gold to a wise man's soul. *The basic law by which the wise live is "listen and learn". Obeying this law brings them happiness and protects them from eternal death, because every 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 everything he hears. A prudent man carefully screens all the criticism and advice he is given.*

11:2

13:10; 10:8a

25:12

13:14

10:29b

14:15

The first step toward obtaining wisdom is to forsake your own vain thoughts and humbly and carefully listen to a wise man. *The road to happiness is the road of receiving instruction.* There is a highway that seems right to man, but at the end of it is eternal death. And there is a pathway that seems wrong to man, but at the end of it is everlasting life.

22:17

10:17a

14:12; 16:25

Make every effort from your heart to be teachable; labor to be able to hear and to grasp instruction. *Take counsel when you need it, and listen to advice, so that as you grow older you will also grow wiser.* In time, it will seem pleasant to your soul to hear words of wisdom, 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.*

23:12

19:20

22:18

10:17b

The ear of a wise man seeks for truth and knowledge, and his heart seizes upon it when it is found. *But good counsel isn't easy to obtain. It is like cool, clean water hidden deep in the heart of the wise; but those of an understanding heart will find ways to draw it up.* While a foolish man blabs about everything he knows, a prudent man 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.

18:15

20:5

12:23

14:33

29:11

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. *Arrogant young people speak sarcastically about instruction, as if instructors are their enemies. What fools they are! Their enemy is their own ignorance, and instructors are there to help them find the road to happiness.* They rage at anyone who attempts to correct or instruct them, and swagger confidently onward toward the Pit. Wise young people understand that instructors are God's servants, sent to help them find the way. They fear God and do good; *they speak respectfully to their parents and teachers, and avoid a thousand heartaches.* You show yourself to be wise when you instruct your lips to speak humbly; and the wisdom you then obtain from others will in time proceed out of your own mouth.

16:21b

14:3a

14:16

14:3b

16:23

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. He 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 staggers into a thorn bush trying to walk straight.*

26:7

26:9

When God's glory and power overshadow a man, he may stagger and even fall prostrate upon the ground. Drunkenness causes a man to act the same way, but it is just a mockery of the 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 trust God for a spouse and rejoice with her (*for the marriage bed is undefiled*); or you can take the world's short-cut to happiness: fornication. But it 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 cheat 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 short and easy ways to happiness. They are fools. Submit yourself to the glory of God, and be filled with His Spirit; do not take the world's substitute 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. There is only one road to happiness; all other ways end in confusion, sorrow, and death.

20:1; Heb. 13:4

A wise man sees through this world's delusions and fearlessly exposes them as powerless to bring eternal happiness to anyone. *A wise man has true strength, the kind that only increases with age. His wars are never lost, because they are never fought hastily, without wise counsel. He understands that in much counsel there is safety, and by taking wise 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 multitude of wise counselors is received; and no endeavor can succeed when the counsel of wisdom is refused.* Everyone who makes ill-considered decisions is on the wrong road, because righteousness comes from listening to the upright and patiently following their counsel. *Every man who refuses to take counsel will fail in his pursuit of happiness. Happiness is found only in the well-advised way.*

21:22

24:5-6

13:16a

15:22

19:2b

11:14

A fool perishes because he lacks knowledge, even though while he lived he was surrounded by righteous men who openly proclaimed the truth, *but the son who receives reproof will become a man of understanding*. The world has honored many a fool as being a man of great understanding, but if he were a man of understanding he would have wisdom. *Be patient, and do not let these things fret you. In time, every fool becomes servant to the wise. And in time, the wise shall be justly commended and forever blessed, while the perverse shall be forever held in contempt.*

10:21

15:32b

10:23b

11:29

12:8

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. 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. *These are the enduring riches of wise men, a crown which the prudent desire and obtain; but the treasure of fools is their foolishness.*

13:20

14:18

14:24

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.* He longs for wisdom, dedicates his heart to it, and separates himself from those who do not want it. *And because he 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.*

17:27b

15:24

18:1a

13:15a

18:1b

19:8b

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 this 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.*

22:19-21

24:13-14

CHAPTER SEVEN

HUMILITY AND PRIDE

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, trusting in the strength of his beautiful shell. *Pride is a prayer for punishment. People who are proud are virtually pleading with the Almighty to destroy them; their pride is like an malodorous incense rising heavenward, pleading for destruction from God.* God has always heard and answered that prayer, because He abhors proud people. *He will lay waste all their possessions, and their exalted expectations will come to nothing.*

16:18; 29:23a

17:19b

16:5a

15:25a

The aspirations of a fool are vain, and a fool's pursuit of honor is useless; still, there is more hope for a fool than for a man filled with pride. *Believe it: God loathes a proud man! So much so that God considers it a sin even to dress or behave so as to make it appear that you are better than others.* If every one of us on earth were to agree together in defense of pride, God would still utterly destroy us all; there is no safety in numbers.

26:12

21:4

16:5b

Don't puff yourself up to pursue some high position. Pride leads the way to disgrace and disappointment, because the honors that men give, they can take away at their convenience. If, in your efforts to obtain praise and honor from men, you are humiliated, those whose praise you seek won't care that you are hurting. They will show no compassion on you at all. *Listen! The earthly glory that proud men covet for themselves isn't real glory. It is fool's gold. Too much of anything is too much, and those who hoard to themselves all the earthly wealth and stature they can get are certain to become spiritually sick because of it. Men may envy and praise them, but their souls will be emaciated.*

25:6-7; 11:2a

25:27

Do not brag. Why tell others 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 in an attempt to impress people and win their praise? Can people give you happiness? What do you have to boast of, anyway? You may not even be alive tomorrow. Everything is in the hands of God, who despises proud people. *But even the praise of others is a burden; don't put your trust in it. Praise from others, even if sincere, will put your heart through a fiery test, a test of the heart which many have failed. And the greater the praise, the hotter the trial can become.*

27:1-2

27:21

A little humility will benefit a man more than a lot of pride. 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, so, be happy; but in time all such efforts fail, for safety is only of the LORD. *He alone is able to make men truly happy. He protects the possessions of the humble widow from wicked and powerful men. 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 living.*

15:33b

22:4

21:31

29:23b

Great wealth tends to give men an exalted opinion of themselves; however, a poor man who is wise can bring to light the rich man's vanity. *The poor speak politely because they are at a disadvantage, but the rich speak haughtily because they think they have no need of others.* But you don't have to be wealthy to become proud. Even in poverty, some men become puffed up. The 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.

28:11

18:23

12:9

Fearing the wrath of God that will certainly fall upon the proud, and desiring the blessings with which God will reward the humble, all wise men choose the path of humility over everything that this world can offer them. All wise men, whether rich or poor, fear God and remain humble. Consequently, they live peacefully with others, because strife arises only where pride exists. Without even trying, a proud man stirs up strife wherever he goes, but an humble man lives in peace with those around him and is happy.

18:12

11:2b

13:10a

28:25a

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MERCIFUL AND THE CRUEL

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", don't you know that He who created your heart knows what is in it? And don't you know that He who gives you your breath knows what you are saying? Do you think that He, like you, will fail in His duty to render to man according to the deeds he has done--or failed to do? No, my son, He will faithfully bring your deeds into the light to be judged. He has no need to call witnesses to determine the truth of a matter, for He knows every thought that passes through your mind; and He will cause you, and all men, 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 never suffer lack. You will always have enough.*

14:21

24:11-12

28:27

You see, my son, a man's true, hidden attitude toward the 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 the needy. *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.

14:31; 17:5a

21:13

17:5a

When you give to those who are unable to give to you in return, 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, who refuses to hoard up goods for himself when a poor person near him is in need.

19:17

22:9; 2Cor. 9:7

22:9

One who is glad when anyone 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, 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 his 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.*

17:5b

25:20

When someone does evil to you, and 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 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. *Love your enemies, if you would belong to God and be happy. Bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.* If God afflicts someone who 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 hand. 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

An ungodly man researches old records to unearth transgressions of others. His lips burn with a yearning to ruin the reputation of good people by bringing to light any error of which they may have been guilty in the past. The LORD despises the man who is arrogant and harsh with others; and such a man, 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.

