

THE EIGHT
EXPERIMENTS
OF MAN

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A Commentary on the
Book of Ecclesiastes

Pastor Robert R. Mclaughlin

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Consider the following before you begin your study:

If you are a born-again believer, you are commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18b *Be filled with the Spirit.*

How?

1 John 1:9 *If we acknowledge [name and cite] our sins, He is faithful and righteous, with the result that He forgives us our sins [known sins] and purifies us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins].*

If you are an unbeliever, the issue is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You must be born again.

John 3:3 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

How?

Acts 16:31 *“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.”*

PREFACE

The book of Ecclesiastes is proof of how much God the Father loves the lost. This book contains much of the thinking of God's enemy, and to allow that to appear in such measure among the sixty-six books that are His testimony to the world is, on one level, inexplicable. Why would God do that? The answer is because He knows that is the only way to reach so many where they live right now. The point of reading Ecclesiastes is to recognize your lost self somewhere among the ramblings of the foolish side of King Solomon.

This book is particularly for young people. The sad sage Solomon stands at the edge of eight lengthy dead-end trails, and having traveled down each of them, he shouts to the passersby, "Beware!" A young person asks him, "What can I expect if I head down the road of sex, or money, or fame, or reputation?" God allows Solomon to tell them, "Failure, regret, and deep pain." Solomon is saying, "Don't make the same mistakes I made." That's why God allowed this book, He had no better messenger than the richest, most powerful, most gifted (humanly speaking) ruler in the ancient world, King Solomon.

In the end, we will see what Solomon's conclusion is: Happiness is not found anywhere else but in God. Remember Him, respect Him, and guard His commands, for that is the only way to become a complete and mature spiritual person.

CHAPTER 1

Autobiography of an Eightfold Failure

(Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)

We all desire happiness, but the problem is that most individuals today are on a frantic search for it, looking for it in all the wrong places. Fortunately, as with most questions that people have, the answer to how to find true happiness is found in the Bible. There are many illustrations found in the Word of God that are written for our instruction. We are told in Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” First Corinthians 10:11 says, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

In this book, we are going to look at a man named Solomon. Solomon was a man who started out as a great ruler; he was a ruler as a matter of inheritance, and therefore wanted to become an achiever. His father, David, was also a ruler, also an achiever, and the greatest soldier of his day. But during Solomon’s reign there were no wars, his father had seen to that under the principle of freedom through military victory. There was peace in Solomon’s time for forty years thanks to the tremendous military victories of his father, King David. So Solomon had to look for a different field to achieve in and he selected many areas. For example in business, as a businessman Solomon was the most successful, he was the wealthiest man in the world. In Second Chronicles 9:13-14, we are given a glimpse of his wealth, “Now the weight of gold which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold [that’s \$20,500,000 from one source of income alone] besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and

all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.”

Now, what are you going to do with all of that money? Well, you start to make things with it, as in Second Chronicles 9:15 “And King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold, using 600 shekels of beaten gold on each large shield.”

The ancient Greeks had a custom of converting a large accumulation of gold into shields and spears or other paraphernalia, so he made shields out of his gold. “He made 300 shields of beaten gold, using three hundred shekels of gold on each shield, and the king put them in the house [palace] of the forest of Lebanon” (2 Ch 9:16).

The forest of Lebanon was one of his out-of-town hunting lodges. Second Chronicles 9:17 “Moreover, the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with pure gold.”

Now remember, the man about whom this is written was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the most glamorous king that the Jews ever had. While we do not know exactly when he alienated himself from God, there are several passages of scripture that give us some indication. One reference is obvious from this verse, an ivory and gold throne was not for comfort. Anyone who demands for himself an ivory chair overlaid with gold does so for one reason only—for a status symbol to satisfy the ego. Second Chronicles 9:18 “There were six steps to the throne and a footstool in gold attached to the throne, and arms on each side of the seat, and two lions standing beside the arms”

In other words, if you were that close to Solomon, you were there by kneeling. The footstool was for people to kneel in front of him. Second Chronicles 9:19-21 “And twelve lions were standing there on the six steps on the one side and on the other; nothing like it was made for any other kingdom. And all King Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the palace of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; silver was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon. For the king had ships which went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks.”

The apes and peacocks were the ultimate in status symbols; the final touch in Solomon’s extravaganzas. They were an expression of the frantic search for happiness in the details of life. In the ancient

world, apes and peacocks represented the principle of entertainment. For Solomon, however, they represented the principle of boredom and the frantic search for happiness.

Second Chronicles 9:22-23 “So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart.” At one point, he was a mature believer, and people came from all over the world to hear the wisdom that God had put in his right lobe!

Second Chronicles 9:24-28, “They brought every man his gift, articles of silver and gold, garments, weapons, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year. Now Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. He was the ruler over all the kings from the Euphrates River even to the land of the Philistines, and as far as the border of Egypt. The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland. And they were bringing horses for Solomon from Egypt and from all countries.”

Solomon achieved success in business, and was the wealthiest man in the world, a mature believer when he reached the peak of his achievement. However, Solomon lost his momentum in the spiritual life through cosmic involvement (involvement in the ways of the world). Solomon became demonized and then went on a frantic search for happiness. Like all of us, Solomon was a product of his own decisions, and not of the environment. In fact, man is always a product of his own decisions, and never a product of his environment. In the past, Solomon had made great decisions. For example, he made the greatest of all decisions to believe in The Lord Jesus Christ. After salvation Solomon persisted in his perception of doctrine and proceeded to grow in grace. He was not only a believer with a great doctrinal heritage, but he was also a believer with great doctrinal cognizance as noted in the book of Proverbs. However, all of us, as believers, are still human beings vulnerable to the cosmic system, the system devised by Satan to draw people away from God. Satan deceives the whole world. Paul warned the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from your sincere

and pure devotion to Christ.” In Revelations 12:9 “The serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.”

Gradually, Solomon neglected his consistent daily intake of doctrine which, in the past, had given him such fantastic spiritual momentum. Bible doctrine had changed his life, but eventually he was so distracted that he rejected Bible doctrine altogether, and therefore he began a frantic search for happiness under demon influence. Demon influence is the infiltration of evil thinking into the soul and personality of the believer or unbeliever living in a place called the cosmic system. There are only two power systems operating on human beings today, the pre-designed plan of God, and the cosmic system of Satan. Satan is a fallen angel who is the enemy of God, he has no integrity, and his apparent truths always have a dark side. In the Bible, Satan’s kingdom is called the kosmos, usually translated world, and it is his system of power for enslaving mankind.

Satan’s ultimate weapon is evil thought—the subtle distortions, half-truths and lies he uses to control man’s thinking; this ultimate weapon is called “demon influence.” These evil thoughts enter into a believer’s thinking when they choose to operate without truth.

Demon influence includes such things as pride, jealousy, anger, bitterness, self-pity, guilt, rebellion against authority, self-righteousness, sexual self-gratification, criminality, attacks against the divine institutions of human freedom, marriage, family and nationalism, cosmic panaceas such as communism, and religion (man by man’s efforts striving to gain the approval of God). Demon influence can never happen without one’s own consent. Solomon, like many believers today, entered the classroom of the cosmic system to become inculcated with evil thought.

Solomon began a frantic search for happiness apart from doctrine. He was blind to the truth that no believer will ever find happiness apart from Bible doctrine regardless of how great or successful he becomes. Solomon had everything, but he was not happy!

Solomon began his reign by building the first temple in Israel, known as Solomon’s Temple, and called in the Bible “the house of God.” However, he began to bring his reign to a close by building a house of cards! We have his autobiography; we know exactly what he thought and what his conclusions were, for they are all contained in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon traveled eight different roads seeking happiness in the cosmic system. Thankfully, before he tells

us his story, he wants us to know the futility of his experimentation, and so he wrote in **Ecclesiastes 1:1**. “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem . . .” Solomon now tells us his conclusions before we have even seen his premise.

Ecclesiastes 1:2. “Vanity of vanities” [meaningless, meaningless], says the Preacher [Teacher], “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

This is what happens to believers, even mature believers, who become involved with reversionism and the cosmic system. This is the attitude of many believers before they fall apart personally. Life becomes meaningless, and loses its luster. Solomon was a man who can save us a lot of trouble. He wrote down for us how he sought and accomplished everything that is supposed to make a person happy and he wound up the most miserable of creatures. But before we go on with this book, let’s take a quick look at the type of man who will be making these experiments.

First Kings 3:5-12. *“In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish me to give you.” Then Solomon said, “Thou hast shown great lovingkindness to Thy servant David my father, according as he walked before Thee in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward Thee; and Thou hast reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people who cannot be numbered or counted for multitude. So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Thine?” And it was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.”*

The wisdom that God gave Solomon was not doctrine resident in the soul; he would have to learn that like everyone else! God gave him what he asked for, which was the wisdom to rule. He was wise in the political economy and did a marvelous job of ruling the nation. He kept the era of peace; in fact, other nations of the world

went to Solomon to study and to behold his wisdom. The point is that Solomon had it all and he tried every field of endeavor and pleasure that was known to man and his conclusion is written for us in this first chapter, life without God, no matter how smart you are, how beautiful you are, or how many things you have is meaningless and empty.

We must remember as we enter into this study that his verdict casts no reflection on the works of God which at their original creation, God said was “very good” (Gen 1:31). In this book, Solomon speaks of the things of this world not as God has made them but as sin and man has corrupted them.

Romans 8:20-21 “For the entire creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Solomon will remind us repeatedly that the blessings of the creature, when used for the glory of God, become the source of rich and legitimate enjoyment.

Paul said in First Timothy 6:17 “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

God desires for us to enjoy all of the things that He designed for our blessing, however, that is only true when we are rightly related to Him. The evil lies in the fact that man buries his heart in those things, neglecting his relationship with God, and this is the vanity. Man makes the things of this world the most important things in his life. However, vanity is stamped on man in his best estate, Psalm 39:5b “*Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.* (Selah)”

Our Lord warned us about living for the things of this world rather than His word.

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine [Bible doctrine], and acts upon them [application of doctrine], may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended [a reference to the storms of trouble], and the floods came [the floods represent adversaries and opposition against the members of the household], and the winds blew [the unexpected adversities], and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who

hears these words of Mine [perceives doctrine], and does not act upon them [doesn't apply], will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand [the ways of the world]. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."

Earthly things and the ways of the world look good until the trials and difficulties of life prove their vanity. Heavenly things look inadequate until the trials and difficulties develop their glory.

"Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" is life without God. It is man walking and talking "under the sun," trying to get something out of life. Here our man Solomon is going to try and squeeze the juice of life out of the dry rocks of this mundane existence on planet earth, while he's involved in the devil's world. For most of us, chances are good that there are dreams that we have not yet lived. Most people think that if somehow they could separate themselves from the responsibilities, if they could unshackle themselves from the clutter of demands, and if they had enough money, that they could fulfill their dreams. Well, there's a man who kept a journal, who did just that. The journal bears a funny name but it carries a serious message. It's a journal of a desperate journey in which Solomon set out to find happiness and purpose because everything around him seemed so boring and empty that it was like chasing the wind. His hope was to find fulfillment and satisfaction by somehow finding what his heart was searching for. The sad thing is, he didn't know what his heart was searching for. He knew what he wanted, what all of us truly want, fulfillment, but he didn't know how to achieve it.

The book bears the name in our Bible, Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes actually is word that means to assemble people for the purpose of addressing them and therefore the word came to mean the preacher. The preacher who wrote this book, who was also the king of Jerusalem, was disillusioned about his present situation and he hoped to find fulfillment somewhere else, and this book is relevant to us all. The writer Solomon had all that it took in money and brains to pull off whatever he pursued. Ecclesiastes is a collection of what man is able to discern under the sun, the visible world! This book does not take into consideration revelation that comes from beyond man's powers of observation. This is an inspired book that guarantees that what it reports is what the majority of people actually believe.

It is not merely a collection of ancient philosophy because what it talks about is very much up to date and extremely relevant. The thoughts we will study are what you hear in soap operas and in political speeches. Here is what you hear in the halls of academia or on the streets of any city in this country. In this book the philosophies by which people attempt to live are laid bare for consideration and examination. The emptiness, the futility, and the meaninglessness of life leave individuals with a life of vanity if they're living life "under the sun." Sadly, that is the way most people on this earth live, sadder still, it is the way most Christians live.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2. "The words of the Teacher, [the man with a message], the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, [or meaningless of meaninglessness] says the Teacher, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

In verse 3, Solomon says there's also vanity and meaninglessness in any achievement in life if you're in the cosmic system. Achievement is only meaningful if you keep up with your intake of Bible doctrine and if you grow in grace.

Ecclesiastes 1:3. "What advantage or profit does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?"

Someday people will believe what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 23:4-5 "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." What appears to be substance in this life is more accurately described as an unreal thing, having no eternal purpose at all. Some day people will realize what our Lord said in Matthew 16:26 "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Life will not have purpose and meaning when people place the world before God, the body before the soul, and time before eternity. They will stand before God someday to give an account for their labor and the question that they will have to answer from their conscience is found in Romans 6:21 "What benefit were you then [while on earth] deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed [at the judgment seat of Christ they will be ashamed of living for time rather than eternity]? For the outcome of those things is death."

Ecclesiastes 1:3. "What advantage or profit does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?"

The key word is advantage. The term advantage is translated from the original Hebrew, and it means that which is left over when a given transaction is complete. Today we would say, “When it’s all said and done.” When you turn the light out at the end of life what advantage or profit does man have in all his work which he does under the sun? If your world is based upon prosperity, success, power, being a status symbol, money, sex, pleasure, social life, or material things; I have tragic news for you, you’re going to wind up bored and frustrated because these things are really not a source of happiness. We who worship our work and play at our worship have gotten all things fowled up. Solomon tells us before we even attempt it, that it’s vain under the sun!

Now, after stating his conclusion in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, he continues in verses 4 through 10, to set forth his reasoning by four principles from nature. First, Solomon tells us that life out of fellowship with God is like the cycles in nature, which always return to the same point. The first thing Solomon tries is in the realm of science as he makes a study of the laws of nature. Men today still go into the scientific fields of study and spend years, in fact a lifetime, studying these laws of nature. This book is remarkable in giving us these laws of nature long before they were discovered by so-called modern science.

Ecclesiastes 1:4. “A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.”

Life in the world or the cosmic system is a hopeless cycle, generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. People are constantly coming and going through this world. Everyday a child is born, everyday a person dies, and it’s over! Planet earth is still here, continuing along as it always has. With every passing generation, the earth keeps right on going. One generation comes along trying to find happiness apart from God, and it disappears. Another generation comes along and makes the same mistake; then another, and another; and history continually repeats itself. We must conclude with the German philosopher Hegel: “We learn from history that we learn nothing from history.”

Man and his labor are swept away, as if they had never been here. Fathers are going; children are coming after, and no one stays. We are warned of this throughout the Scripture. I wonder how many believers really live like Peter says that we should in 2Peter 3:10-18 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens

will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness or spiritual living, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in prosperity [at the bema seat judgment], spotless and blameless [not ashamed], and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

Ecclesiastes 1:5. “Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there {again.}.”

Solomon is seeing only as far as the sun and not beyond it. His purpose and pursuit are under the sun. There is no meaning to this crummy existence called life on planet earth if you live only beneath the perspective of under the sun. Solomon’s next illustration is the wind, in verse 6 he discovered high and low pressure areas, and the circuits of the wind, long before meteorology did.

Ecclesiastes 1:6. “Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns.”

The wind travels in circles or currents and this is just like people who are seeking happiness without God; they are going around and around and around, but always coming back to the same place, finding no happiness, only emptiness. Just like the cycles of the wind, life becomes a monotonous and repetitive thing. Finally, there is the last illustration in verse 7; Solomon uses evaporation after precipitation as another example of the hopelessness of life’s cycles.

Ecclesiastes 1:7. “All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full or because the sun hits it. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.”

When sunlight hits water, the water evaporates, and when the water evaporates, it volatilizes into the air and air currents move it over the land. It precipitates and rolls back into the sea from which it came. As in the other cycles Solomon mentions, it goes around and around and around. According to Solomon, that’s the way life is, one day you have something and the next day something comes along and takes it away. The spiritual principle behind this analogy is that people seeking happiness without God are on a merry-go-round, they never get anywhere.

In verses 8-11, Solomon gives us the human viewpoint of his cosmic conclusions. Here is the attitude of a believer who was once great but became demonized.

Ecclesiastes 1:8. “All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell {it} [or it’s more than one can say]. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.”

This is what it’s like to have everything and be miserable with everything. Remember, this is a man who had everything, but he reveals to us that men cry for more and more of the world, but when it comes it does not satisfy, for the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

Ecclesiastes 1:9-10. “That which has been is that which will be [what was done in the past will be done again], And that which has been done is that which will be done [again]. So, there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, “see this, it is new?” Already it has existed for ages which were before us.”

This does not mean that there will never be new inventions. An invention is simply someone discovering what God has already determined to happen. Solomon is talking about the main features of the universe being the same, in other words, the same causes produce the same effects.

Genesis 8:22 says “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.”

Even many of the discoveries that appear to be new have been shown to simply be the unknown work of past ages. The art of printing was known in China centuries before it was proclaimed in Europe as a

new invention. Look at man in all his pleasures, pursuits, and changes of life. His intellect may be gratified and his appetite for something new may be supplied, but no new avenues of happiness are opened to him. When man is without a relationship with God, whatever he produces will only confirm that he lives in a world of vanity.

Ecclesiastes 1:11. “There is no remembrance of earlier things [men of old]; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still.”

This, like the last statement, is a general rather than a universal truth. Time blots out a multitude of events, as if they had never happened. Man tries to be important; tries everything to stay before the public. But it isn't long until he passes off the stage of life, and then there's no remembrance of him. Solomon made some tremendous experiments in the laboratory of life. He tried everything that is available for man to try, and he was in a position to do so as he could enter into any field he chose. However, there is no capacity for life or happiness apart from a personal relationship with God. Solomon, who already had everything, was searching for something different, something new and exotic that might bring happiness. But he discovered something that we will all discover either the easy way (through Bible doctrine) or the hard way (through a frantic search for happiness) that no form of stimulation, no new thing, nor any form of the world system will ever give us true happiness. Only concentration on God's word, and the day-by-day inhale and exhale of Bible doctrine will give us the happiness and fulfillment that we all truly desire.

So there came a day when Solomon forgot the source of his greatness and blessing; suddenly he was too busy for God. Suddenly, he was preoccupied with himself; there were things more important than his intake of Bible doctrine or the teaching of the Word of God. Little by little, Solomon neglected his consistent daily intake of doctrine which, in the past, had given him such fantastic spiritual momentum. Bible doctrine had changed his life, however, eventually he was distracted into rejecting Bible doctrine altogether. Therefore, under demonic influence, he began a frantic search for happiness. Solomon, like many believers today, entered the classroom where you become demonized, which is what we call the cosmic system. Therefore, he became inculcated with cosmic philosophy, and one day, he realized that he was no longer happy. The tremendous

happiness that he had enjoyed from Bible doctrine was gone, and suddenly there was frustration. He began to seek happiness totally apart from Bible doctrine for he was involved deeply in the cosmic system. We know that no believer will ever find happiness apart from Bible doctrine no matter how great he is or how successful. Solomon had everything, and yet he was not happy! Solomon began his reign by building the first temple in Israel called Solomon's temple, called in the Bible as the house of God. However, he began to terminate his reign by building a house of cards.

We have Solomon's autobiography, we know exactly what he thought and exactly what his conclusions were for they are all contained in the book of Ecclesiastes. Through cosmic involvement and demonic influence, he lost his true sense of destiny. He made thousands of decisions from a position of weakness. He tried eight different roads or eight different experiments seeking happiness in the cosmic system, and the book of Ecclesiastes is the story.

CHAPTER 2

The First Experiment: Anthropocentric Academic Speculation

(Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)

In Ecclesiastes 1:12, Solomon begins his first of eight distinct and separate experiments. Each one was a search for happiness, and each one turned out to be a dead-end. He discovered through experience something that many believers have learned over the years, that involvement in the systems of the world, the cosmic system, is a guarantee of unhappiness! Solomon discovered that you will never be happy in this life apart from residence and function in the PPOG. Solomon's first attempt at finding happiness apart from Bible doctrine was in the realm of anthropocentric academic speculation. Anthropocentric means to regard human beings as the central element of the universe. Solomon is going to take a deep plunge into the world of pseudo-intellectual advances in knowledge about a world where man is the center of focus.

Ecclesiastes 1:12. "I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem." Solomon first reminds us that he was king over Israel, in Jerusalem, to make sure that we all understand that his royal dignity gave him every advantage of observation.

Ecclesiastes 1:13. "And I set my mind [or devoted myself to study] to seek and explore by wisdom [or academics] concerning all that has been done under heaven." Let's first gain some insight into this passage by going back to the original Hebrew. The words *seek* and *explore* are two very important words because they describe his mission. The Hebrew word for *seek* is the verb *darash* which means to investigate the root of a matter or even to worship that which you are seeking. This meaning is pertinent because many people worship

what they seek. For instance, they worship a house, a car, money, pleasure, sex, materialism, etc. So *darash* tells us that Solomon didn't just decide to search out the matter, he decided to search the roots and the origin of these things. Solomon shoved aside all his affairs of state, pushed aside the needs of his home, and dug into many man-centered subjects like passion, sex, pleasure, philosophy, money, or whatever else he could study.

The word *explore* is the Hebrew verb *tuwr*, which means to examine all sides of something. The meaning of this word tells us that he not only sought these things, but that he did experiments with them. Therefore, we have a journal of a man who stopped at nothing as he explored all of the things that life has to offer. Remember, he was the wisest man on the earth and the wealthiest man in the world, so he had no limitations as far as human abilities were concerned.

Solomon spent a lot of time studying the philosophies of the world. He lived nearly a thousand years before Christ and two thousand years have gone by since the time of Christ. During this time man had invented many gadgets and devices, but actually, man doesn't know any more through philosophy and wisdom than he knew three thousand years ago. There has neither been improvement in philosophy and wisdom, nor can human philosophy and wisdom ever satisfy the human heart. There is nothing wrong with academics, but academic education does not produce happiness. This is the conclusion that Solomon will reach at the end of his first experiment, Anthropocentric Academic Speculation.

Second John 9. "Everyone who advances in knowledge and does not remain in the field of play [PPOG] by means of the doctrine of Christ does not have God [fellowship]." The pseudo-intellectual advances in knowledge apart from the knowledge from Bible doctrine will only produce arrogance in a person's soul. Pseudo-intellectual arrogance is the reason that many believers try to reconcile philosophical and scientific speculation with Bible doctrine. However, Bible doctrine and human speculation from many academic fields are irreconcilable. A believer involved in this arrogance must choose between the truth of doctrine and the false concepts in the areas of academic speculation. For example, arrogance chooses evolution over creationism as found in Genesis. Also, psychology and psychiatry blame man's problems on his environment instead of on man's good and bad decisions. Many theories in academic subjects such

as science, history, philosophy, geology, economics, and political science contradict Bible doctrine. In all areas a believer must choose the truth of Bible doctrine over any other conflicting idea.

Solomon first decided that no one could be successful and happy in life unless he went to college and received a fine education, and many people are sold on this same idea today! There is nothing wrong with higher education per se, but it has led many believers astray, as well as creating confusion in the minds of many people. Many people go to liberal universities and graduate in a state of total disorientation to reality. It is far better to be a graduate from elementary school and understand the true principles of life than to graduate from some Ivy League university, and be confused about everything pertaining to life. All the education in the world is not worth one second of bypassing fellowship with God; and none of it can fulfill the soul of the believer. Only Bible doctrine can fulfill the believer's soul, anything else turns sour and becomes self-induced misery.

Solomon has a genius IQ. He is the wealthiest man in the world, he is a great and powerful king who is admired and famous, and yet he is still unhappy. Therefore, he decides, there must be something he missed in school. He doesn't immediately run down and grab a concubine and a bottle (that comes later); instead, he gets involved with academic achievement as his first experiment. But Solomon will find that academic achievement is no substitute for learning doctrine, neither is it a substitute for fellowship with God or the execution of God's plan. No amount of academic achievement will give happiness in this life. In fact, according to the academia of the Bible, a believer cannot find happiness by seeking happiness. Happiness must find the believer. Academic achievement is a wonderful thing for the believer who has the perspective of Bible doctrine and the divine viewpoint of life, but academic achievement cannot give the believer happiness.

Ecclesiastes 1:13. "And I set my mind [or devoted myself to study] to seek and explore by wisdom [or academics] concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with." What a heavy burden, he says, that God has laid on men. What is the grievous task that God has given the sons of men to be afflicted with? Living life under the sun! If all that we have to live for is this life under the sun, then we have nothing to live for. And Solomon is also saying; if you want to

be well-educated, you must study; but let me warn you, it is a grievous task. In Ecclesiastes 12:12, Solomon tells what happens to the person who studies too much: “But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.”

Exhaustive study of the world of man will burn you out. This is not the same as the primary job of a pastor who is to study until he is exhausted. The study of the pastor-teacher is made possible by the power of God through the function of his spiritual gift. What we have here is a man who studied everything except the Word of God! He is a very wise man throwing himself, with intense energy, into a hazardous investigation; setting *his mind to seek and explore by wisdom all that has been done under heaven*. All of Solomon’s extraordinary assets and treasures of wisdom were employed to find the answers to questions like: Why is man, the noblest of God’s creatures, placed in the world with a grievous task to know truth while given such a short time to learn it? And why is man so unsatisfied and his desires are never really met? To search for these answers apart from Bible doctrine only leads to confusion and despair. Solomon will discover this in Ecclesiastes 7:29, “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices”; and in **Ecclesiastes 1:14**, “I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving or chasing after wind.”

All systems of philosophy lead individuals to a blind alley or a dead-end street, or as Solomon says, “chasing after wind.” The question for us is, will we believe Solomon’s conclusion or do we have to learn the hard way and make the same experiment ourselves? You can spend all your time studying a certain subject only to find out that it was actually a waste of time. We are living in a day when educators are declaring that past methods of education were incorrect. But have present methods made mankind any better or happier? All indications tell us that the answer is no. Education changes constantly, one day certain methods are good, the next day they’re bad. Man can never learn who and what God is through wisdom or philosophy. Knowledge of God comes only through divine revelation. You cannot take natural man, who is alienated from God, give him an education and expect that education to solve the problems of his life. It simply will not work. Man’s problems can only be solved through regeneration and Bible doctrine. Solving problems with education is *chasing after the*

wind. Hosea 12:1 [the Lord said to believers who had fallen away from Him] says, “Ephraim feeds on wind, And pursues the east wind continually; He multiplies lies and violence.”

When believers fall away from God’s Word, they inevitably end up living in a lie. So they multiply lies and are violent with their mental attitude and tongue and, in some cases, even their overt actions! Solomon said in Proverbs 15:14, “The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on folly.”