16:27

11:20a

14:2b

13:5b

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 trying to act happy. When the laughter ceases, the pain returns. Only God can mend a broken heart; and when someone comes to Him for comfort, 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 of heart can completely discourage someone's spirit. *To those who are constantly suffering, there is nothing new in a new day. To them, a new dawn is a dreaded event, for they know 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 the spirit is broken, no one can bear life's burden. *When someone's spirit is broken, his health deteriorates and his whole life begins to fall apart.*

13:12

15:30a

14:13; Lk. 4:18

15:13b

15:15a

18:14

17:22b

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 acts as a medicine for his whole body. *Not everything that gives people joy is good for them, however. A foolish man is made joyful by more foolishness. You must yourself be good in order for what is good to give you joy.* To the wise, a fool's joy seems absurd. It is as unseemly for a fool to be happy as it would be for an ignorant, plastered bum to be acclaimed as ruler of the world.

15:13a

15:15b

17:22a

15:21a

19:10

What a man desires determines how kind he is to others. If he desires the favor of God above all other desirable things, he will be merciful to others as he pursues it. If he desires anything above the favor of God, he will be inconsiderate and unkind to others in his quest for it. Love for God enables man to be like Him, for it opens the door to love from God. *Who can say, "I have cleansed my own heart from the stain of my sin"?*

19:22a

20:9

CHAPTER NINE

THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

SHORT-CUTS

Because the way of an upright man is God's way, it is safe; *and those who walk with a righteous man are much enriched by the experience. 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.*

10:9a

11:30a

12:28

13:15b

Wicked men entice others to join in their ungodliness with vain promises of happiness in sin. *They know how to pressure their victims into making ill-considered, hasty decisions; and those who do so are ensnared by evil.* Wicked men leave the impression that people can be happy without obeying God, and their words attract those whose hearts are impure; but, it is only from God that true happiness springs. *Because evil men believe that there exists 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.

16:29

19:2b

12:12

17:11

13:21a

Above all, my young son, never steal from God. Whoever would have you do so 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 do what He has promised to do.*

20:25a

Mal.3:8-10

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. This principle holds true with a wicked man; everything a sinner does is tainted with sin. So, beware the wicked man most when he appears kind and good; such a man always has an ulterior, self-serving motive, and there is no mercy in his heart toward you.*

11:18

12:10

If a clever, wicked man persuades one of God's children to follow him down a path toward his cleverly hidden trap, he will fall into the pit that he himself has dug; and the LORD will lead His child back to the right way, and will still bless him. *Whoever is allured by a thief's promise of quick happiness and consents to his wicked way, despises his own soul; he is throwing away his hope of eternal life and happiness. When a righteous man submits to the counsel of the ungodly, wickedness is given credibility; and innocent souls are placed in peril, because they trust the righteous man and will follow his example. The man who turns away from the right ways of the LORD will be turned away by the LORD when he comes to Him for help, but God's rewards for faithfulness will completely satisfy the upright man.*

28:10

29:24a

25:26

14:14

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 are faithful to the covenant love God enough to withstand the wicked and to 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 righteous acknowledge the righteousness of the judgments that God executes in the earth.*

28:4; Rom.1:32; Eph.5:11

28:5

A SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

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 truth is not to make men right, but to make them good.

11:20b

14:2a

14:27

16:6b

19:23

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. *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 purity of heart delivers the upright, for it refuses all invitations to wander off the right path. *The integrity of an upright man leads him to make right choices, even when he is confused concerning which path to take.* Everything the 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 peacefulness with God.*

11:3a

11:5a

11:6a

11:19a

10:16a

4:18

The reason God punishes the wicked is because of their evil deeds; and if they would receive His correction and turn from wickedness, He would accept them. *But they cling to the goods they have stolen as if those things had been given them by God. They know they have done wrong, 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 transgressing God's commandments, their own naughtiness ensnares them. *They need no enemies; their own sins work against them.* Whatever the wicked do--without having to plan, or even think about it--leads to further ungodliness; they carry in their very breath the disease of sin. *The heart of the wicked is simply not worth much.*

21:12b

21:7

11:3b

11:5b

11:6b

13:6b

10:16b

10:20b

RESULTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WICKEDNESS

Among the many benefits of righteousness is that it makes the whole body healthier and produces strength for the soul, but the envious nature of sinners devours their health and peace like a cancer. A man who steadfastly lives a life of righteousness cannot be deceived or destroyed; *but not only is he himself protected by the LORD; his children also escape many troubles because he trusts in God.*

14:30a

10:29a

14:30b

13:6a

11:21b

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 blessing that the unrighteous hold perishes with them when they die. Trusting in a gospel of man is like hiding from a raging fire in a fireworks factory.* The righteous is protected by God in this life and will be saved from the wrath of God 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.

10:28

11:7

28:18

26:10

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 be able to 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.* The upright man will receive his due reward, and nothing shall be lacking to him. *It will be impossible for anyone to take from the righteous the happiness that God has promised them; and it will be quite impossible to rescue the wicked from damnation when he faces God in the Judgment.* Listen to this, my son, and mark it well! Do not think that it is safe to commit a sin because a multitude of people are doing it. If every person on earth chooses the path of wickedness, then every person on earth will be damned. There is no safety in numbers.

11:19b

11:27b

21:15b

12:21b

11:27a

28:25b

13:21b

10:30

11:21a; Ex.23:2a

In the field of iniquity nothing of any lasting value is produced, though the ungodly labor assiduously in their fields. 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. 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 proudly over his earthly success, but the brightness of his smile will dim when all his successes crumble--and he sees the righteous man's joy continue to shine upon his countenance.

22:8

17:20a

13:9

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. Don't be confused. Every circumstance in the life of the upright man is a part of God's plan for his eternal blessing, and it is his present happiness to know that he is doing the right thing. Regardless of any present circumstances, the righteous 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 trembling heart senses that the day of God's wrath is coming upon him. You can rest assured that the good man's desire shall be granted, and that the evil man's fear shall come upon him in full.

14:9b

10:6

12:21a

21:15a

11:23

10:24

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;* and their souls overflow with 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. For, whoever fears men will commit 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 keeps him happy, while those who do not fear God follow paths that are full of troubles.*

12:3b

18:10

12:3a

28:1a

14:26a

28:1b

28:25b

29:6

29:25

28:14

HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION

Regardless of what the wicked do, God is displeased with them. God even despises an ungodly man when he worships Him. *Son, if you refuse to obey God's voice, you make even your prayer an abomination to the Lord.* As much as God despises the worship offered Him by the ungodly, He is even more provoked when the ungodly man's worship is just a 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.*

18:3

15:8a

28:9

21:27

21:4

15:8b

28:12a

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 man is in difficulties, God delivers him, *because he hates lies and will not resort to deceit in an effort to obtain happiness.*

12:20a

12:13

13:5a

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 truth is not something merely to be believed; it is a thing to be done.

16:6a; Job 31:33

28:13b

28:13a

SCHEMES

The man who devises unrighteous schemes is making a big mistake, for the way to happiness will be revealed only to those who contemplate on ways to do good. *Still, even in his sleep, the ungodly man's mind works on new means to attain to happiness without God; and when he wakes, he speaks, and evil works are initiated.* An essential part of a wicked schemer's plan is the appearance of goodness, but he will eventually be exposed to be the mischievous person he really is. *It is not possible for him forever to escape the revealing light of truth.* When the foul plans of such a man are uncovered, he may laugh, pretending that the plans were intended as a prank. Don't believe him. His heart is as dangerously inclined toward ruining others as a raging madman with weapons of war in his hand. *After successfully carrying out cruel plans against innocent people, the wicked will try to avoid detection and flee away; but God always makes certain that the path the sinner takes in his flight leads down to the Pit of Hell. Do not meddle with God's judgment; let it happen.*

14:22

16:30

24:8

10:9b

26:18-19

28:17

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, or 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 eat the bitter, burning fruit of their own ungodly behavior.

21:10

11:29a

21:18

26:27

13:2b

The road of rebelliousness and arrogant sarcasm leads through thickets of thorns, and deadly pitfalls, but there are no such dangers on the right path, *for the path that leads to happiness is a pleasant path that leads away from evil, danger, and disgrace.* *The one who single-mindedly perseveres along that pathway will save his soul from many a heartache.* When you keep God's 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 about accomplishing their wicked purposes, and you must take equal care to avoid them.