Fools feed on folly, foolishness, stupidity, and nonsense. In Isaiah 44:20, we are told that the believer who falls away from God feeds on ashes, “He feeds on ashes; a deceived heart has turned him aside. And he cannot deliver himself, nor say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’”

Ashes speak of that which has no substance; that’s what a lot of people feed on, knowledge with no substance. It is only Bible doctrine metabolized that protects the believer from this deception. Proverbs 30:8 says, “Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,”

The only food that is needful for you is the Word of God, which will protect you from deception. Solomon now gives us an illustration or two.

Ecclesiastes 1:15. “What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.” Solomon looked into math a bit, and found out that he couldn’t square the circle, so he brought that principle over to the meaning of life and he said, “What is crooked cannot be straightened.” For example, you and I start out in life with a crooked old sin nature (OSN). We can educate it and do many things to try and improve it, but as the Lord Jesus Christ said in John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

It will always be flesh, and that is the reason why we must have a new nature, a spirit that is born of the Holy Spirit. The new nature or spirit comes to us in only one way, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. For a time, in this country, we thought that education would solve the problems of life; we have now learned differently. Knowledge, science, and technology have all increased greatly in our world, but they have not increased the happiness of mankind. In many cases, increased technology has caused increased work. In fact, the increase of knowledge is one of the signs of the last days. Daniel 12:4 says, “But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words

and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.”

However, in spite of our greater knowledge, we have come to the day when evil is called good, and good is called evil. That is why Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 1:15. “What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted.”

The world, in its present condition, is full of crookedness and defect. We can never make the world a better place in which to live. Intellectually, man’s wisdom can never discover, much less remove, the causes of his restless misery. In the spiritual realm every faculty of man is under the perversity of the fall, and we have no more power to make straight its crookedness, than to restore the whole work of God to its original creation. Man is a creature of so many wants and desires, and that which is lacking cannot be numbered.

Ecclesiastes 1:16-17. “I said to myself, ‘Behold, I have magnified and increased in wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. And I set my mind to know wisdom [or academics] and to know madness and folly [psychology and psychiatry]; I realized that this also is striving or chasing after the wind.’”

Now, here is Solomon’s conclusion: **Ecclesiastes 1:18**, “Because in much wisdom [academics] there is much sorrow, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.”

The conclusion is that the more knowledge one attains, the more grief one gets. Solomon’s first experiment was a dead end. He took the whole course in psychology and psychiatry and when he finished, he concluded that it was all just chasing after the wind. Remember, there is nothing wrong with higher education; there are many advantages, but when any type of education becomes a substitute for doctrine or fellowship with God, it is all wrong. In all of his academic life, Solomon did not find the happiness he sought because he had left God out. All he did through academics was to improve his vocabulary and his thinking, so that he could express his unhappiness and misery in superior terms. He’s still miserable and he can explain it better than ever. It was the same for our first parents when they wanted to have the knowledge of good and evil. The woman wanted to know the higher things that she incorrectly thought were hidden from her and denied to her, but instead of increasing their happiness this new knowledge destroyed it.

If there's nothing under the sun or under heaven, our only hope must be above it and beyond it, i.e., our only hope is in the third heaven where God is and where our Lord Jesus Christ sits at His right hand. If a man like Solomon, who had everything, couldn't find true happiness, purpose and meaning for life, then the one thing needed must be invisible. Anthropocentric academic speculations will never provide happiness for the believer, only a personal relationship with our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, can accomplish that.

CHAPTER 3

The Second Experiment: Seeking Happiness in Pleasure

(Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)

In the last verse of Ecclesiastes chapter 1, Solomon gives us the result of his first experiment in trying to find the real meaning, purpose, and happiness of life and writes of it in Ecclesiastes 1:18, “Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.”

After knowledge and academics, Solomon tries an entirely different approach to finding happiness—this time, he’s going to try pleasure. In Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, we see the experiment of seeking happiness in pleasure—eat, drink, and be merry. This is Solomon’s second attempt to find happiness apart from Bible doctrine, and his thoughts on the subject begin in **Ecclesiastes 2:1**, “I said to myself [he thought in his heart], ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility [empty, vain, meaningless, and boring].”

It is a style of writing frequently employed by Hebrew authors that even before a matter is given in a more detailed description, the outcome of it all is indicated. In other words, before Solomon tells us about his next adventure, he gives us the results and conclusions first. He tells us that all the pleasure, partying, sex, and living it up was nothing but futility. Those who write pornography would never tell us this. There are no billboards over X-rated film theaters telling us that it’s empty and meaningless. There is no disclaimer warning us this is the easiest way to get herpes, syphilis, and AIDS, and destroy your sexual ability. Even medical doctors and psychologists have discovered that the common problem of impotence among males

is caused primarily by previous pursuits with perversion. We don't hear these things from our so-called great writers—they leave you to discover these things on our own! And Solomon, who tried it all, is telling us that it wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

A victim of AIDS wrote the following after being given nine months to live: All of my life, being brought up in a religious home with parents who instilled moral values within me, I was taught to preserve myself sexually for the man I would marry, and I remained a virgin until age twenty-four. It was then that I met Ron. We dated a couple of times, and then one night I had too much to drink. It was that night that I lost my virginity and contracted AIDS. Ron had apparently picked up the disease in a past sexual encounter, which could not be traced. It was my first and last sexual experience.

We rarely see accounts like this in the media. Our civilization has become so preoccupied with sex that it now oozes from all pores of American life. If every young person would only listen to Solomon and not the viewpoint of our times! This man, Solomon, traveled the trail of seeking happiness in pleasure as far as anyone could take it, and he concluded that it was futile, empty, vain, meaningless, and boring. All who read these words must listen to Solomon, not the lies perpetuated by the music and films of our time, the lies from MTV, from Hollywood, from popular magazines, etc. The novice, the inexperienced, the virgin, the one who has not yet walked that journey must listen to God's truth before the lies of this world. This man who indulged in it, and lived to tell you about it, can save you years of heartaches if you will only listen to what he says. He warns us that the pleasure trip: the partying, drinking, and sex, is only destructive and frustrating.

Solomon's father, David, made a few mistakes himself, and he did not want his son, Solomon, to repeat them. Unfortunately, Solomon would fall into the same failure a thousand times over. In Proverbs 5:1-5, David writes, "My son, give attention to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may observe discretion, and your lips may reserve knowledge. For sweet droppings of honey drip from the lips of an adulteress and smoother than oil is the inside of her mouth, but in the end [when she's through] she is bitter as wormwood [She knows what to say and how to talk him into doing what she wants], sharp as a two-edged sword. [When it's over, she stabs you in the back.] Her feet [the seductiveness of her physical body, which she uses to entice the man] are leading her to death."

Strong's Concordance states that *regel*, translated *feet*, by euphemism means the pudenda, the female sexual organ. Whatever part of the human body that happens to be elevated in society, she uses it to seduce the male. At the time this was written, since quite often only the woman's feet were not covered by her robe, the men would look at the women's feet.

Proverbs 5:5-11, "Her seductive feet go down to death, her strutting steps lay hold of Sheol [the grave]. She does not ponder [mentally weigh] the path of life; her ways are unstable [the man she's after is just another number], she does not know it. [She is yet another victim of the deception of Satan and the lies of the world.] Now then, my sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house [Avoid the temptations, do not even call her on the phone], lest you give your sexual ability that God has given you to satisfy the woman to others, and your years to the cruel one; lest strangers [promiscuous women] be filled with your strength [your sexual vigor and performance], and your hard-earned goods [your shattered earthen vessel, or human body] go to the house of an alien; and you groan at your latter end, when your flesh and your body are consumed."

The word *flesh*, according to *Strong's Concordance*, is the word *basar*, which by euphemism means the pudenda of a man. In verse 5, we have *regel*, the female pudenda; in verse 11 we have *basar*, the male pudenda. Proverbs 5:11 could read, "And you groan at your latter end, when your pudenda and your body are consumed [destroyed and ruined]."

This is divine viewpoint, the mind of Christ! This is the Word of God, and it teaches that the more illegitimate sex a person has, the more their sexual organs become ruined until they fall into some form of impotence or nymphomania.

Proverbs 5:12-13. "And you say, 'How I have hated instruction [warning from doctrine] And my heart spurned [ridiculed and rejected] reproof! And I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to my instructors!'"

If people would use the organ of perception (the ear) they would preserve the organs of sex. Too many young people will not take heed of this message and will learn the hard way that God's Word is true and man's word is a lie. The apostle Paul said in Romans 3:4, "Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar."

Proverbs 5:14. “I was almost in utter ruin in the midst of the assembly and congregation.”

All this can happen in the midst of a worship assembly, through negative volition toward doctrine.

Proverbs 5:15. “Drink water from your own cistern [fulfill your sexual thirst with your right woman], and fresh water from your own well.”

David is explaining to Solomon that if woman is not content to wait for her right man, she can be compared to water gushing out of a well, splashing anyone who comes close to her. And if she continues, she will be a dry well when the right one comes along. The water refers to a woman responding to her right man. She waits in the well until he comes along and uncovers her, and then she meets his thirst. She waits for the one who has the right to drink from the water.

The Shulammite woman, who appears to be one of the very few women who successfully resisted Solomon’s advances, is described in Song of Solomon 4:12, “A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up.” This is a picture of a woman holding and preserving all her water for her right man.

We live in the days of the new sexual movement because these are the days of apostasy. The world says, “use bait.” The public schools say, “Use condoms!” But God says, “Wait!” No man can have his thirst quenched by an easy woman. Proverbs 23:27 (KJV) says, “For a whore is a deep ditch, and a strange [adulterous] woman is a narrow pit.” In ancient days, it was impossible to get fresh water out of a deep ditch to quench one’s thirst. And anyone who goes to a whore will not have his thirst quenched. She has splashed so many others that she has nothing left to satisfy her man’s thirst. Because of pollution in Solomon’s time, ditches and narrow wells were dug for sewage. Solomon is saying that to drink from her well is to drink pollution, analogous to venereal diseases. Proverbs 5:16-17, “Should your springs be dispersed abroad [the male’s sexual ability], streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone, and not for strangers with you.” David is saying point-blank, “Let your sex acts be for your one-and-only, and not for strangers.”

Proverbs 5:18-19. “Let your fountain [your physical sexual aggressiveness] be blessed, and rejoice [take pleasure] with the woman of your sexual vigor. As a loving hind [which was known for its beautiful symmetry] and a graceful doe [a wild she-goat known

for its responsiveness and passion], let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.”

This indicates the woman’s wild passion in response to her right man. The verb for *satisfy* is *ravah*, which means to be excited and stirred up. The breasts were and are considered the door of arousal for the woman. Remember, this is the Bible; these are Words from God. Exhilarated is the verb *shagah*, which means to be enraptured or to wander up and down, and to be overcome with emotion.

Proverbs 5:19 (An American Translation), “A lovely hind, a graceful doe, let her breasts intoxicate you always, with her love be continually ravished.”

Proverbs 5:19 (The Moffatt Translation). “A lovely hind, a charming doe is she, let her breasts give you rapture, let her love ravish you.”

David has been on both sides of the fence. And this answers the question, “Is it too late?” “Have I blown it too many times?” The answer is “No, there is still hope,” and David is our example.

Proverbs 5:20. “For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?”

David knew that Solomon had wandering eyes for the ladies. *Embrace* is the verb *chabaq*, which means to have sexual intercourse, so this could be translated, “Why do you wander up and down the body of a promiscuous woman, and have sex with a stranger?”

Proverbs 5:20 (Jerusalem Translation). “Why be seduced, my son, by an alien woman, and fondle the breast of a woman who is a stranger?”

Proverbs 5:21-22. “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths. His own perversion will capture the wicked, and he will be seized and bound with chains to the female idol.”

Each act of sex becomes another link in the chain binding the man to the idol of sex, and an idol can never satisfy.

- Proverbs 5:23. “He will die for lack of doctrinal instruction, and in his many affairs from his foolishness he will go astray [wander through life, never finding the right one].”

This man is always looking but is never satisfied, and Solomon, as the king of Israel, needed his right woman desperately. One of the

wisest and richest men who ever lived, said to himself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And his conclusion was, “Behold, it, too, was futility.” If we do not listen to this man and the results of his experiments, we are fools! God does not fill the pages of His book to keep us busy reading—He gives us truth to change our lives. The Lord Jesus Christ said in John 8:31-32, “If you abide in My doctrine, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Solomon had begun his experiments in a typical way for a man with a high IQ. He did not start out by raising hell, he pursued knowledge. Then he simply said, “I’ve gotten uptight from all these academics, what I need to do is get out and laugh a little! I need to get my sense of humor back.” The result of this experiment is found in **Ecclesiastes 2:2**, which says, “I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’”

The Hebrew word for *madness* is *halal*, which means to make a show, to boast, and to be boisterous and foolish. He discovered that as he laughed and laughed, he was never any happier than when he was studying. After laughing for a while, he said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” He does not have the ability to truly enjoy and appreciate these things because, as a worldly, cosmic believer he has no capacity for life. Solomon is not attacking a healthy sense of humor, or disapproving of getting together with friends and laughing. He is merely saying that all this is futile, empty, vain, meaningless, and boring when you do not have Bible doctrine in your soul. There are, no doubt, many comedians in this world with this same emptiness, who deep down inside must agree with Solomon. Perhaps the following story will illustrate this principle: A certain disturbed individual awoke blue every morning and went to bed every evening deeply depressed. He couldn’t find relief for this anxiety, and so he sought the counsel of a psychiatrist who listened to him time after time and finally said to his patient, “I think what you need to do is not to take life so seriously.” You need to get out more! You need to relax and laugh! In fact, there is a comedy club down the street featuring this Italian clown who is leaving them in the aisles laughing, and he is the one that perhaps can bring back your happiness. Why don’t you go see this Italian clown and laugh your troubles away?” And with a hangdog expression the patient uttered, “Doctor, I am that clown!”

Solomon is saying, “It’s all madness . . . What does it accomplish?” Wisdom could not give him what he was looking for, and neither could the extent of his pleasure and laughter. Solomon tried something very interesting; he said, in effect, “Let me combine pleasure and wisdom and try them together—the intellectual with the pleasure!” He hoped he could find something in drinking fine wines while engaging in stimulating conversation, **Ecclesiastes 2:3**, “I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely . . .”

Wine, women, and song . . . there’s got to be something out there that will bring pleasure! However, pleasure carries with it certain problems. Pleasure promises more than it can produce. In fact, planning for it is usually more exciting than the actual experience. Many people go on vacation, and then they can hardly wait to get back to the so-called dump that they left! Solomon was not becoming an alcoholic. This is a very sophisticated, wealthy man who decided that he would let his brilliant mind guide him into the realm of alcoholic beverages and pleasurable, intellectual conversation. And in reality, it can be a very enjoyable time, sitting around with friends drinking good wine and talking. Falling into drunkenness is definitely not implied here—Solomon is not saying in a fit of aspiration, “I think I’ll go out and get drunk!” He is saying, “Maybe there’s a great deal to this fantastic world of spirits; I think I’ll try it.”

Ecclesiastes 2:3. “I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely [he still has his wisdom while drinking wine], and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.”

One day Solomon realized he was getting nowhere. He looked around and saw all those empty bottles and knew that he was wasting his time. He decided to straighten up; but he was still on the pleasure kick, so he was just going to change his brand of fun. He got tired of wine, women, and song, and said, “I’m ready for something better.”

Solomon wanted to accomplish something that would last. He wanted to be able to look back and say, “I built that, and it will be there for a hundred years, a monument to my ability!” He was challenged by the concept of engineering great buildings, and

therefore, became a workaholic and pursued construction. He did all this in the natural, physical realm when he should have been building doctrines inside his soul. **Ecclesiastes 2:4-10** says, “I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and I had home born slaves. Also, I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.”

Notice how often the words “I,” “me,” “my,” “myself,” appear in this passage. Everything Solomon does centers around him, not the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s people. He decided to take on architecture; he decided he would design and build, and he did. In fact, some of the structures that he built are still in Israel, and since he already had a course in engineering, he was certainly qualified. He built castles, canals, roads, and many types of palaces and houses. Solomon was the first to discover a system of irrigation; he found a way to bring water into Jerusalem so there would always be a sufficient supply. The point is, just about anything that could be built, he built it. But he was not happy. He was trying to find happiness in ranches and farms. Many people do that; after spending all their life in the city, and they long to move out to the wide-open spaces, sit under their own fruit trees, and look over the expanse of their own acreage. Nearly everyone wants to do that sooner or later. Solomon did it, but it did not make him happy, and he had to move on to something else. It seems that all the city people want to get out to the country and all the country people want to get into the city, and on Saturdays, they all pass each other! The country boy comes to the city looking for fun, and the city man goes to the farm looking for fun. They could save each other a lot of time and energy, if on the way they could stop and tell each other, no fun here!

Solomon, stopped at nothing; in Ecclesiastes 2:7, he thought, “What I need to do is to improve the inside decor of my palace. There are many details which would enhance my way of life!” Ecclesiastes 2:7-8, “I bought male and female slaves, and I had home born slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.”

Solomon had perhaps the largest and most beautiful harem on earth. First Kings 11:1-3 tells us, “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, ‘You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.’” Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines [one thousand women—apparently he did not listen to his father], and his wives turned his heart away.”

They were available to him any time of the day or night, in any number he wished, for whatever desire he had. Yet his boredom was indescribable. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:28, “Yet such [those who marry] will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.” Did he succeed in all of this? Yes. But was he happy with his magnificent construction? No, and was he happy with all his women? No!

Ecclesiastes 2:9. “Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom [academic wisdom] also stood by me.” This is the grace of God. God promised him he would always have this wisdom, and God “who promised is faithful,” (Heb 10:23). He is not going to tell us everything that he did, but he is going to tell us in principle how he tried to find his happiness in various types of pleasure. Ecclesiastes 2:10 says, “And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them [Whenever I saw something that I wanted, I got it]. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this [pleasing my heart] was my reward for all my labor.”

His reward for all his labor was not what he built or what he did, but how he felt mentally in his heart. He was stimulated by what he had done, and all the things he had accomplished:

- His great building complexes, palaces, and vineyards (verse 4).
- His gardens and parks and all kinds of fruit trees (verse 5).
- His reservoirs (verse 6).
- His slaves, flocks, and herds (verse 7).
- His silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces (verse 8).
- His singers and concubines (verse 8).

He accomplished all this, and said in **Ecclesiastes 2:10**, “For my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.” He actually derived more pleasure from performing the experiment than from what the experiments themselves could give. The development and accomplishments of the plans were the real pleasure—the thrill of the catch was the chase. His plans to find the real meaning and purpose of life were so interesting that the interest they created was his only reward. Even the novelty of this wore off, the joy diminished, as it always does, and the newness of the experience disappeared. **Ecclesiastes 2:11** says, “Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and chasing after wind and there was no profit [gain] under the sun.”

No pleasure or accomplishment, regardless of how enjoyable it is at the moment, will ever bring happiness apart from fellowship with God. Little does Solomon realize that the principle of happiness is within him, not outside of him. What he wishes and accomplishes are one thing; what he really needs is another. He wanted peace and prosperity, and all he had to do was to remember the words of the Lord to his father, David, in 1 Chronicles 22:9, “Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days.”

Sensual pleasures hold out promises, but with no staying power. That little line of white powder that some people snort into their system holds out the promise to make you feel good, and in most cases it does . . . At first, however, it has no staying power, so you need

more and more, and it becomes more and more expensive until, finally, you are its slave. Sensual pleasures offer to open our eyes, but in reality they blind us to everything that is important and real. What you need, according to the world, is to expand your horizons, but it's a lie. The lie began in the garden with the father of lies, Satan, who said to the woman in Genesis 3:4-5, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

One thing we all need to understand is that the Lord always looks beneath the surface, while we only look at what is on the surface. As the prophet Samuel said in 1 Samuel 16:7, "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Because we lack the ability to look beneath the surface, we specialize in hiding the truth from one another. We say things are going great when they are not; we give the impression that we have everything together when everything is falling apart. As Mark Twain put it, "Every man is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody." Perhaps the reason we can identify with Solomon with such a great deal of interest is that he pulls no punches, he keeps no secrets, he tells the truth about life, and he says it like it is. Dr. Walter Trovich, before he died, was writing a book titled *The Misunderstood Man*, in which he hides nothing as he writes about the frustrated man. He states that the word *frustrated* comes from the Latin word *frustrat*, which means in vain. The one who is frustrated is the one who feels that all he does is in vain. He goes on to say, "A sense of inner helplessness overcomes him when he looks at the challenges which face him." We don't want people to know that—we want to appear secure and confident, successful, in charge, and in touch. Most people would rather lie, even to themselves, than to have the truth revealed. Perhaps this is what David had in mind when he wrote in Psalm 62:9 "Men of low degree are only vanity, and men of rank are a lie; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than breath."

CHAPTER 4

The Third Experiment: All in the Family

(Ecclesiastes 2:12-24)

Solomon eventually began to think, “I have all of these things now, maybe I’d better get a family started so that I can have a heritage, and I’ll leave it to my children!” So in Ecclesiastes chapter 2, beginning with verse 12, he decided that he was going to have a son and leave everything to him, so that the family name could be perpetuated and go on to greater glory—the All in the Family Experiment. **Ecclesiastes 2:12-13** says, “So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly, for what will the man do who will come after the king [the king’s son] except what has already been done? And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.”

In **Ecclesiastes 2:14**, he came to the conclusion that it is better to live wisely than foolishly, “The wise man’s eyes are in his head [he uses his head—this is Solomon], but the fool walks in darkness [his son, Rehoboam]. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both [the wise man and the fool].”

Solomon knew his son when in **Ecclesiastes 2:15**, he said, “Then I said to myself, ‘As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?’ [What do I really gain for being wise? I am going to die just like my foolish son.] So I said to myself, ‘This too is vanity.’”

Solomon said to himself, “If you live wisely you’re still going to die! You can put forth the effort to get a good education, to pursue a good job, to operate in good common sense. You can practice a profession or carry out your trade. You can do all the things that a wise person would do, planning for tomorrow. But the fact is, the axe falls on your neck just like it does on the neck of a fool—you’re going to die! He came to this conclusion because he realized that

he was depending upon his children to bring him happiness, and this is a pressure no parent should ever put on their children. If your children ever become aware that you are depending upon them for your happiness; and therefore, they must achieve great things, you have destroyed them. We must not be arrogant, ambitious parents, frustrated by our own failures; and therefore, desiring success to come through our children. We can enjoy our children and have a lot of fun with them, but if we depend upon our children for happiness, we will be miserable. They are to depend upon us for sustenance and training, but we are not to depend upon them. **Ecclesiastes 2:16-17** points out, "For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and chasing after wind."

Now, who is this that hates life? The wisest and wealthiest man in the world at the time! A king! A very handsome man! The man who has more than anyone else in the world! When he said, he hated life, he said in effect that he hated himself. He realizes what a terrible thing he had done by trying to gain happiness through the achievement of his children. The only thing that parents should really desire for their children is that they honor the Lord, and that they grow in grace and find the only true source of happiness in life, which is Bible doctrine. Whether or not they ever succeed by human standards is of no consequence. No parent should ever make their children feel ashamed because they have not met the high standards that their parents' own arrogance devised for them. **Ecclesiastes 2:18-19** says, "Thus I hated all the fruit [the production or results] of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?"

Solomon decided, "If I leave everything I've worked for to a fool, then I've wasted my time! Solomon was the wisest man in the world, but this did not mean that his son would be wise. Parents are ultimately not responsible for how their children turn out."

Ezekiel 18:20. "The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19. “Thus, I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.”

In one generation after Solomon’s death, his entire business empire and his kingdom were both destroyed by his foolish son, Rehoboam. Solomon had spent the majority of his life on this earth building these things. If he had spent all his time building doctrine in his soul, he would not have had all of this unhappiness and frustration, and life would not have been so confusing and boring. **Ecclesiastes 2:20** says, “Therefore, I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.”

God was about to show to Solomon a doctrinal believer who had happiness, even though Solomon did not recognize it at the time. In **Ecclesiastes 2:21-22**, it is written, “When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill [this is one who produces divine good, who will be mentioned again in verse 26], then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?”

Work, work, work! Think! Compete! Plan! Sacrifice! Worry! Skip vacations! Work overtime! Work a second job! Scratch the right backs! Invest! Save! Risk! Then when everything is in place . . . death comes. Everything we worked so hard for is passed on to others, and we have no assurance that they will use those things wisely. All of this, and then death comes! And for some it can be even worse—they live to see their kids make a mess of everything they worked so hard to build. For some, it would be better to die first. It does not matter how capable and competent your children may be; there is something in you that they do not have. You were the pioneer, the one who hammered it out. When you had nothing, you made something out of it. No matter how hard you get them to work alongside you, they have not accomplished what you have. Part of what they get, they get for free, and when you get something for nothing, it has a tendency to breed irresponsibility. So, what is the value in all our labors? From a purely human perspective, there is none. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to have all our works evaluated, as in 1

Corinthians 3:13 says, “Each believer’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”

- Second Corinthians 5:10. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
- Revelation 22:12. “Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me to decorate each winner according to his accomplishments.”

Think about it . . . what good is all our success without God?

Dennis Barnhart was president of Eagle Computer Inc. His life was a study in tragedy. His firm grew and he eventually decided to go public. A forty-year-old man, as a result of this first public-stock offering, suddenly became a multimillionaire. Strangely enough, when only blocks from the headquarters of Eagle Computer, he drove his red Ferrari through twenty feet of guardrail into a ravine and died. Eagle Computer netted thirty-seven-million dollars from the initial offering of 2.75 million shares. Barnhart’s ownership of five-hundred-ninety-two-thousand shares was worth more than nine million dollars; that afternoon, he died in an auto accident.

What about your kingdom? What about your empire, your plans? It all seems so terribly irrelevant when you think of your inevitable death. Euripides the poet says:

*Death is a debt we all must pay,
The rich and poor,
The young and old,
The king and pauper alike,
Are now in the grave,
And so it will continue to be!*

Ecclesiastes 2:21-22. “When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?”

Solomon threw up his hands and said, “It isn’t worth it!” He thought, “Maybe the answer is getting relief in the evening; if I work very hard in the day then I’ll take time off in the evening to build up my family—to do what is necessary to prepare them to handle the empire.”

Ecclesiastes 2:23. “Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.”

How many entrepreneurs need a tranquilizer or a drink every night to keep going? Now, in **Ecclesiastes 2:24**, Solomon gets a flash of insight, “There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.”

In the original Hebrew language, the words *better for* do not appear. This verse actually reads, “There is nothing in a man to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.” There is nothing inherent in man, or in humanity, that makes it possible for humanity to extract enjoyment and purpose from the things that we do. Solomon was saying, “God has revealed this information to me in my pursuits, and I’m ready to tell you, this is true—there is nothing within you or your children that will cause you to enjoy the real meaning and purpose of life!” Solomon received this truth from God; this insight into humanity. So how could he continue to go astray in reversionism after hearing this truth from God? Unfortunately, many of us continue in a negative direction after hearing the truth from God. We can learn a lot of doctrine, and then walk out of the church and forget everything that we learned. Human beings do not have the natural capacity to draw genuine happiness from their endeavors, so the human energy exerted to accomplish their goals is wasted.