22:5

16:17

19:16

USE OF WORDS

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 to all, like good food for the soul; and those who truly are seeking the truth feel satisfied in their souls when a righteous man has finished speaking.* Still, fools, claiming to be hungry for wisdom, scorn to taste of it--and their pompous souls starve to death in a useless pursuit of profundity. The righteous man makes the wisdom of God understandable to those who sincerely desire it. *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 pure, God rewards him by having compassion on him when he prays; God satisfies him, even as he has satisfied other needy souls.*

10:20a

15:28a

10:11a

10:21

10:31a

10:32a

15:29b

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 his tearful eyes turn upward, he will see a sign on heaven's door that reads, "Gone on vacation". God will reward the wicked man for his cruelty by cruelly ignoring him in his distress, refusing to respond to his anguished pleas for aid. He will plead in vain for God's help, because it is God's wrath that is upon him.*

10:10a

6:12-14

17:20

15:29a

A hypocrite's words can ruin the lives of those who remain close to him. Even if they know he is unrighteous and wrong, his words will affect them if they continue to listen. *He will mercilessly set up innocent people to be 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 will escape every snare which the wicked lay, no matter how cleverly they disguise them.

11:9

12:6a

12:5b

11:11b

12:6b

Wicked men have learned how to make their words appear compassionate, but only the simple-minded trust them; for a wicked man's heart is a spiritual cesspool. *His speech infects those who listen to him with the sickness of sin and leads to a violent death.* An evil man's words promote smugness and rebellion; his

words are seeds, the 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

10:32b

16:28a

10:31b

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.

15:28b

15:26a

ASSOCIATION WITH RICHES

On a man's deathbed, wealth gained by wickedness will be of no help at 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 from eternal damnation. Just give it 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 being used by God as they hoard up many goods; for they are gathering those riches in safe places, so that God can later confiscate those blessings for distribution to the upright.

10:2

11:4

11:28

13:22b

One of the ways wicked men seek to pervert justice, and to gain unfair 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 super rich and supercilious. The righteous are given enough in this life by God, and a good man's descendants are remembered by God after he dies; but the wicked man, no matter how wealthy, will see the time when he desires what he can never have. Even now, here in this life, God undermines the wicked man's efforts to hold onto great riches; but God upholds the righteous, though he be poor. Everything the wicked manages to acquire and build in his short life will come to nothing, but the work of the righteous will prosper, and his possessions shall endure.

17:23

16:19

13:25a

13:22a

13:25b

10:3

12:7a; 14:11a

12:7b; 14:11b

Seek eternal things, my son, and do not envy the wicked for their fleeting successes and prosperity, nor desire to be their friend and companion. They are perpetually up to no good; their tongues are always advancing some new and mischievous scheme. Don't let it irritate you when an ungodly person escapes justice, or is honored, or enjoys great success in amassing fortunes. Don't envy him because of these things. 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 glory of the wicked is very short-lived. *And the man who envies them is no wiser than an animal.*

24:1; Col.3:1

24:2

24:19-20; Ps.37:1-2

Ps.73:3, 22

Anger can so provoke a man that he becomes unreasonable and inflicts damage upon another. And wrath is worse still; 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 of them. If envy invades your heart, you will commit acts that are crueler than even some sinners would commit.

27:4

The man who fears God is humble and merciful; he fervently pursues righteousness, and is blessed not only with righteousness but also eternal life, enduring riches, and everlasting honor. A righteous man possesses many true riches such as these, but the unrighteous store up vanity and sorrow for the days ahead. The wicked are rich with wrath.

22:4a

21:21a

22:4b; 21:21b

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 agony?

24:15-16

LOVE AND HATE

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 has a secure hope of eternal happiness in his heart; 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 departed this life; but, the more one reflects upon the life of an ungodly man, the more unsavory his memory becomes. *The death of a wicked man is a blessing to everyone.*

16:31

14:32

10:7

11:10b

A hardhearted, avaricious man hates the upright, because by the light of righteousness perverse ways are exposed; but a righteous man is a 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, find a quiet place with God and search your heart.* You will hear it said that God loves everybody, and that He loves everybody equally, and that He will never hurt anybody; but that is a vain fantasy of man's perverse imagination. Listen to me, my son, and tremble! God is patient, and is very merciful to repentant souls,

but He is nobody's fool. Repentance is not a feeling; it is a doing. Many a soul has been "pricked in their hearts" without changing a thing.

29:10

29:27

Mal.2:17

God loves those who obey His commandments; but there are even some righteous men who are loved by God more than other righteous men, because they are wiser and more prudent in their ways. All those who turn from the right path and do wickedly, however, 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. God hates wicked men, their foolish thoughts and their iniquitous ways.

15:9b

e.g. Dan.10:11

Lev.20:23; 26:30;

Ps.5:6; 10:3; 78:59; 89:38; 106:40

22:14b

14:17b; Ps.5:5; 11:5

15:26a

15:9a

All that wisdom teaches us can be summed up in this: fear God and keep His commandments, for God will bring every work of man into judgment, whether it be good or evil.

15:33b

CHAPTER TEN

GOD AND THE KING

Jehovah

All of the suffering and fears of mankind are the result of wrong ideas about God. I will therefore, tell you some basic truths about your Creator, truths that will protect you and guide your heart as you and your friends begin your search for happiness.

You will hear some say that God is so holy that he cannot look on sin; don't believe it for a minute. The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding both the good and the evil. *He hates the way of wickedness, and He loves those who follow after righteousness; but how could 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 in plain sight before Him, and every thought of man's heart is known to Him; 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?*

15:3

15:9

15:11

20:12

Men think that their plans and their accomplishments are their own, but God alone directs the course of history. *Men devise plans, but God puts the ideas in their hearts that they eventually agree to pursue.* 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. *There is no such thing as countervailing the judgments of the LORD. Both the unclean and the pure play roles in His purposes.* God determines the outcome of quarrels between mighty men and nations; and once God has made His decision, who can add 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 they call "heads" or "tails", and then determines how the 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?

16:1

16:9

21:31

21:30

18:18

16:33

20:24

Are you confused? It is the work of God. It is His glory to conceal the truth of a matter from men. *The LORD hides Himself and then demands that men humble themselves and seek Him.* But will reveal to you the secret concerning where you may find Jehovah. The LORD can always be found in these two places: first, in His high and holy place, and second, close to the man who is of a contrite and humble spirit.

25:2a

Isa.45:15

Isa.57:15

God uses both the malice and the praise of men to try our hearts; therefore, neither hold grudges against those who curse you, nor show favoritism to those who praise you. They are merely fulfilling the will of God for you. *God has provided ways for men to purge imperfections from precious metals. Then, should He not also know how to perfect those 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 perfection of His people.

20:27

17:3

16:4

If two people are quarreling, you need not ask which of them is right. I will tell you who is right: they both are--in their own sight. Every man believes that he is clean and his cause is holy. But God does not judge any man by his opinion of himself; He ponders the hidden thoughts of the heart and weighs the spirit of man on the scales of truth. *God would much rather have men do right than to have them perform a religious rite in His honor, which is what men typically offer Him instead of obedience. Obedience is better than ceremony, and listening to God is better than making an offering to Him.*

16:2; 21:2

21:3; 1Sam.15:22b

THE KING

My son, the powers that exist are ordained of God, and there is no power but of God; therefore, fear the king as you fear God. The king is God's instrument; He has set the king on his throne, and whoever resists him resists God. The king's judgment is God's judgment, for God has the king's heart in His hand, and every decision he makes accomplishes only what God has already determined should be done. *You can no more rightly judge a king than you can judge God; therefore, do not meddle with the king's business.* My advice to you is to obey every commandment of the king whom God has placed over you in this life, unless his commandment contradicts the expressed will of God.

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

24:21a; Rom.13:1

16:10; 21:1; Rom.13:2

25:3

Eccl.8:2-5a

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 private can travel.

Eccl.10:20

The king's wrath, as God's, is a harbinger of death; *it is like the roar of an approaching lion*, but a wise man, humbling himself, will pacify it. *If a ruler becomes angry with you, do not run away; submit yourself to his authority and you will pacify his wrath, even if you have committed great offenses.* 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 to establish peace and order on earth. Whoever is foolish enough to provoke the king's anger has sinned against his own soul.

16:14a

19:12a

16:14b

Eccl. 10:4

20:2

Patiently endure the rebuke of a ruler when he finds you to be in error, 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 man. An humble response calms the wrath of the king, but a brash, backbiting answer provokes him to even greater wrath. *Just as a dry wind from the north clears the sky of clouds, a king's angry countenance can silence a sassy mouth.* His eyes scatter wickedness as a strong gust blows dust over the ground. *You will recognize a rebellious and wicked man by the insolent tone of his voice*, but God will hold him down and cut out his impudent tongue.