Ecclesiastes 2:25. “For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?” What a statement! For just a moment, Solomon remembered a principle of doctrine—only God gives capacity to enjoy life. For this reason, the apostle Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Solomon is about to give us a glimpse of hope. Fortunately, Solomon caught a glimpse of our gracious heavenly Father.

CHAPTER 5

A Brief Flash of Insight (Who Can Have Enjoyment Without Him?)

(Ecclesiastes 2:25-26)

Ecclesiastes 2:25-26. “For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight, He [God] has given wisdom and knowledge and joy [happiness], while to the sinner [speaking of himself out of fellowship with God] He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he [the sinner] may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.”

Solomon said, “Here is a man who has nothing but a relationship with God, and he has happiness; I have everything, but not happiness! The man who doesn’t have anything has the one thing I want—happiness!” Enjoyment of life is God’s personal gift. Here is a man working his guts out, and God takes what he has earned and gives it to others. It is an irony that those who are right with God derive benefit from other people’s labor. This same affirmation is also made by Job in Job 27:13-17, “This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the inheritance which tyrants receive from the Almighty. Though his sons are many, they are destined for the sword; and his descendants will not be satisfied with bread. His survivors will be buried because of the plague, and their widows will not be able to weep. Though he piles up silver like dust, and prepares garments as plentiful as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver.”

If we do not have God in the right perspective, and if we do not have the Lord Jesus Christ in the nucleus of our plans, we are wasting our time. When we remove God from our life, we remove enjoyment,

purpose, direction, and meaning. All we're left with is years of hard work, sleepless nights, and nothing to show for it when our body gets put in a box. True enjoyment of life is God's personal gift to humans. The ability to find satisfaction comes from the hand of God. "For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?"

All believers have God inside them in the Church age, but not all believers have enjoyment. How can we have God living in us but be without Him? God indwells our body, but that does not guarantee that we have His Word and His thinking in our soul, for that we need the mind of Christ (1 Co 2:16). There are always individuals who think life without God is not that bad . . . That may be true in the short term, but it will not be true forever. This is why Solomon made this statement in Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no delight in them.'"

Most believers do not realize the devastating effects of their negative volition toward doctrine and their lack of love for God. This happens for a number of reasons; one reason is that many men who communicate the Word of God are not honest with their listeners. For example, most of us have heard throughout our Christian life what a terrible experience sin is, and that is not always true. Sin can be very pleasurable and enjoyable at times; however, it is the end result of sin that brings misery and heartache. We are told in Hebrews 11:25 that Moses chose rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Sin can only give us passing pleasures. The wicked have their moments of victory and the godless have their times of happiness. Job 20:5 says, "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless momentary! Those who do not love God will be under a curse until the Lord comes back."

- First Corinthians 16:22. "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed Maranatha."
- James 1:14-16. "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

Fortunately for Solomon, he remembered a very important principle of doctrine in Ecclesiastes 2:25, "For who can eat and

who can have enjoyment without Him?” For just a moment, he remembered the only *source* of true happiness.

Ecclesiastes 6:1. “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men—a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them [given him the ability to enjoy them], for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.”

First Timothy 6:17. “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

God has supplied us with all things to enjoy. However, without a relationship with Him, it is impossible to experience this. With a relationship with God and fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, all things will give us happiness and contentment, and Romans 8:28 becomes a reality: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Only those believers who love God will have all things working together for their good. God will enable us to have enjoyment and happiness in all things with Him. However, if you remove God from your life, then you also remove all meaning, purpose, and enjoyment. We will have spent our life in hard work and sleepless nights with no benefit from our labors at life’s end.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25. “There is nothing inherent in man to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?”

How can we enjoy life’s experiences? How can we enjoy academics and wisdom? How can we truly enjoy pleasure? Many people, after having begun to learn Bible doctrine, also begin to enjoy the very things that were once boring to them. They begin to enjoy their families, their marriage, and their jobs more than they ever had before. Why? Because they now have Bible doctrine and divine viewpoint! The only way to happiness and enjoyment in life is through the Word of God. The English noun *happiness* is defined as a state of well-being, characterized by a relatively permanent contentment. Contentment is a synonym for happiness. The Greek noun *autarkes* means contentment and self-sufficiency (*autos* means self; *arkeo* means sufficient). Contentment describes the happiness of the believer in

spiritual adulthood, Philippians 4:11, “Not that I speak from want or with reference to need; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”

Contentment is something we have to *learn*; it is not something we naturally have. It is a mental attitude—a mind filled with Bible doctrine. It is written in Philippians 4:12-13, “I have come to know how to get along with humble means, and I also have come to know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

Once we start growing up spiritually, we have an entirely new and refreshing system of thinking, and we do not think in terms of our needs. We all continue to have needs, but they become less and less important, as we advance through spiritual adulthood. We finally come to realize that God has known our needs all along. Our needs become inconsequential to us, and we realize that we do not have to spend our time thinking about them. We still plan for them, and organize our life, but we recognize that God has everything under control. As long as our personal needs have top priority in our life, it is impossible to grow up spiritually.

Happiness is something we learn, not something we have, want, or anticipate. We will have adversities, as Philippians 4:12 teaches; we must learn how to live in adversity. Likewise, we will experience prosperity; we must learn how to live in it as well. To learn to be content requires a lot of doctrine, taught and repeated, and knowledge of the uniqueness of the church age and all of its mystery doctrine. Contentment is a synonym for perfect happiness and enjoying the plan of God for our life. Paul tells us, “I have come to know how to get along with humble means.” This is something we all must learn because, by nature, none of us have it. In humility we are objective. Humiliation is the result of arrogance; humility is associated with spiritual growth and understanding God’s grace. Humility comes with the organized life of the believer in spiritual adulthood. What we do not learn from Bible doctrine, we must learn from adversity and undeserved suffering. Suffering is a great teacher to the wise believer, but it is a bitter pill to those who resist Bible doctrine. Suffering actually provides the maximum opportunity to apply our metabolized Bible doctrine to our life. One of the most difficult

lessons for human beings to learn in life is to be humble. However, God will provide this lesson for us through doctrine and suffering. We cannot be great without humility. Humility is the most fantastic spiritual dignity that carries with it perfect happiness.

We must learn how to be happy (content) in prosperity; yet very few prosperous people understand this. It is difficult for prosperity to work successfully in us, simply because of our arrogance. Arrogance destroys our capacity for life and our capacity for prosperity as is written in Philippians 4:12a, “I have come to know how to get along with humble means, and I also have come to know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret . . .”

The Greek verb for *to learn* is *memuemai*, which means to be initiated into something, or to learn the secrets of a fraternity, and to endure the testing of the fraternity. Like Paul, we must learn the secret of living in both adversity and prosperity. The church is the fraternity, and we are initiated into its secrets through learning Bible doctrine and bearing, by means of grace, suffering for blessing. Philippians 4:12b says, “I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry.”

“The secret of being filled and going hungry,” means how to be prosperous and how to suffer need. Both categories are necessary for the advance to spiritual maturity and the fulfillment of God’s pre-designed plan. Paul attained this fantastic stage of life in which he had God’s perfect happiness in every possible circumstance through divine power; noted in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

This is a reference to the availability of divine power for the execution of the pre-designed plan of God. The source of this power is through Him. He, God, makes us strong. He pours His power into us. It is God the Father who makes it available to us. Therefore, Solomon asks in Ecclesiastes 2:25, “Who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?” He also wrote in Proverbs 3:13, “Happiness belongs to that person [believer] who finds wisdom, even the person who gains understanding [of doctrine].”

This happiness and contentment can be experienced, even in adversity, because God will give you the ability to recognize that these negative experiences can be for your own benefit, 2 Corinthians 12:10, “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults,

with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

At age seventy-five, Malcolm Muggeridge wrote about his affliction in a book entitled the *Twentieth Century Testimony*: “Contrary to what might be expected, I look back at experiences that, at the time, seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction.” In other words, if it were ever possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence, the result would not be to make life better, but to make it trivial and boring.

There is no true happiness in life without *capacity* for that happiness, and this capacity comes from a God-given ability through doctrine resident in the soul. Capacity is simply the ability to receive and to retain, and it is the key to true happiness in life. Capacity is the God-given skill for divine blessing and the doctrinal ability to appreciate blessing from God, and translate it into perfect soul happiness. It is only God-given capacity that allows anyone to enjoy blessing and promotion, 2 Corinthians 10:18, “Not he who promotes himself is approved, but whom the Lord promotes.”

Many individuals may try to promote themselves, but unless the Lord promotes you, you are not promoted. Without Him, you will have no capacity or ability to function properly in that promotion. You may receive the promotion, but it will be obvious to all that you cannot handle that position! How do you know if God is promoting you? A right thing must be done in a right way; God promotes the prepared believer. The prepared believer is promoted by being matured into a spiritual champion and invisible hero. He is not promoted by cheating, corruption, dishonesty, or stealing, and he is not promoted by destroying his peers. Remember what King David said in Psalm 16:11, “You will make known to me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of happiness. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

We are in the presence of God whenever we are taking in Bible doctrine, and Bible doctrine reveals the secret to true happiness. Perfect happiness means capacity in the eternal state for pleasures and blessings forevermore.

CHAPTER 6

The Fourth Experiment: The Philosophy of Time Orientation

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-9)

Solomon gets a little philosophical in Ecclesiastes 3. After all, bored people tend to get a little philosophical, and in his philosophy he came to another conclusion. He said, “You know everything in life is timing and my trouble is I’m out of sync with everything; my timing is bad.” Many people think that the only way to be happy is to organize their time, and there’s no question that organized people seem to be much better off than disorganized people. Disorganized people may not be a distress to themselves, but they certainly are a distress to everyone else. However, if you are in the cosmic system or living your life minus doctrinal viewpoint, though you are well organized, you’re not going to be happy. Therefore, we have experiment number four: The Philosophy of Time Orientation.

Let’s establish a principle before we begin chapter 3: only the believer who makes doctrine his first priority every day of his life, and who sets aside time every day for doctrine, can find happiness in being organized. Ecclesiastes 3 teaches that everything in life is a matter of timing. First of all, let’s note that God has assigned to us a number of days to live on this earth according to Psalm 90:12; 31:15. We are not given years or months to live, but, according to the Bible, days to live!

- Psalm 90:12. “Teach us to number our days, That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.”
- Psalm 31:15. “My times are in Thy hand.”

God has given us an assignment in which there is a certain amount of time to do certain things in our life. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, while we will probably experience most of these experiences we will enjoy none of them without doctrine. Only Bible doctrine gives us capacity to enjoy the things that Solomon listed. Without a relationship with God and seeing the divine purpose in all of these things we will say with Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:9, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?” Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 teaches the general principle about timing, let’s listen to the philosopher:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-9. “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. A time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build up. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing. A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?”

One of the most fascinating subjects in life is this word *time*. What’s amazing is that we all have the same amount of it whether we’re a child in school or the president of the United States Think of how much of it is woven into our lives on a daily basis. Throughout the day we hear things like: What time is it? What time does the meeting start? What time do you want me there? I don’t have time; how much time will it take? Don’t waste your time on that, it’s time for us to go. Or, time is up. Suppose your banker called you up and said that he had some very good news for you. He tells you that an anonymous donor who loves you very much has decided each morning for the rest of your life to deposit in your bank account 86,400 pennies. That’s \$864.00 per day. However, there is one stipulation: You must spend all the money that day! No balance would be carried over to the next day. Whatever sum you failed to use, you would lose. So \$864.00 a day times 7 = \$6,048.00 a week! Times 52 = \$ 314,496.00 for the year. If you were to live to be seventy years old, you would accumulate a whopping \$22,014,720.00. Now, here’s the point; every morning, someone who loves you very much deposits into your bank

of time 86,400 seconds, which represents 1,440 minutes, which of course equals 24 hours. He tells us in Ephesians 5:16, “Make the most of your time because the days are evil.”

God gives us a certain amount of time that we might use it for His glory. Do you remember why we were created and why we are here?

- Isaiah 43:7. “Everyone who is called by My name, I have created for My glory, Those whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”
- Revelation 4:11. “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”

Nothing is ever carried over so that you might credit it to the next day. None of us get any more or any less time than anyone else. This is why the mature believer regards every day alike according to Romans 14:5-6. Every day we live is a gracious gift from God, and it should be a day that we have time set aside for our relationship with Him. James reminds us how frail our life really is in James 4:14, “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

The fact that the believer lives another day is a sign of divine grace and the faithfulness of God. Lamentations 3:22-23 says, “The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.”

This is why it is important to learn Bible doctrine every day as Matthew 4:4 teaches. Matthew 4:4 “But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”’”

Job said in Job 23:12, “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured [*tsaphan* which means to esteem; to admire, appreciate, respect, and even worship] the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Remember that it is Biblical to praise God’s Word as David did in Psalm 56:4, “In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust,” and in verse 10, “In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise.”

So, every day is a day when we should be learning doctrine and preparing ourselves to glorify God, and if we do not purchase time by taking in doctrine consistently, we lose days. This is why we are told that days of life are lost through divine discipline, Psalm 102:23 “In the course of my life, He broke my strength, He cut short my days.” This is also the reason why we are told to purchase time each day or to buy back the time in Ephesians 5:16-17, “Constantly buying time, because the days are evil. [You purchase time with doctrine; doctrine is the capital needed to buy time.] Because of this, stop being ignorant, but completely understand the will [purpose] of the Lord.”