25:15

15:1

25:23

20:8

10:32b

10:31b

In the presence of the king there is safety, and his favor is as rain in a thirsty land. The favor of the king is like a dew of happiness descending softly upon everything in your life, making it brighter and better. *It glorifies God that He conceals truth, even from the king; and it is an honorable thing for the king to humble himself to seek answers from God.*

16:15

19:12b

25:2

Never embark upon an important task without adequate counsel. *A people guided by men who take no counsel from God is a people that will fall.* The lips of a righteous man please a wise king, because nothing perverse passes through them; he loves the man who speaks right things and will promote him to honor.

If a king believes lies, all his servants become liars. A king who can be deceived makes all his advisers deceivers.

20:18b

11:14a

16:13

29:12

If any government provides the righteous with safety and liberty to obey God, then God will bless that government, and the people will be happy. *Whenever God's elect are blessed by rulers, their kingdom is exalted by God above other kingdoms.* By doing what is right, noble, and wise, a nation is blessed by God with safety, and with power over other nations; but wickedness is a disgrace to any people, and it will debase even the greatest of kingdoms. *The happiness of a people is dependent upon the integrity of their rulers. Wicked rulers bring grief to the people, but honorable rulers bring them joy.* Righteous rulers compassionately consider the needs and the rights of the poor, and encourage them; but ungodly men care only for themselves.

11:10a

11:11a

14:34

29:2

29:7

Whenever 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 still be blessed by God, and the wicked will be cursed, *because the LORD invariably loves those who do good and condemns evildoers.* God manipulates the circumstances of life so that the evil eventually bow before the good; the judgment of the righteous will prevail over all the power of the wicked.

28:12b

28:28a

11:31

12:2

14:19

It is also a matter for great sorrow when the king is a child and when its princes are self-indulgent. How blessed is a country when a well-trained young man ascends to the throne, and when the princes eat and drink when it is time to do so--for strength, and not for gluttony or drunkenness!

Ecc1.10:16-17

When the dross is removed from the silver, the refiner has material for 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 when righteousness is its base; therefore, a wise ruler abhors ungodly words and deeds.* But a wicked man undermines the kingdom by helping the ungodly escape the king's judgment. He doesn't report evildoing to the authorities.

25:4-5

16:12

29:24b

It may happen that sinners escape earthly punishment for the same wickedness a thousand times, and 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 death and 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 then 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.

Eccl. 8:12-13

A wise king strikes terror in the heart of the wicked and has no qualms about punishing them severely and swiftly. Swiftly of punishment is half of its effect. It is because rulers do not swiftly administer justice upon evil deeds that young men give themselves to wickedness; delayed justice promotes lawlessness.

Men devote themselves to evil when their punishment is delayed. Earthly rulers who do not swiftly punish transgressors are undermining their own authority. Forbearance with fools is folly, for they see the ruler's indulgence as impotence and then behave as if there is no power over them.

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, assenting to their sin.

20:26; Eccl.8:11

2Pet.3:9

Ps.50:21

The wise king understands that only by swift and painful judgment is evil purged from the heart. When stripes on the back heal, the heart is improved. Wickedness never voluntarily abandons its home; it must be driven out. (Beware the sinner who ceases from sin, but not through fear of judgment. Evil never willingly leaves, unless it is in hope of accomplishing a greater evil.) Furthermore, when a man who scorns authority is publicly punished, young people looking on become wise. When they are instructed, they will not rebel, but will receive the knowledge offered them, and the whole community will be benefitted. *Punishing a scorner will not turn him from his scornful way, because he is foolish; but it will instruct young people who are watching. On the other hand, when a wise man is reprovved, 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.

20:30

21:11

19:25

28:2a

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.*

28:2

29:8

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

14:35

25:6-7

When the wicked multiply, lawlessness increases; nevertheless, the righteous will survive them and be blessed. *When God finally removes the wicked forever, the righteous will flourish;* they will find the

undisturbed happiness they have longed for, because whoever submits himself to the higher power submits himself to God, Who makes men happy.

29:16

28:28b

29:18b

An especially abhorrent abuse of power is for those in authority to acquit an evil doer, 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 before Him, when you are brought into question? Nor is it good to punish a judge for judging matters even-handedly, or to punish rulers for refusing to take bribes and pervert justice. Wicked men maneuver to obtain special privileges, for they fear to be judged impartially; but their ways are evil. By their bribes and their cunning deceit, justice is denied to the upright. It is not good to veer off the perfect path of justice in order to show respect to a 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 be willing to sell himself for a piece of bread, if anyone would take him up on the offer.

17:15

17:26

18:5

28:21

A wicked king terrorizes and oppresses the poor among the 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 in the king's hands to provide justice for the poor, and if he does so, God will bless 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.*

28:15

14:28

29:14

28:16

29:4

20:28

22:16

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, nor 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 in fact evil, 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.

24:23-25

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 delicacies 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.

23:1-3, 6-8

For a little while, and by the use of evil practices, the wicked may wax powerful and strike terror in the hearts of men, but, like a swiftly passing storm, he shall pass away and never bother the righteous again (*his days will be shortened by God*). On the other hand, when the righteous 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.*

10:25a

10:27b

10:25b

10:27a

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE FAMILY

A 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 places in her care. She will do him good and not evil as long as she lives. He knows this; his heart trusts in her diligence and judgment and is at peace.

"She purchases what she needs, and 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 is anathema to her. 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 for herself, as well as for her family, good clothes. And because she never neglects her duties, the peace of the home is never disturbed by unnecessary and expected 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, and self-willed woman at home, his time would be consumed with finding 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 judges."

31:10-31

A wise woman blesses 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.*

14:1

11:16

12:4a

18:22

19:14b

A beautiful woman with a wicked heart is like a golden ring in a pig's slimy nose. Regardless of how beautiful a woman 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 woman 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 watching rain water drip through 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.*

11:22

12:4b

19:13b

21:9; 25:24

21:19

27:15

27:16

A home worth having is one that is established upon understanding, and genuine security for it 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 can't 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.

24:3-4

21:20

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 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 cries 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.*

13:24

29:17

19:18

20:11

Don't allow your children 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 stubborn and blind adults; and such a generation is a curse to the whole earth. Foolishness never voluntarily departs from 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 than he was before; but a child who is forced to find the right way to happiness by himself will always take the wrong path and disgrace his mother.

23:13-14

22:15

29:15

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 remembrances of the right way. When a man conducts himself with integrity before the LORD, 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 blessed to have you as their father. Children, in time, can sense whether or not their father has conducted himself with integrity.

14:26

22:6

20:7

17:6b

Start out in your 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 can grieve and a mother can bitterly regret that she ever gave birth to her 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 happy man.

24:27

10:5

19:13a; 19:14a; 19:26a

17:25; 10:1b

17:21

10:1a

My Son, you can hardly know how happy you will cause your mother and me to be 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 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, or strive to be like them, but always remember the coming day of the judgment of God 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 drinking and partying with them. Give your heart to me, and not to the whorish woman who weaves webs around young hearts. Such a woman is like a deep ditch, out of which a young man cannot climb once he has fallen into it. She waits to ambush an innocent young man like you with her experienced charm, and many a young man has fallen into that sweet smelling snare, and has found his heart enslaved to her desire--until he has no money left to buy so much as a clean 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 ignore them and get away. Wine is like the whorish woman who knows how to cover the stench of her soul with sweet fragrances. It is like a venomous serpent which, though it moves slowly and rhythmically in the glass, can kill and maim. It is full of deadly poison.

Drinking with young fools will confuse you as it has confused them; wretched young women will begin to seem attractive, and you will hear words coming out of your own mouth that you never thought you would 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 hurt. 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 while, before going out in the evening to find another party and to drink even more than the night before.

23:15-35

A wise son is one who walks in the way of God's law. *He loves wisdom, and 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! This is wisdom that will reveal much to you throughout your life: 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.

28:7a

29:3a

27:11

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.

29:3b

28:7b

19:26b

20:20

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 almost 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.*

17:17b

27:10b

18:19

18:24b

THE ELDERLY

If an old man has walked with God, *the grey hair of his head 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 lived an ungodly life, his grey hair is a grievous testimony against him. It declares to everyone that God has blessed him with long life, yet he despised his precious opportunity to go the right way.* Grandchildren are a grandparent's grandest earthly blessing. They are a blessing affectionately bestowed by God upon the elderly, whether they have done good or evil.

16:31

20:29b

17:6a

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 owner 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.