What Solomon said in this chapter is basically right, however, without a relationship with God, and without seeing things from the divine viewpoint of life, all of these things are meaningless. Solomon was involved in what is called *fatalism*. Fatalism comes from the Latin *fatum*; meaning, that which the gods ordain to happen. It is the belief that all things are determined by fate and are therefore, unalterable, and that is why Solomon said what he did in this passage. In **Ecclesiastes 3:1**, Solomon from the viewpoint of fatalism says, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.”

One of the things that make time so important is the fact that it is fleeting. It is irretrievable! We can never live it again! We can never get back the time that we lost or wasted; it’s gone forever! The philosopher William James said, “The great use for one’s life is to spend it for something that will outlast it!” God’s timing is perfect, and if we are in fellowship with Him, we will have peace of mind in everything we do. However, if we are not in fellowship with God, and do not have doctrine resident in our soul, you will agree with Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:9, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?” **Ecclesiastes 3:2a** says, “A time to give birth, and a time to die.”

Notice that this verse doesn’t say there is a time to be conceived and a time to die. It says, a time to give birth, because time begins at birth, not in the womb. Regardless of the circumstances and events that surround your birth, God gave you life at that moment, so that was the right time for you to be born. We contributed nothing to that moment, nor did we have anything to say about it, and so our timing was perfect. This brings up some interesting truths:

- We did not choose your parents; God did!
- We did not choose your birthday; God did!
- Our volition wasn't involved at all!

God created soul life and imputed it to our soul at birth, and that was the right time for each of us to be born. So, if we have any complaints about our parents or our birth, our timing is off. We can't say that we were born too late or too early or that we would have been better off if we lived during another generation. God is perfect, His ways are perfect, and you and I were born under the perfect timing of God! So, if we complain about anything related to our birth or our environment, or our parents, or our home, we are blaspheming God. We are saying that God's timing is off, but God's timing is never off! In complaining about the circumstances of their birth many members of the human race first begin their derailment, i.e., their exit from the pre-designed plan of God. In fact, psychology encourages this type of thinking. However, every time we use our environment as an excuse for our bad habits or our bad decisions, we are so far out of line that we are disoriented to life. All of our bad habits and bad timing can only be corrected by believing in Christ, and then taking in His Word on a consistent basis. Just as we had no control over our birth, we also have no control over our death. When we are born, and when we die, is a matter of the sovereignty of God, or God's judgment. We are all on God's timetable regarding our birth and death. We will die in the manner and at the time that God selects, and God cannot be wrong. Only our perception of what's happening can be wrong, as will be brought out in this passage. People are often bitter, upset, and disturbed because of the way or the time in which someone they love dies, putting themselves out of God's timing for the rest of their lives, thinking that somehow everything in life is unfair to them. There is a lot of unfairness in the world, but the minute we react, we're out of God's timing. Excuses are never solutions to problems. There are many people who complain about their birth, their parents, their home, their environment, and their circumstances, and they're making a terrible mistake! Believers can become very pushy while trying desperately to make things happen in their own timing. Our wrong timing as a believer will destroy us and make us miserable in life.

Timing is simply defined as the selection of the best time for doing something in order to achieve the desired effect with maximum results. For the church-age believer, timing is a matter of adjusting to and synchronizing with the pre-designed plan of God. Every time we make a decision that is contrary to some principle found in the Word of God, contrary to the mechanics of God's plan, then we are out of sync with that plan. Every detail of life is involved in timing, such as being in the right place at the right time. In God's plan for our life, bad timing is a matter of being out of fellowship, of falling apart when under pressure, of being out of the will of God, of having the wrong priorities, or of making the wrong decisions, and all of this because of ignorance or rejection of the plan of God. Above all, bad timing is lost opportunity under the equal privilege and equal opportunity of God's plan.

Ecclesiastes 3:2b. "A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted." The Hebrew word for *plant* is *nata*, which means to plant, to work, or to invest. Solomon is saying that God has allotted or assigned to us a profession, a business, or a job, and also the time to invest in that job. In their lives, most people will go through several of the jobs that God has ordained for them. In each profession or business there is a time to begin and a time to end, or a time to start and a time to retire from it. Planting and plowing describe an agricultural economy, which existed in Solomon's time. In the present day a more appropriate translation would be, *there is a right time to invest and there is a right time to reap from that investment*. There is always a right time to start a business, to invest in the stock market, or to buy property. In effect, this verse says that for whatever we do in life by way of making a living, there's a right time and a wrong time, and if we're on God's timing, then we're on right timing!

We were born at the right time, and we will die at the right time; the timing of our birth and death are both God's decisions. However, while we're alive, we must make decisions in life. Knowing when to plant and when to plow is a matter of understanding the soil, the weather and what crops we're trying to produce. This verse is saying that timing in life is a matter of knowing what we want to do in life, what business we want to be involved in, and how we desire to make money to sustain ourselves. Solomon is right in his assessment of the fact that there is a time for everything. If we don't look at life from divine viewpoint, and we live our life under the sun, time is

meaningless (even when you're doing what you're supposed to be doing). If we are in God's plan for our life, we will be under God's timing, and things will work out magnificently for us.

Ecclesiastes 3:2b. "A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted." Uproot is the Hebrew verb *aqar*, which means to root up, to destroy, or to exterminate. Before we can replant a field we must destroy the old crops to make room for the new. This means that there could be a time in our life for us to uproot, destroy, or exterminate that which we have been planting. The key again is being in fellowship with God, for He is not the author confusion. If changes need to be made in our life, God has His ways of revealing them to us. In other words, don't try to hold on to something that God has taken away!

Ecclesiastes 3:3. "A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build up." The Hebrew verb for *kill* is *harag*, which means to kill the enemy in battle, or to execute the criminal. This is a high honor in life and is the basis for our freedom. All of us are free today because of those who killed, or were killed, for our freedom. Violence can be right timing or it can be wrong timing. For example, if we are in the military or in law enforcement, there are times when we must practice violence. In the laws of divine establishment, capital punishment is the way in which crime is controlled. In fact, as a result of following this principle, the Jews had no need for jails.

So a "time to kill" refers not only to capital punishment for criminals, but also to killing an enemy in the service of your country's military. In doing so, we are not murderers; it is honorable to kill in war, not dishonorable! The Bible does not say, "You shall not kill," it says, "You shall not murder." Verse 3 says there is a time to kill *and* a time to heal; if we kill when it's time to heal, we are a murderer.

The Hebrew verb for *to heal* is *rapha*, which means to heal; to bind up wounds, to heal medically, physically, to restore life; to save life; to mend or repair; to reconcile.

The Hebrew verb for *to tear down* is the Hebrew *paratz*, which means to demolish, or to break away. There is a time when we must have things in our life completely removed. There is a time when we need to break away from others.

Then there is a time *to build up*, the Hebrew word *banah* is used for construction of something wonderful, something great; it can also mean to repair something.

Ecclesiastes 3:4. “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” We never confuse the time to weep and the time to laugh because once we are in sync with God’s plan, we’ll know when it’s time for each. God has allotted a certain amount of time in our life for laughing and dancing and weeping and mourning. Pastors especially need to understand this. Many pastors spend all of their time trying to set people *straight* rather than just teaching the Word of God and letting God straighten their thinking. There’s a time to laugh even when one is behind the pulpit. A good sense of humor behind the pulpit is a healthy thing. If our timing is right, we will enjoy the laughter and the dance, and we will also have peace and tranquility while weeping and mourning. Laughter and weeping are used here as opposites, and yet they bear a direct relationship between the mentality of the soul and the emotions. Our circumstances will dictate to us which should occur.

The Hebrew verb for *to weep* is *bakah* and it means legitimate weeping, not operation crybaby, or tears of bitterness; it doesn’t mean an expression of emotion. For example, our Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus (Joh 11:35); this was the weeping of bereavement, indicating our Lord’s great capacity for love. Our Lord wept out of patriotism in Luke 19:41 because of the coming destruction of Jerusalem Our Lord also wept at the cross (Hebrews 5:7; Psalm 22). All of this was an expression of the manliness and maturity of Christ.

Laugh is the Hebrew verb *sachaq*, which refers to legitimate humor because of relaxation, but not laughing at foolishness. Nor does it refer to laughter used to hurt someone by making fun of them or by mocking them. There is a legitimate laughter, which God has allotted to us. All of us need times of laughter. Weeping is usually related to tension, and laughter to relaxation. God has appointed for us times of tension, and times of relaxation, and if we have doctrine in our souls, we can enjoy both.

Ecclesiastes 3:4b. “A time to mourn, and a time to dance.” *To mourn* is the *qal* infinitive construct of the Hebrew word *caphad*, which means to weep or to beat the breast, and is used for mourning for loved ones at a funeral. There’s a certain amount of time that God has set aside for us to mourn for those who have died, but that time must end and we must then begin to move on. We will always remember those loved ones in our soul, but we are not to beat our breasts for them for years on end.

To dance is the qal infinitive construct of the Hebrew word *raqad*, which means to dance as an expression of pleasure and happiness. God has given us time for everything, and our getting in sync with God's timing is what counts. C. S. Lewis probably said it best, when he said, "Pain is God's megaphone. He whispers to us in our pleasures but He shouts to us in our pain." As a pastor, I've seen families throughout my ministry draw strength from one another while mourning over the death of a loved one, and I've seen those same families laugh and enjoy each other's company even at the funeral.

Ecclesiastes 3:5. "A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones." *To throw stones* is the *hiphil* stem of the Hebrew word *shalak*, which is causative active voice, which is best translated *to be caused to throw stones*. Throwing stones can mean a lot of things, but to be caused to throw stones can mean to be caused to fight for your country, or in law enforcement, to practice capital punishment, just as we studied in verse 3a. Stones were used as weapons in the ancient world. In fact, the throwing of stones was a means of executing criminals as legitimate capital punishment. However, *to throw stones* can also mean to pick up stones and to clear the land for construction or building. *To gather* is the Hebrew verb *kanac*, which means to collect materials for building; to collect stones for construction, or to clear a field for plowing. It also refers to equipping the military with weaponry. This passage teaches that there are destructive and constructive times in the believer's life. The Lord said this to Jeremiah in chapter 1 verse 10: "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

When God gives us rest and peace from problems and difficulties, whether He gives it to our nation collectively or to us individually, it's time to build and to prosper. In Second Chronicles 14:7, it is written, "For he said to Judah, 'Let us build these cities and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side.' So they built and prospered."

We have a certain amount of time in our lives when we are called to build and prosper, just as we have a certain amount of time in our lives when we are called to war. If it's not physical war we are called to fight, it is the spiritual warfare of Ephesians 6:12. There is a time

when destruction is the only alternative; however, a constructive soul with inner grace and inner power can handle the destruction, without needing counseling. Because we have learned to hear God, counseling is not needed. We have all that we need for times of destruction: maximum doctrine circulating in the soul.

Ecclesiastes 3:5. “A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.” *To embrace* is the qal infinitive construct of the Hebrew verb *chabaq*, which refers to the sexual relationship with our mate. In other words, there’s a time for sex. Some people have one thing on their mind all the time, whether they are working, playing or even sitting in church they are thinking of sex, but there is a time for sex. Sex is a good thing and not a bad thing because God invented sex, not man. God has given certain times for the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Hebrews 13:4-5 teaches that with doctrine in the soul, personal love, and a relaxed mental attitude, sex can be a fantastic experience of unselfishness.

To shun is the qal infinitive construct of the Hebrew verb *rachaq*, which means to be far away from embracing. There are times we should not even think about the opposite sex, so that we can concentrate on what we are doing. For most people, God has provided a certain man for a certain woman, and He has also allotted time for them to spend together. However, there is a right time to be together, and there’s a wrong time to be together. Few people seem to understand the time to embrace and the time to refrain from it. In marriage, they want either one or the other, depending on the condition of the marriage. Therefore, the principle is: there is the time to refrain from embracing, to give our soul an opportunity to concentrate on other things that will also be wonderful and stimulating in our life.

In Ecclesiastes 3:6, there is another aspect of our allotted time. It may be a surprise to many believers because many believers can’t stand the thought of ever losing or giving up anything. Sadly, there are some who never think about winning anything!

Ecclesiastes 3:6. “A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; a time to keep, and a time to throw away.” *A time to search* is the *piel* infinitive construct of *baqash*, which means to seek after, to strive after, to try to gain, and in the *piel* stem it means to be aggressive. It should be translated, *there is a time to be aggressive*. This aggressiveness is also to be found among females as well as in males. *To give up as lost* is the *piel* infinitive construct of *abad* which means to give up.

There is a time when we should give up because we must get on with our life. Also, as we age, we begin to realize that many of the things we possess, which we previously placed so high on our scale of values, are absolutely meaningless. Such things do not really help us or give us true happiness. They don't change our life or prepare us for death or adversity. One day we realize that only doctrine can give us happiness and prepare us for the battles of life. Under grace, even when we lose we can gain as taught in Deuteronomy 23:5 and Genesis 50:20. Therefore, there are legitimate times when giving up is the right thing to do. Some dreams die very hard, but there is a time when God is telling us to give up something and to consider it lost. During these times we just have to admit that things did not work out the way we wanted them to, and we must go on with our lives. In the timing of God there is a time to aggressively pursue and a time to give up as lost.

To keep in verse 6 is the qal infinitive construct of *shamar*, which means to guard, to keep, to protect, or to beware. What are we to guard or to keep? Whatever you value. Doctrine in the soul must be guarded and our values must be protected.

A time to throw away is the hiphil construct of *shalak*, which means to cast down or to cast off. This word can even refer to casting away things we thought were important in the past. This action is necessary when our scale of values has changed. God, in His grace, allows us proper time to exchange our foolish values for godly ones.