29:19

29:21

27:18

It is a joy to a just man to do what is right. *Like God, he impartially rewards those around him according to his deeds. He will even promote a slave above his own son, if that slave has been prudent and diligent and his son has been foolish and slothful. When a prudent servant enriches a master who is just, he will share the inheritance with his master's sons, because that is his due.* Be diligent and faithful; you will gain a reputation among the wise for being prudent, if you do not fear a reputation among fools for being prudish. Faithfulness to God always brings honor.

21:15a

17:2

16:21a

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

A friend is faithful in every circumstance. He doesn't become friendlier if you become wealthy or popular, and he isn't less friendly if you become poor and are despised by others. *This doesn't 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 is a benefit; well-wishing is worthless.

17:17a

27:6

27:5

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 your friend, nor someone who has been a faithful friend to your father.

18:24a

27:10a

When you have a heart to receive guidance in the ways of God, the counsel of a friend will become as pleasant and as desirable to you as the fragrances of a young bride. *Your counsel to him, too, will be humbly received, and the two of you will sharpen each other's wisdom 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 your friend gives you of yourself 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 you 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 praise from the lips of false friends.

27:9

27:17

27:19

29:5

27:21

A righteous man inspires his neighbors 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, and respect your neighbor's privacy. Don't wear him out with your company and make him dread seeing you approach his door.*

12:26

25:16-17

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 abuse your friend's love for you, even in small matters. What if your friend does not awake as early or as happily as you do? No matter how cheerfully you greet him in the morning, if he is not ready to start the day, he will welcome your loud salutation as eagerly as he would a broken leg, and he might even pray that you lose your voice!

20:29a

27:14

CHAPTER TWELVE

RICHES AND POVERTY

INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS

Dishonesty and injustice are abhorrent to the LORD, but 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 not bring happiness; be careful to maintain integrity in all your business dealings. Especially is this true of business dealings with the poor. They are frequently targeted by dishonest businessmen because the poor are often unsophisticated and easily fooled; but remember, my son, that God is the avenger of the poor, and He will not forgive 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.

11:1

20:10; 20:23a (14:17b)

20:23b

22:22-23

15:25b; Dt.10:17-18

As long as crooked businessmen escape being caught and facing justice, they enjoy immensely the pleasures purchased with money gained by their deceitfulness; 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 convicts you for doing so. God's judgment is not bound by the imperfect standards of men. *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 will 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.* There is nobody who is motivated by a desire to get rich quick who can avoid committing sin. They think that stealing from other people will bring them happiness; but what do you think their chances for happiness will be, when they stand before God to answer for their thievery?

20:17

22:28

23:10a

23:4

10:2

11:4

28:20b

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 remained in his field. The poor man who refuses to resort to deception in order to escape poverty is better than the fool who deceives others in order to gain 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, rich or poor.

28:3

19:1

19:22b

28:6

Of course, customers can be as crooked as any business man. Some of them protest solemnly that a product is not worth much and coerce a weak salesman into selling it for less than he should; then, they

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.*

20:14

16:26

EMPLOYEES

A dependable employee relieves those he serves from burdens that can wear down their spirits and their bodies. *He relieves burdens from the soul of his employers as a cool breeze relieves weary field workers; he forwards the happiness of others.* But always remember that God alone is the source of honesty and wisdom. All sound 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.

13:17b

25:13

16:11

My son, be faithful to those who trust in you. In neglecting his duties, an unfaithful employee causes trouble for 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.* To betray someone who has done good to you is one of the worst of sins. God's punishment for that wickedness is a curse that nothing will reverse.

13:17a

25:19

17:13

MERCY IN BUSINESS

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 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 any other wicked means, are only hoarding that wealth to be distributed to the poor.

11:26

23:10b-11

28:8

There is such a thing as giving away earthly possessions, yet becoming 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 God.* A good man stores up blessings that are protected by God for his grandchildren; but the wealth that sinners store up will eventually be given to those whom God loves.

11:24; 13:7

11:25

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 lender who makes men poor by charging them interest on loans, will eventually have fellowship with the poor man's poverty. The lender will then be enlightened to the fact that it is evil to increase 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. Fortunes amassed at the expense of the happiness of others are taxed heavily by the LORD; but wages honestly earned are invested in Him.

22:7

29:13

13:11

SURETY

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 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. You are about to become richer without having to do any work.*

11:15

17:18

22:26-27

20:16; 27:13

BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS

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 it; but how quickly an empty wallet can drive away his neighbors, friends, and even his family!* He may humbly plead with them for compassion, but to no avail. Purchased friendships will vanish when the purchasing power is gone.

14:20

19:4

19:7

The rich man's wealth insulates him from troubles that others commonly suffer, while poverty exposes the poor man to complete ruin. *The rich man's wealth can be likened to a strong fortress, protecting him from many of the world's distresses.* Earthly wealth can 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 is more affordable for them, or because a judge is bribed to spare the wicked son of a rich man. *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 remain safe and blessed.

10:15

18:11a

13:8a

18:11b

11:28

BRIBES AND GET-RICH QUICK SCHEMES

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.* Bribes often succeed in accomplishing their intended purpose. By way of bribery, men are appointed to high office and gain access to influential men. *The wrath of many a judge has been placated by a secret gift; and many an evil-hearted soul has escaped justice with a bribe.* (None of this means that wickedness has triumphed, though. 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 many will then seek their favor--and will pay well for it.* Such a man is greedy, and 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 refused to depart from the right path.*

17:8
17:23
18:16
21:14
29:26
19:6
15:27
28:20a

Some have murdered friends, relatives--even their own parents--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, then, after seeing their humiliation and suffering, declares 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 deceit, 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.*

20:21
28:24
21:6
21:7a

Get-rich-quick schemes cause men to sin; leave those schemes alone, walk steadily up the good road, and be content with the many blessings that are obtained along that way. *The man who pursues a pathway to quick riches is double-minded and confused; he wants happiness, but he is attracted to a path that takes him away from it. Along that dark pathway are pitfalls in which he will lose everything, and cunning thieves will take from him even his hope of great gain.* The poor man who does not trust God will also break through and steal food, giving no heed to the consequences, when he is facing starvation. *Nothing tastes good to those whose belly is full; but to the starving man even bitter foods are delicious, and his hunger will drive him to take great risks for something--anything--to eat.*

28:20
28:22
13:8b
27:7

Don't think these things can't happen to you! You must come to a painful and humbling realization; that is, until we are established in the ways of God, every one of us has a price for which we would sell our souls. Those who offer bribes understand this, and you must understand it, too. *You must pray earnestly not to be led into temptation. (True fasting is when you become so hungry for the righteousness of God that you cannot be persuaded with earthly goods to do evil.)* Trust the LORD to protect you from your weakness, until you mature in knowledge and are fully committed to the right ways of God. Then, everything this

world has to offer will seem as dung, compared to the incorruptible riches upon which your heart will be set. *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 and turned aside.*

Ps.39:5; Rom.7:18

Mt.6:13

Phip.3:8

16:3

TRUE RICHES

Why would you set your affection on money, and trust in something that can disappear overnight to bring you happiness? Would you build your hope of future happiness to a wild bird, whose nature calls it away? Money has wings; it can soar away as an eagle into heaven. *The possession of lasting happiness is the wise man's goal. To have true happiness and be poor is better than to be without it and be rich.*

23:5

Eccl. 4:6

Make every effort to prove yourself upright and faithful, for a good reputation is more valuable than any amount of money, and 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 earthly wealth comes problems; but the blessing of the LORD makes one truly rich, for He adds no sorrow with it. There are no maintenance fees, no security concerns, and no leaving it behind when you die.

22:1

20:15

10:22

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 once to die. The rich and the poor, the honest and the deceitful, will eventually meet together in the grave. It is in preparation for the judgment after death that wise men spend their time.

15:16

15:17

16:8

16:19

22:2; Heb.9:27

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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, springing from a pure*

heart, are pleasant. They are the fruit of the Tree of Life; and whoever eats it will live forever.

18:4

10:11a

15:26b

15:4a

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

20:15

24:26

10:20a

10:31a

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 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.

16:24

12:25

15:23b

25:11

A good report rejoices and encourages a longing heart the way good food satisfies a hungry belly. *But not all that seems good is good. Don't be too eager to hear encouraging news. Good news, long waited for, renews and rejoices the soul, just as cool water renews the spirit of a wanderer in the desert; but always make certain that the good news you hear is true before committing your heart to it. Wicked men know what you want to hear, and a talebearer's tales are a troublesome treasure.* 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.

15:30b

25:25

13:17

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 leads eventually 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.*

15:4b

10:11b

11:9

If he is within striking range, you are likely to be bitten by a serpent, 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, and 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 streaming

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.

Eccl. 10:11-15

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 hearing every crumb of news about others and repeating it. The person who loves to hear rumors also loves to tell them. Be wise. Do not trust such a person with a secret. A faithful man will encourage you with good words instead of tickling your ears with gossip, and your heart will tell you that he 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.

26:20

11:13

20:19

29:5

17:9a; 16:28b

18:8; 26:22

The talebearers's flattery seems sincere; his lips burn with desire to compliment and to probe others for information, for his heart is corrupt. 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 one who receives it. Young men whom God abhors are turned over to the delusive power of flattering, godless women. The flattering mouth of such women is an open pit into which God casts young men who reject His counsel, and out of that pit they will not escape.

26:23

26:28b

22:14

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 his flatterers, who now comfort him because of the discomfort your wise reproof has caused him. You see, the words of the wise may inflict pain as they cut sin out of someone's soul; but afterward, the wound will heal, and the heart is made better. Then, you will at last be honored for performing the surgery.

28:23

12:18b

BOASTING

Claiming to have a gift from God does not make it so. The man who boasts of an ability that God has not given him is like a dark cloud which 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. It is extremely difficult to find a man who sees himself as he is and leaves no false impressions with others concerning his worth.* 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! What does any man have to boast of? He may not even be alive tomorrow.

25:14

20:6

27:1-2

TRUTH AND LIES

Whoever speaks true words is lighting the way 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 will become bitter because of the loneliness of your way, for few will ever love the truth or discover the way 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.

12:17a

12:19

22:12

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. *You need never fear that you will be deceived, however, as long as you do not attempt to deceive others. It takes a liar to believe one. Only sinners trust the ungodly words of other sinners; and only liars believe lies. Those who love the truth cannot believe a lie; and those who obey God cannot be misled by the crafty language of the unclean.* Nor need you ever fear anyone's curse but God's. Nobody else in heaven, on earth, or beneath the earth, has any power to curse anyone, or the wisdom to know who should be cursed. Any curse uttered by any creature is a like a wild bird passing overhead; you need not be concerned that it will descend and perch upon your head.

12:17b

17:4

26:2

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.

13:3

12:13a

17:20b

12:13b

21:23

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 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.*

18:20-21

22:11

BEARING WITNESS

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

12:22b

14:5a

11:11a

14:25

19:28a

26:28a

19:5

A man who testifies falsely against his neighbor is a threat to all people. Have nothing to do with him except when necessary--and cautiously then. Leave his judgment to God. Whether your neighbor has done good to you or 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.

25:18

24:28-29

A liar will lie even when there is no purpose in it. He will lie even when he knows he is in danger of damnation for doing so, for the father of lies is his god, and he trusts in deceit to bring him happiness. *The liar's mouth dines on deceit, and he cannot be content unless he has lied to someone.* But he will not deceive God and escape sorrow and death, *for the Almighty loathes liars.* The false witness's mouth will be permanently sealed in death, but the man who understands and obeys God's voice will live and speak with Him forever.

14:5b

19:28b

19:9

12:22a

21:28

COUNSEL

There is nothing you do that 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.*

20:18a

19:21

11:14b

10:20b

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 may 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 blurts them out of his mouth.

18:13

18:17

29:20

Take counsel, and 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; his 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.

20:25b

12:5a

10:32a

12:5b

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

15:23a

13:2a

12:14a

12:20b

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: ECCLESIASTES

THE CURSE OF CEASELESS LABOR UNDER THE SUN

Ecc. 1:1 I am Solomon, King in Jerusalem, the son of David; and these are my observations on this creation which God has cursed, and my counsel concerning how you, my son, should live in it until you die.

Ecc. 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 in this life, nothing he obtains, is of any eternal benefit to him. After he is dead, what benefits are provided to a man by all the labor he has done? 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.

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 want 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, and the whole wearisome process begins anew. Nothing about any of it is eternal. It is all cursed with time.

Every thing under the sun is ceaselessly laboring, never able to stop and, yet, never able to get anywhere but where it has already been! The greatest accomplishment for anyone or anything in this world is to be able to start all over again. It is far beyond the ability of mortals to describe adequately the ceaseless, futile effort being expended by everything under the sun.

Everything on earth is trapped in an endless cycle of labor. The eye sees, but is never satisfied with seeing; ears hear, 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.

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

Ecc. 1:10-11 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 dying with it.

Ecc. 1:11 The memory of what has happened before our time has faded away, and what is with us now will be forgotten as well. 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

Ecc. 1:12-16 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 it is all empty of any lasting benefit to man! Give your soul to nothing under this 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 can ever supply.

Ecc. 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 daily contemplated matters that most people never take seriously. 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 that many people were loony, and were happy about it! And many others were fools, and seemed perfectly content to remain that way. So, I decided to experience madness and foolishness for myself, to see if that kind of life held any value; but I found that 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. Don't 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, such 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 honest answer was, nothing. Entertainment and laughter, too, 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.

Eccl. 2:4-12 I also observed that very many were pursuing earthly riches and land, and, wondering if great earthly possessions might be the secret pathway to lasting happiness, I decided to multiply my worldly possessions. If an abundance of wealth and earthly possessions brought men true happiness, it was obvious to me that I was about to experience unspeakable joy, because I knew that God had given to me the knowledge to become the wealthiest man on earth, ever; and compared to the riches and majesty 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 wasn't 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 seemed unworthy of the lips of my guests.* I planted vineyards of the very highest quality. And to them, I added orchards, and trees producing fruit of every kind. I devised clever works, pools of water which would mass produce trees for my agricultural endeavors.

2Chron. 9:20

I took for myself seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. I had multitudes of slaves, both male and female. I developed herds of specially bred cattle, sheep, and goats. *No one had ever held such wealth in the history of earth, and no one ever will again.* 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.)

For my pleasure, specially trained singers, both men and women, were brought into my palace to coo 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 conceivable 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 adequately describe 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, 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, drinking them in and waiting for these luxuries and riches to fill me up and satisfy the longing of my soul, as they so fully satisfied all the senses of my body.

1Kgs. 11:3

1Kgs. 3:13

One day, I paused in my enjoyment of this pleasure and comfort; and I considered all of my many possessions and all the works that I had accomplished. When I had meditated over them all, I acknowledged that the contentment I had seen in wealthy men was real. 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.

I remembered the massive amount of time and hard labor that both I and my servants had expended to design and to construct my majestic, magnificent works. And it crushed me to confess to myself in my heart 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 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 standing there commanding him to start the race again. There is no finish line in this life! There is no enduring rest under the sun. Nobody can find lasting happiness anywhere in this creation, because it is all cursed with time and because there is no respite 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 that gnawing empty feeling again. 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 of value to my soul in this world!

I reflected sadly on all my labor and on all that I had obtained in my search for enduring happiness and rest on earth. I thought about wisdom and foolishness, the insanity of entertainment; I thought about drunkenness and sobriety, possessions, pleasure, and wealth. Who could ever possibly do more than I had done to find true and lasting happiness under the sun? There is no monarch, no emperor, no magnate, who will ever match, much less surpass, the spectacular beauty, riches, and glory that was mine. And yet I concluded, with much grief, that all I had experienced and all I had acquired was useless in the pursuit of lasting happiness.

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 life 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 an awful realization captured my attention: whether wise or foolish, good or evil, every man will die. My mind seemed paralyzed with the awesomeness of that incontestable, inescapable fact. The same wretched, humiliating event happens to the wise man and to the fool! The thought was almost unbearable to my 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, 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. Both the people and their works are all 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 them with eyes that were open, seeing them for what they really were: deceitful. I learned that *the possession of earthly riches is a most deceitful thing*. But the worst that all my possessions were, was that they were not eternally mine!

Mt. 13:22; 19:23

I had built them, but I could not have them. I had designed and developed them, but death would deprive me of them all. I purchased my slaves; I clothed, fed, and educated them, but they would soon be free from me forever. Either death would liberate them, or else I would die and leave them to . . . to whom? Oh, what a despairing thought! What kind of man would come and possess all that I had labored so wisely and earnestly to obtain! What deep frustration tore at my soul! Whether he be a prudent man or an abject fool, he would have absolute control over all my wealth and my property! I accumulated this massive estate through hard work and wisdom, yet he will have it all handed to him on a golden platter to manage 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 that I accomplish in the hands of a man who may prove to be an utter fool, and there was absolutely nothing I could do to change that fact. 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 circle of injustice just rolls on relentlessly, continuing 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, and 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 of his life 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 labor his body drops dead, men recommit it to the ground, 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 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 after death, God's perfect, immutable justice will reign totally; and the only possessions anyone in that realm will be allowed to have--and have them forever--are those possessions he himself has earned.