Ecclesiastes 3:7a. “A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together.” *A time to tear apart* is the qal infinitive construct of *qara*, which means to rip apart; meaning that there is a time to take something, and rip it to pieces. *As believers growing in grace, it is inevitable that we will have to separate from certain friends who are not compatible with our norms and standards and who have become a distraction.* We may even have to hurt the feelings of others if they force us in to a position where we must tell them the absolute truth. Our Lord had to do this to the Pharisees in Matthew 23. Love is not always being kind; rather, love is operating in the truth and the timing of God.

Then there is a time to pick up all the pieces and sew them back up. The phrase “a time to sew together” means that in our enthusiasm, we may be completely and totally wrong in severing relationships with people. This often happens with children who sever their relationship with their parents. We must not forget that there's a

time to mend our relationship with them by sewing together that which had been torn.

Ecclesiastes 3:7b. “A time to be silent, and a time to speak.” A time to keep silent is the qal infinitive construct of *chashah*, which means to be still, to hold your peace, to keep silent, or to be quiet. There’s a time not to be offensive; a time to be gracious and quiet. There’s also a time to speak, when we can open our mouth and say something that’s wonderful, edifying, helpful, and comforting. Knowing when to do these things requires the utmost in wisdom and wisdom, requires doctrine. God’s timing is the key. But if we are living life like Solomon, “under the sun” and not “beyond the sun,” we will never be in God’s timing. There’s a time we ought to stand up and speak even when we are made to look foolish. We can appreciate the man who said “I never felt sorry for the things I did not say!”

However, keep in mind that some silence (the silent treatment) is not normal when it’s the result of an angry and bitter soul. This is not the kind of silence that is called for under the timing of God. Also, this means that we learn to listen to what other people say, rather than doing all the talking ourselves. Find out what other people think, and learn about other people. Learn when to talk and how to talk, and also learn how to listen. Today, there are not many good listeners, but there are an abundance of talkers who are absorbed with themselves.

Ecclesiastes 3:8. “A time to love, and a time to hate.” The phrase “a time to love” is the qal infinitive construct of the Hebrew word *ahab* which means to give our total attention and concentration to the object of our love. God has allotted for each one of us a certain amount of time for love. During this time we are to focus our attention on nothing but the object of our love. This includes our love for the Lord (category one love), our love for our husband or wife (category two love), and love for our friends (category three love). Capacity for love in all three categories is based upon the amount of doctrine in our soul.

The next phrase, “a time to hate,” does not conflict with turning the other cheek, or with impersonal unconditional love for all mankind. A time to hate is the qal infinitive construct of the Hebrew word *sanee*, which means to hate that which is anti-God; antiestablishment, or to hate human viewpoint. It also stresses that acts of injustice and prejudice ought to be hated. Hating does not

mean the Bible is condoning sin. This word refers to hating principles that are wrong or evil, like communism. Hatred here is used in the sense of rejection. *Sanee* refers to hating that which is antagonistic to God's will, doctrine, plan, and purpose.

We are to hate legalism, but not the legalist. We are to hate gossip and maligning, but not the gossiper or maligner. We should hate hypocrisy, but not the hypocrite; lying, but not the liar. Therefore, we are to hate the evil, but not the evildoer. Most people don't know when to love or when to hate, because they lack the knowledge of God's timing. Hatred often times comes from self-righteousness and arrogance rather than from faithfulness to God's standards. The believer who loves God's standards will know when righteous indignation is called for, and he will have anger against that which is unjust, but he will never hate a person or persons involved in such things. He knows how to deal with others in grace because our Lord also has handled him with grace.

Ecclesiastes 3:8b. "There is a time for war." The Lord also said in Matthew 24:6, "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end."

A time for war is the Hebrew word *milchamah*, meaning to fight, to battle, to stand up for what is right. Beware of people who say, "Peace, peace," (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11) when there is no peace. The way to prevent war and to protect freedom is to be militarily strong and prepared. The more weakness we, as a nation, show the sooner we will go to war. The Bible teaches that there will always be wars until the second advent of Christ.

Under the perfect timing of God, there is a time for peace, which is the Hebrew word *shalom* meaning rest, peace, and prosperity. Whether it is personal or national peace and prosperity, this is a time to build and strengthen. A strong soul that has been built up with metabolized doctrine during times of peace will be ready when the fight comes, and you can be sure, it will come. In the same vein, a nation who's military has been built and strengthened during times of peace will be ready for any future attack. The United States of America will certainly find herself under many attacks in the future as the current client nation to God.

From all of these principles of timing we can see immediately, that if we confuse the time table, we will be in trouble. We'll be

disoriented to life because of bad timing; however, timing or being organized isn't going to do our author Solomon any good because he has no capacity for life. He has been disoriented to God's timing and has become a fatalist; this fatalistic viewpoint is shown in **verse 9, chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes**, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?"

In other words, what's the big deal? Solomon was saying that after understanding all of these things, what is the profit, what is the gain? Solomon wanted us to see:

Yes, there's a time for birth, but there's also a time for death;
 Yes, there's a time to plant, but there's also a time to uproot;
 Yes, there's a time to kill, but there's also a time to heal;
 Yes, there's a time to tear down, but there's also a time to build up;
 Yes, there's a time to weep, but there's also a time to laugh.
 And there's a time to mourn, but there's also a time to dance;
 To throw stones and to gather stones;
 To embrace and to shun embracing;
 To search and to give up as lost;
 To keep and to throw away;
 To tear apart and to sew together;
 To be silent and to speak;
 To love, to hate;
 And a time for war, and a time for peace.

We may ask, so what? **Ecclesiastes 3:9** says, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?"

When we approach life from the viewpoint of being under the sun, with its 86,400 seconds in a day, or its 31,536,000 seconds in a year, we are told by Solomon that there's nothing in it for us. And he's right, if it's all under the heavens, or if we do not have God's perspective. When we're out of God's timing and in the wrong place and in the wrong timing, we can work until we're worn out, and there will be no profit. All our work may get us more things, but we will lack the capacity to enjoy those things, which things are God given for us to enjoy.

The key to understanding verse 9 is the word *toils* which is the Hebrew word *amel* meaning monotonous and wearisome labor or work. It speaks of doing the same thing again and again until you're sick of it, tired, and exhausted. It's a picture of one who feels like his

job or life is boring and tiresome and just a huge glob of routine. Maybe you do the same thing over and over again and you feel it's of no importance, and you think you're wasting your time. But you are not, routine is a part of God's plan for all of us. Many things we do in life are monotonous, wearisome, exhausting and tiresome, and seem to be a waste of time. Many people have jobs at which they do the same thing over and over and over again; jobs which make them tired, worn out, and exhausted. Many of these people think they are wasting their time. This is the attitude of Solomon in verse 9, and it is simply a wrong attitude toward time. The job we do has been ordained by God since eternity past, so we shouldn't buy into the cynicism that Solomon has toward time.

Being rightly related to time means looking at time as a gift from the Lord, Psalm 90:12. Disorientation to time is not understanding the gracious gift of life that God has given you. Our attitude toward time should be one of respect, and not being cynicism, Ephesians 5:14. Life has no meaning, purpose or definition, if we mock the details of life, which all believers without a doctrinal viewpoint are sure to do. To the negative believer, time becomes a form of slavery, and a bondage from which there is no escape but death. Bondage to time means failure to appreciate life and results in a lack of capacity for life, love, and happiness. Time is a provision from God, and should not be regarded as a problem to be dealt with. For the believer with doctrine in his soul, the most insignificant of jobs becomes a place of service to the Lord. There is no such thing as a monotonous job, there are just monotonous people. It is important to remember that the believer in Christ is in full-time-Christian service, even on a monotonous job. It is imperative for all believers to understand that doing your job as unto the Lord, even in the most monotonous of circumstances, is winning in the angelic conflict. Luke 19:17 says, "And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.'"

Remember that Solomon, the king of Israel, is bored with his job. The man who in chapter 2, built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and parks, planted all kinds of fruit trees, made ponds of water and reservoirs, possessed flocks and herds, collected silver and gold, is bored with life. Why? Because he is living life under the sun without meaning, purpose, and definition! So in verse 10, he writes

Ecclesiastes 3:10, “I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.”

The Hebrew verb for *to see* is the qal perfect from the verb *raah*, which means to really research, not just to observe, but to experience something. Solomon experienced every aspect of life. The word *task* is the Hebrew noun *inyan*, which means the job, the business, the task, or the matter. Notice that it is God that has given us a job as well as the details of life that many consider dull. Therefore, we should thank Him for it. Becoming bored, dull, defeated, or unstable because of not being happy with our job, is sign that we are out of God’s timing and that we need to return to a serious relationship with Him. Always remember that we can learn character through discipline. The phrase “The sons of men” in verse 10 is a reference to the human race. Our jobs or monotonous work is a gift to fill up time; with too much time on our hands we would go crazy. God has provided every believer with a niche (nest) in life, which contains an occupation that is filled with routine. This is a gracious gift from the Lord.

Time spent in doctrine is never wasted, but Solomon has been wasting his time in reversionism. He tried to get along without doctrine as his guide, but neglecting doctrine now will catch up with us in the future. Although Ecclesiastes 3 teaches that everything in life is a matter of timing, this truth was lost on Solomon. What Solomon said in this chapter is basically right; however, without a relationship with God, and seeing things from the divine viewpoint of life, all of these things are meaningless. This fatalistic viewpoint is brought out in verse 9, “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?”

Ecclesiastes 3:11a. “He has made everything appropriate in its time.” This was a correct conclusion. The Hebrew word for *appropriate* is *japheh*, which means meaningful or beautiful. God has made *all things* beautiful in its time, but our problem is not so much what happens, as it is our perspective of what happens. Do we see with divine viewpoint, the beauty of *all things* through our correct orientation to the timing of God? We like things to end as fairy tales—and they lived happily ever after. But when something occurs that we don’t like, we begin to question the giver of that particular thing, and when we push it all the way to the margin, we remember God and think what kind of God would allow such a

thing to happen? If we don't understand the angelic conflict, we'll miss the big picture, we'll miss God's timing. If we don't look at life through the eyes of faith, by means of doctrine, then we will never understand why certain things happen. We won't understand why the tiny crib is empty, and the baby is gone. We won't understand the reason for the young widow; the reason for doctrinal homes being broken. We won't understand the reason for the cancer patient who is dying, when God could heal him instantly. However, seeing things through His eyes, we can recognize divine timing, and the fact that in His time, he makes all things beautiful and meaningful; it is then that we will give Him praise for all things. As with many of the truths of God's Word this application is easy to teach and easy to say to one another, but many times very hard to do.

The second conclusion in verse 11 has to do with life. **Ecclesiastes 3:11b** says, "He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work, which God has done from the beginning even to the end."

When we think of the word eternity, however, we often times think of it as something incomprehensible or inscrutable, or something far beyond our ability to understand fully. Rather, let's look at eternity from the viewpoint of curiosity about our future. God has not only put things in perspective by having a timetable in which events run their course, but also He has put within every human being's heart a curiosity about tomorrow, about life, and about life beyond. As much as we may love our dog or cat, they will never be concerned about their eternity. They may worry about a meal or some water, or protecting their young ones, but they will not be concerned about tomorrow; God has not placed eternity in their hearts. Since that is true, and since we will not find out about tomorrow or the beginning from the end of a matter without God, our pursuit must be of Him. This means that we are not really ready to handle life until we are ready to handle death and eternity. When we have eternity squared away, time becomes a precious blessing that we will use for God's glory. Solomon will finally see this after his eight experiments are completed.

The New American Standard (NAS) says in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He has made everything appropriate or meaningful in its time."

The King James Bible (KJV) says in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in

their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”

The English doesn't capture the true meaning of this verse. We must go back to the original language to get its true meaning. It is the pastor-teachers' job to search out the truths of the Word of God. The Bible states many times that some things are hidden and are not revealed on the surface.

- Proverbs 2:4. “Seek wisdom as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures.”
- Job 28:20-21. “Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? Thus, it is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the sky.”
- Psalm 25:14. “The secret of the Lord is for those who respect Him, and He will make them know His covenant.”
- Jeremiah 29:13. “And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”

In Ecclesiastes 3:11, first of all, God *has made everything appropriate in its time*. This means that there's a time for everything and things become meaningful when done at the right time. Secondly, God has not set the *world* in their heart (KJV), that would be a contradiction to 1 John 2:15, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world.”

Therefore, God did not set the *world* in their heart. The NAS translation of the original language correctly says; *He has also set eternity in their heart*.

The KJV then says, *no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end*. The original language gives us the correct translation; we can *find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end*. You can find out the work God has done. The KJV is *incorrect* when it says that *no man* can find out God's work.

Let's look deeper, at the original language. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, “He has made everything appropriate in its time.” The phrase “He has made” is the *qal* perfect of *asar* which is *`aasaah* meaning to manufacture something out of something. Here it refers to manufacturing blessings, success and true spiritual greatness. When God does something for mankind, it's worth noting. Always remember that no matter how insignificant certain things seem or how great pleasures become, having the right mental attitude with

doctrine resident in the soul can bring blessings. We can manufacture blessings even in our place of monotony.