Ecc. 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, God provided for exemptions from required military service. And in many nations, there are some who are excused from fighting the wars of that country. However, in the warfare of man and death, there are no exemptions and no discharges. All the efforts of man's nature to resist onslaught of darkness are fruitless; none of his ideas or efforts provide any security at all against the day of death and of judgment.

Dt. 22:5-7; 24:5

Ecc. 10:5-7 One of the evils that I have seen under the sun is that rulers sometimes make errors in word or deed. No such thing is seen by those who are already dead; all the rulers of the world to come are perfect in wisdom and in their work. So many things in this tormented world are out of place! I have seen sheer 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 servants riding like princes on horses. But nothing out of place will be seen in the place where all are going.

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. And again, I observed an unjust, 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 will remain so forever.

Eccl. 7:15 In the days of my earthly life, I have seen everything. I have seen a righteous man die young, and I have seen a very wicked man live a long, prosperous life. All such things are only seen in this life on earth.

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

This, too, never happens beyond the grave, but it is a disease which surprises and 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, I say a miscarried child has had a better life, for he is brought forth for nothing, departs in darkness, and leaves no memory behind. Moreover, he has never seen the sun nor witnessed the evils done under it. In death, he has more rest than the other.

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 something you are finished with one more thing that is not eternal. It is even better to die than to be born, because when you die you are finished with everything that is not eternal; but when you are born, you are born to labor throughout this life for what amounts to nothing. For this reason, it is better for you 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, and something evil is being cooked up. The laughter of fools is applause for wickedness.

Eccl. 6:6 My instruction, son, is not the rambling of an embittered old man. Listen and learn. Nothing of all I am telling you could be altered, even if a man were to live two thousand years and observe the lives of millions 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. Don't all men end up in the dirt?

Eccl. 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 it does not last. This is true of the labor of wise men and of fools, of the rich and the poor. In terms of life and death, there are no rich or poor, for all must pay the same debt for sin, and all have the same amount to pay. It is better to enjoy while you can what God has given you than to spend your days longing for what He has given to others.

Eccl. 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 those who do good, is all of God. There is no other source of good. Men cannot even know what to love or what to hate unless God shows them.

In this world, all things happen alike to all. The same events happen to both the righteous and to the wicked; to the clean and to the unclean; to him that worships God and to him that refuses to worship God; to the good and to the sinful; to him that swears and to him that fears 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, they see no difference between themselves and the upright, nor any particular blessing to the good, and their hearts are

completely given to evil. Men have made themselves mad with wickedness while they live; 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 desire 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 sin and receive mercy from God.

The living know that death is coming and may yet prepare for the judgment which follows, but the dead know nothing of what is happening under the sun. *For them, the events which take place in time are finished. Their children are greatly blessed, or greatly distressed, and they know nothing of it, ever again.* Nor can they any longer 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 any thing 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 a wise and better way to do any work that is done 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 in this, for this frustrating earthly toil to which all on earth have been condemned 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 of the conditions 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 a little rest at 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

Eccl. 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 God; 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 plans, or 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 by God; 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 is dispiriting that the good and pleasant things of earth are cursed with time, because we know that something will come along to take them 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 it is not an eternal death.

There is a *time* to kill, but that is comforting because under the sun there is only a time for killing, and we know that it will end; and it grieves the wise man that there is a *time* to heal, because that means that his health will not last. It is heartening to remember that there is a *time* to destroy, for on earth there is no everlasting destruction; and there is a *time* to build, but that is discouraging to a wise man because he knows that whatever he labors to build under the sun he cannot have forever.

There is a *time* to weep, but the spirit can rejoice that weeping under the sun will not last forever; and there is a *time* to laugh, but it is bitter to the soul to know that all earthly joy is fleeting. Thankfully, there is a *time* to mourn, for all earthly sorrow is cursed with time, and pleasant, joyous times will return. There is a *time* to dance, but it is saddening to know that our earthly jubilation cannot last.

There is a *time* to gain, but what on earth can be gained and kept? And there is a *time* to lose, but there is nothing eternal in this life to lose. There is a *time* to keep, but only a time. There is also a *time* to throw away what once we valued, but our spirits are supported by the knowledge that a time of recovering will come.

There is, sadly, 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 there is no everlasting hatred. Fortunately, there is a *time* for war under the sun, for none could survive the carnage of ceaseless warfare; and, alas, there is a *time* for peace, and it will pass, and then wars shall come 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 time, sowing seed is a wonderful thing, but to plant your crop in the fall is unseemly. You see, **it isn't the act itself that is either good or bad; it is the timing of it.** *The marriage bed is undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* Reaping is beautiful in the fall, when there is a crop ready to be harvested; but to reap the crop in the middle of its growing season is disorderly and wasteful. So it is with all the purposes of God, gathering stones and casting them away, embracing or not embracing, tearing or mending, speaking or being silent. In its proper time, everything is lovely. Out of its time, anything can be sin.

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.*

Heb. 13:4

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

Still, even if a man conducts all his affairs wisely, nothing in this life is eternal, and what benefit to his soul is there in all his labor that he puts forth on this earth? The incessant labor with which God has cursed fallen man is the discipline of God, and He has turned man's heart dark, so that he cannot find a way out of it. Man cannot so much as imagine anything beyond this creation. *Those things must be revealed from God by His Spirit, or man can never perceive or believe them.*

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. Vain 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. *Who can ever attain to the knowledge of God if he cannot recognize God's hand at work in this life? It is by acknowledging God's judgments that men come to know Him.*

Ps. 9:16

Eccl. 3:12-13 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 is for him to determine to live simply, to be content to do what is good in God's sight, and to enjoy the earthly blessings which 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.

Eccl. 3:14-17 Fools waste their lives attempting to get around this truth, laboring to avoid the unpleasant truths about life under the sun since God rearranged it because of man's sin, or to add to His ways something they in their foolishness 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. And God will judge you tomorrow for the things you do 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 perverted the faith of those who sought from them instruction in the right ways of God. There is more corruption than there is integrity among those who rule the earth, and no man will ever be able to change that. But remember this: there is no escaping the coming judgment of God. He patiently--and mercifully--allows such 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 the works of just men but also the works of sinners. God uses all men for the good of His chosen people, and then He will judge 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 what He had enlarged my heart to really see: that we all will certainly 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 the dust, and men came from and return to the dust. 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 his 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 portion on earth 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 others from heaven. Forget it. Whether they are cast into hell or are borne into paradise, the dead neither see nor hear of earth anymore.)

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 business men, 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 seen the evils that are done on earth.

Ecc. 4:4-5 Then I thoroughly reconsidered the hard work that men are condemned 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 a neighbor of his envy him instead of learning from the righteous man's example so that God would bless him, too. The stupid fool wouldn't get up and submit himself to the ceaseless labor that God has imposed upon fallen man. He just lies there with his hands folded until all he has is consumed. 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 noticed a man who lived alone. He had no child, nor any close relative for whom he had to provide; still, he gave himself no rest and labored constantly to heap up more and more 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.

OPPRESSIONS OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL

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 money makes 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 multitudes of rulers, and money has more influence over 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 insane with depression and frustration. Whether it be a greedy ruler who demands more taxes than is proper, or a clever, dishonest business man who takes advantage of an innocent, poor person, it is maddening to the wise to watch 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 anger and to desire to scold and punish this world before the time appointed by God, but that is the path taken 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.

Ecc. 5:8-11 When you see the rich oppressing the poor, and rulers violently abusing people and perverting justice, don't 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 and goods 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 increase to help you consume them; and then what good are those goods to you? The only benefit to the man who owns many goods is that he catches fleeting glances of his goods before they disappear into the pockets and mouths of his family and friends.

Ecc. 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 unforeseen accident or need, and a son is born to take control of 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 that he labored and longed for.

It is a very great evil, afflicting the whole earth, that nothing under the sun is eternal and 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? All he inherits is the wind . . . if he can catch it. All his days, he labors for his food in the dark, not knowing when he will die, or what happened on earth before him, or what will happen after him when he, too, returns to dust. And in his last days, he suffers terribly with sadness and sickness because of the wrath of God on all this warped creation.

Ecc. 5:18-20 Son, pay attention to the wisdom I have gained by observing all these things with 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

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

Ecc. 9:13-16a; 18a; 16b-17; 18b In a little city some time ago, I saw a rare and wonderful wisdom that impressed me deeply. Against the small population within this city came a mighty king with a huge army. Having come, the king besieged the city and built bulwarks against it. 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 brought peace and safety to them. His name, in time, was forgotten by them and is now unknown to the descendants of those same people whom he saved by wisdom from certain death.

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, and deaf to 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.

Ecc. 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 on earth, nor of those who lived before them; 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 torments the soul that is hungry 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 one 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, with twisting curves, who can change it? Go ahead and rejoice 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.

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 figure out anything by his own intelligence; man doesn't 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 doesn't 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, and to learn the reason for things, 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; those who displease Him are attracted to her siren call.

Listen to me. 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.

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 can he find happiness again.

I asked myself, "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 men who possess wisdom. Wisdom brightens a man's countenance; it shines confidently through his eyes.

Ecc. 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), I ran headlong into a stone wall. When I beheld the vastness of God's work on earth, I knew that it was impossible for me to see it all. No man ever will. Even if a wise rich man determines to do so and labors his whole life for it, he will not be able to behold all that happens on earth, or all the wonderful works of God. They were created solely for God's pleasure, not for man's benefit.

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 of the heart that work can be avoided in this life. Then, *seek first 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

7:20 No one can ever become wise and good, my young 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 dread power. God is the only source of goodness.

Ecc. 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 vain man can do about that.

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 truly 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 under the sun? No one, for he has no more part at all with anything under the sun.

Ecc. 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. 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 isn't much that you have to say to Him, and when you have said those few things, be silent. *Don't 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 to you by various means. A dream from God is the result of your being diligent concerning the labor He has imposed upon you. Just don't get carried away with such things; many claim to have dreams from God that are only their own imaginations at work. In a multitude of words and in many dreams there are also a multitude of false statements and many vain hopes. *If God gives you a dream, don't be afraid to tell it. There is no comparison between truth and error, between God's word and man's vain imagination. Don't allow the many who boast of false messages from God to discourage you from testifying to what God has 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 make, 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, and hold dear.

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 fervor and their wicked deeds. Those who worshipped with the wicked continued worshipping as they had done before, and those who partook in doing evil with them continued doing evil. They learned nothing from God's judgment, because they did not see the hand of God in it.

Ecc. 7:10 Watch out for those people who lament that the "good old days" are gone. They are just trying to provoke you to anger and to manipulate you to become entangled with their own social and political agenda. It isn't wise 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 Don't be over religious, son. And don't strain to become 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. 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 don't have to be especially religious or profound or scholarly in order to escape the coming wrath of God. The way to happiness is a simple path. 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 confusion and trouble on earth. All you really need to know is the will of God, and all you really need to do is to fear His displeasure. The fear of God is not only the beginning of wisdom but it is also the conclusion of it.

GOD'S SECRET CONCERNING EACH YOUNG PERSON

Ecc. 9:7-10 Now, my son, go on 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 submit 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 pleasure with the wife God gives you, and spend the days of your vain life with her happily, while your vain life is used up in labor under the sun. For these things are God's rewards for the labor which you must do while on earth.

God knows a secret about you, my son, a secret he will reveal to no one but you. You must labor your whole life under the sun, and God's secret concerns what kind of labor will give you the most contentment while you live on this earth. He will not reveal that secret to me, or to any wise man. It is only you who can find it, and there is only one way for you to be able to do that; to wit, whatsoever you are given to do while you are young on earth, 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 lead into a thoroughly fulfilled life.

When you were an toddler, you strove with your whole heart for what you wanted, but soon the world divided and confused your heart and made you ashamed of sincerity. Become as a child again and pursue happiness with all your heart. That is what you really want.

Do not be as the multitudes who refused to strive with their whole heart to do their duty while they were young, and now have to muddle through life with whatever jobs they can find. Find that perfect work for you! God wants to give it to you! Dig deep into the things your teachers demand of you; and if they demand more, give more. It is God's blessing you seek, not theirs! Somewhere in all the labor that is required of you by your elders is the hidden 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 isn't made up, then those few people will not be enough to keep you going. It must come from you! The desire to be happy must come from your own heart! No one can make the effort or reap its benefits, for you. Oh, my son, 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 mock your sincerity.

In school, 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. If you are given a task, give it all your strength and zeal, for it is in such places that God waits patiently for the young man to come. The lazy, the rebellious, and the careless, will never find either Him or the hidden pathway to happiness.

There are some subjects in which you will not have much interest. And there are, of course, some tasks that will be given to you that you will not enjoy. All 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. 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 with the key to such happiness that none but those who are both young and wise are ever given.

How happy and content do you really want to be? Now is your time 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 Some men try to make up for the lost opportunities of youth and to find when they are older the kind of labor that will make their time on earth most bearable for them, but it cannot be done. Those

who repent from wickedness and begin to seek the pathway of lasting happiness when they are older will be forgiven and blessed, but only with God's second best for their lives. Now while you are 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. Be wise, and in just a little while you will know what the foolish never will know, and you will be given what they never can have.

In contemplating 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 a lesser qualified man. Time and chance happen to all. Then, trust your future to God, and put everything you have into whatever you do. Don't be puffed up by your skills, your strength, or your intelligence, nor trust such things to bring you happiness. God will never allow such a self-sufficient man to find the labor that will keep him perfectly content while he lives on earth.

Ecc. 11:1-3 If you will be patient and continue to do what is right, you will soon learn a lesson that many never learn at all; to wit, whatsoever 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 truly take this truth into your heart, you will never run out of patience, nor will you ever be lured 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 voice 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, 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 clouds, darkened and heavy with water, will give rain.

When a tree falls down, it stays down. What I am telling you is as simple and as 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 seem to contradict this eternal, unchangeable truth.

Ecc. 11:4-6 Those who are fearful and lazy try to excuse their slothfulness by pointing to the difficult circumstances they face. But if farmers watch the clouds, they will never sow their seed. It is impossible to plant a crop with your eyes toward the clouds, and it is impossible to do what you are supposed to do if you keep looking at the vain things on earth that oppose righteousness. Keep your mind on your goal, and keep plowing. Don't come out of the rain until it begins to fall. And don't 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 being revealed to you. And you may also be assured that He is preparing a harvest for all that you do. God is performing thousands of thousands of works at once, both small and great; yet He is never so occupied by all His works that he forgets any man or his deeds.

Ecc. 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 many days here, yet his days are but a few in comparison to the number of days that follow death. Consider it, my son; consider it carefully. Regardless of how many years one lives on earth, they are few compared to the time that 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 foolish to refuse to work for the money you need to feed yourself and your family. Prudent men see the situation here and are concerned with securing health and peace while on earth; but they also see beyond this life, and they also are concerned with securing health and peace in eternity.

SOLOMON'S FINAL INSTRUCTIONS 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 bitterness and hatred, and refuse the pathways of sin. If you are wise, you will begin now to prepare for the time to come. This whole life is short; but childhood and youth are even shorter still.

NOTE: The following parable of Solomon's is the most remarkable found in the entire Old Testament. It is a parable of old age and death. How many of his symbols can you interpret? I will provide footnotes for the ones I understand.

Eccl. 12:1-7

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, nor the clouds return after the rain.⁴
3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble⁵, and the strong men shall bow themselves⁶, and the grinders cease because they are few⁷, and those that look out of windows be darkened⁸,
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 flourish⁹, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail¹⁰, because man goeth to his long home⁸, and the mourners go about the streets.
6. Or ever the silver cord⁹ be loosed, or the golden bowl¹¹ be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain¹², or the wheel broken at the cistern¹³.
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.

SOLOMON'S CONCLUSION ABOUT LIFE UNDER THE SUN

Eccl. 12:13-14 This is the conclusion of everything I have known, everything I have observed and experienced, everything that God has revealed to me in the days of my vanity. The conclusion of the whole matter is this: **Fear God, and keep His commandments. There is nothing that man must do but this, for God will bring every deed of man into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.**

FOOTNOTES

¹ (3:5) 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 (8:1-3) 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

⁴ (3:5)

⁵ (8:1-3)

⁶

⁷ (3:5)

⁸ (8:1-3)

⁹

¹⁰ (3:5)

¹¹ (8:1-3)

¹²

¹³ (3:5)