The word *appropriate* (we have already noted) is *jaapeh*, which means meaningful or beautiful. *In His time* as other translations have it, is literally *in its own time*. In other words, whether it's money, sex, pleasure, or monotonous hard work; everything is good, in its own time. Bible doctrine can make all that we are, have, and do, meaningful and bring everything to its correct conclusion. The phrase; *He has also set eternity in their heart*, describes the tremendous grace of God reaching down to fallen man. The Hebrew word for *eternity* is *'et-haa`olaam*, which means the eternal or the desire for the eternal. This word means that God has placed a deep desire in man for that which is eternal. There is a deep desire or a yearning for that which is eternal placed in the hearts of all mankind. This is a very delicate and sensitive desire that can be hindered by arrogance or emotionalism and it can be extinguished by hardness of the heart, scar tissue of the soul, or occupation with the details of life. Hence, we come to the reason that the majority of the world rejects the desire which God has placed within them—arrogance and emotionalism resulting in hardness of the heart, scar tissue of the soul, and occupation with the details of life. The conclusion is that all mankind has the desire for eternal things, yet most do not have this desire fulfilled. Yet, those who feed this desire with Bible doctrine, see the desire grow stronger.

Scripture tells us how a person meets the demands that this desire places upon his life? The desire for that which is eternal is evident by the inner thirst and longing for God. Psalm 42:1-2, "As the deer longs for the water brooks, so my soul longs for Thee, O God. [There is a longing from within the soul.] My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?"

David's soul was thirsty and he desired to come and appear before God, which illustrates the confidence that a person with this inward desire can have once they get to know God. David also records for us this driving desire in a desert situation in Psalm 63:1 (A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.) O God, Thou art my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; [*Earnestly* means in an enthusiastic, devoted, diligent, serious, and intense way.] My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."

The soul thirsting speaks of positive volition toward doctrine. The flesh-yearning speaks of the human nature wanting the things of God. The dry and weary land where there is no water speaks of the spiritual droughts that we all have at one time or another that doctrine quenches once we start drinking it again. Having the desire for that which is eternal means that every member of the human race has a divine destiny or a destination for their life which God desires. This is why 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." It is God's desire that every member of the human race fulfills their desire for that which is eternal. First Timothy 2:4 says, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The more you learn about God and the stronger your motivation to learn about Him, the greater will be your positive volition and your desire for Him. Therefore, if you feed your desire for that which is eternal, the desire grows. And the greater your positive volition, the more you will learn about God's plan, purpose, and will for your life. This will result in the fulfillment of your personal sense of destiny. Therefore, good decisions will be manifested by an active desire to get to know God. When this happens, the believer should appreciate the invisible work of God and recognize that even the maturing of his own positive volition is from God; however, having this desire for that which is eternal is not enough. The desire for that which is eternal does not have the power in itself to advance a person spiritually. As the believer grows, his positive volition grows, being firmly grounded in the truth and his doctrinal thinking becomes his outlook on life. The motivation of getting to know God and the real meaning and purpose of life becomes a driving force, and a source of even greater blessing in the person's life. Please note a very important principle: this desire is never automatic or permanent; any person at any time, in any stage of spiritual growth can become dull, and have the need for that which is eternal die. It is a very delicate and sensitive desire that can be hindered by arrogance or emotionalism, and it can be destroyed by hardness of the heart, scar tissue of the soul, or occupation with the details of life.

The person who does not have his desire for a relationship with God fulfilled, will end up trying to fill the void in this life, desiring things from the world which can never fill that void. He will be

motivated to choose certain things in life that he *thinks* will fulfill this desire only to find out that nothing in this life, or under the sun, can ever fill that empty spot. Only God, who placed that desire in our hearts can satisfy our need. So many people are motivated to choose certain paths in life that they think will fulfill their desires, but those only produce pain from self-induced misery. Solomon will write in the book of Proverbs that if a person hopes for something to give them happiness, they will end up with a sick heart. Proverbs 13:12, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

Such a frantic search for happiness, hoping that something in the world will give us happiness, leads to a dead end. The idea that mankind can find happiness apart from God is vain and futile. Man needs a relationship with God presently or else he finds himself occupied with the past or with the future, most don't relate to God in the present. Most are so concerned about their future plans that they neglect living in the present, always waiting for something in the future to happen. Never really living, but always hoping to do so some day. They seem to be always getting ready to be happy, but inevitably happiness eludes them. God, in His grace, has given us passions and desires which can be fulfilled in the present, only by Him.

As believers, we must be taught, and we must have the humility to be teachable; humility is teachability. The lovers of God and of spiritual things are of one mind concerning what they find to be the greatest of pleasures, Bible doctrine. This is why Solomon actually tells us before this book is over, that the feeling of pleasure or happiness is a mental state. In the case of the natural man, the things, which can give happiness, are individual and are always changing. Man esteems one thing above another, and inevitably what one man esteems clashes with what another man esteems because neither are united by a higher thought pattern. This results in a lot of disagreement among mankind concerning what constitutes happiness. The natural man makes choices in life based upon the pursuit of happiness, from empty promises, and he will sadly discover that the promise of happiness was baseless, resulting in misery. The only real happiness in life is the absolute happiness based on the truth offered only by God.

Look at what Solomon said after his Ecclesiastes ordeal in Proverbs 3:13-18, “Happiness belongs to the person who finds wisdom, even

to the person who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, And its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.”

When a man seeks God first, happiness no longer eludes him. The Word of God promises that blessings will be his. However, these things appear childishly easy and too good to be true to the mind, which has been defiled by the world; they don't make sense! The apostle Paul warned us that the truths we hold dear would be laughed at and rejected by the world. It is important to note here that when someone is critical of you, or of your pastor, or of anyone in your local assembly, just look at their life and ask yourself if you would like to be like them and think with their system of thinking? It's incredible how arrogant people are; critical of everything and everyone around them, and yet in reality, they don't really have anything to be arrogant about!

Paul warned us about this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-29, “For the word [or the doctrine concerning] the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God.”

The world's way may appear to be the best way to finding happiness, but in reality it is a dead-end street. The world's way appeals to the natural-minded man but the naturally minded man can never find true happiness. Human viewpoint is unprofitable since it functions independently from God's will, as did Satan in his fall, Adam, and every one who falls into reversionism. That is why all the great thinkers, like Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, but mostly Solomon, found that human knowledge is unstable in itself. Knowledge needs a stabilizer; it needs the mind of Christ as Solomon demonstrates. The only knowledge which fills man's void is that which is infinite and from God; and why not? Our passage tells us that God is the one who put that void, the desire for that which is eternal, within man. That being said, it is obvious that He is the only one who can fill it.

Ecclesiastes 3:11. "He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end." Our next phrase *yet so* is not a good translation. This is the phrase *mibaliy asher* which should be translated *without which*. When the Lord wanted to make a very important point in His message He would say, "*Truly, truly*" it is important to stress an equally important emphasis here, so that we don't miss this translation because it is fantastic and eye opening. With the proper Hebrew translation, read the verse again and notice the grace of God. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything meaningful in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, without which [the setting of the desire for eternal things] mankind will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end."

Here's the implication: Because the desire for that which is eternal is given, mankind *can* find out the work, which God has done from the beginning even to the end. If the grace of God hadn't placed this desire within the heart of every man then mankind would certainly not be able to know the works of God. This phrase is crucial to understanding this important verse. Let's look at some passages in the New Testament, which teaches this same principle.

Romans 1:18-19, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."

Notice that God has placed a desire and the conviction for eternal things within the heart of man. This is also taught in the Gospel of

John. John 1:1-12, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He [the Word who was God] was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John [this is John the baptist, not John the writer]. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but [came] that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, [even] to those who believe in His name.”

There is a desire or a light placed within man that God has placed there because of grace. If God did not put a desire for that which is eternal in our hearts, we would never develop such a desire.

Romans 3:10-18 as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Therefore, it takes the efficacious ministry of God the Holy Spirit to make Gospel information known (Joh 16:8-11, 1 Co 2:9-16). God has to do all the work or else we would never be saved.

Second Corinthians 6:1-2. “And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you; behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation.’”

Find out, in Ecclesiastes 3:11, is the verb *yimtsa’*, which means to perceive. Therefore, our full, corrected translation of this verse is as follows: Ecclesiastes 3:11, “He has made everything appropriate in

its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, without which [the setting of the desire for eternal things] mankind will not find out [or perceive] the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.”

I would hope that there are believers who would be able to probe the depths of this verse, those who, in their lifetime, would attain what most people never will; that is actually fulfilling the principle of perceiving what God has manufactured from the beginning even unto the end of human history. We have several aids in fulfilling this verse. We have the availability of doctrine every day; we have God the Holy Spirit as our mentor or teacher. We have a local assembly where we can gather on a continual basis to learn things that most Bible colleges don't even know existed. If we fulfill this verse, instead of being dried-up fundamentalists, we are going to be strong, gracious, and wonderful people for the Lord. We will not be dried, shriveled-up legalists dishonoring the Lord with pious amens and epigrams, who give up their bad habits. Somewhere along the line, some of us are going to break through and find out what time really is all about, and what is the most important thing to do in time. The fact that we are in time doesn't mean that we know anything about it. Fish live in the water, but we know more about the water than the fish do. Just because we are living in time and we're a Christian doesn't mean that we perceive reality. We can know that we are given time to perceive the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

It is critical that we understand that it's the grace of God that has placed within man a desire for that which is eternal. We can understand this truth more fully studying the original creation of man. Originally Adam and the woman were created perfect. Adam was created trichotomous: having a body, soul, and a human spirit, according to Genesis 2:7-9, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

It's important to note that the tree of life is associated with perfect life and environment in the garden, as well as the perpetuation of

right relationship with God in the garden, according to Genesis 2:9, 3:22. This is why after Adam and the woman sinned, we read in Genesis 3:22, “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.’”

The tree of life is associated with perfect life and environment in the garden, as well as the perpetuation of right relationship with God. Therefore, when man sinned and was driven out of the garden, he was cut off from the tree of life, in Genesis 3:24, “Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

In fact, the tree of life is not seen again by man until the eternal state, Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14. Revelation 2:7, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

Revelation 22:14, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.”

Eating from the tree of life was a part of man’s relationship with God in the garden. It was how Adam and the woman could perpetuate their relationship with God, and it’s very interesting that now in time, in this life, the tree of life is related to Bible doctrine.

Proverbs 3:18, “She [doctrine] is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.”

Positive volition is related to the tree of life in Proverbs 13:12, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

God has placed a desire for that which is eternal within the heart of man and that desire is what Adam and the woman had fulfilled when they were in the garden eating from the tree of life. The tree of life represented a right relationship with God, and this is why the tree of life will be located forever in the New Jerusalem: Revelation 22:2, “In the middle of its street. and on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

Eternal happiness is also associated with the tree of life: Revelation 22:14, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.”

Human history began in the Garden of Eden with mankind eating from the tree of life in a perfect relationship with God, and human history terminates in the book of Revelation with mankind having a relationship with God and eating from the tree of life. We can see God’s purpose in placing a desire for that which is eternal in the hearts of men in Genesis 2:9, where there were four categories of trees in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:9, “And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree being desirable to the sight, [category 1: designed for the prosperity of the soul] and those good for food [category 2: designed for physical happiness], and the tree of life in the middle of the garden [category 3: the spiritual ability for perfect happiness and blessing], and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [category 4: resulting in spiritual death].”

The first category of trees was designed for prosperity of soul. All true happiness must be related to the soul, i.e., to what we think. Happiness is not a set of circumstances; if we have capacity from having doctrine in the soul then we can express happiness regardless of our circumstances. Being created by God, man had perfect capacity for happiness. Therefore, the state in the Garden was the epitome of grace happiness, and after man sinned the principle didn’t change: misery and happiness are both a state of the soul. Man was created to be perfectly happy, and any happiness we have is received from having the desire for that which is eternal fulfilled in our life.

The second category of trees was the category called good for food. Man was also given physical happiness or happiness of body. Food was designed to express happiness, to stimulate and perpetuate health. In fact, the stimulation of the taste buds was a reminder of God’s grace before man sinned, just as eating the bread of communion is a reminder of God’s grace after man sins.

The third category of trees was the tree of life which was designed to give us spiritual ability for perfect happiness and blessing, and a total appreciation of God’s grace. The tree of life was for the complete and fulfilled happiness of man when he was first created. Man had a perfect soul in a perfect body and was, therefore, the perfect origin and expression of God’s perfect happiness. The reason that Satan

tempted the woman and not Adam was because Adam was happy in the garden. The woman was unhappy because she thought God was withholding something from her, knowing something she didn't know. Originally, man was designed for happiness, blessing, capacity, and pleasure unless and until he went negative to God's plan. The same principle is still true today just as it was in the garden, which is why the average believer does not have happiness, blessing, capacity, and pleasure. He has gone negative toward the plan of God for his life. His disobedience destroys any capacity for happiness.

The first sin did not involve any morality or immorality, it was rejecting the perfect happiness provided by God. And the tree of life was useless to man in the status of spiritual death. Man, as ruler, ought to be happy. The tree of life combined immortality and perfect happiness to give man a perfect environment and perfect happiness, so to enable him to rule over creation. Man had everything that would stimulate perfect happiness. However, the tree of life is useless to man, as a sinner, because sin destroys happiness. The tree of life was God's grace provision for man as the ruler of this world and man's partaking of it was an expression of positive volition to God's provision. Therefore, when man rejected the tree of life through disobedience, his access to the tree of life had to be denied.

Genesis 3:24, "So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden he stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life."

Category four was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil resulted in spiritual death. If man was able to continue to eat from the tree of life then he would have lived forever on earth in his imperfect state. God had another plan of grace to solve this problem. Man was cut off from the tree of life because of his positive volition to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree of life represents God's perfect happiness, and God's perfect happiness perpetuated. God's perfect happiness was lost when Adam and the woman chose disobedience. God's happiness cannot exist in the human race unless God provides another means of receiving it and perpetuating it. The closest we can come in this life is spiritual maturity, but in the same way, we can destroy the happiness of spiritual maturity by having negative volition to God's plan. If man, in spiritual death, had eaten from the tree of life, he would have lived forever in that state with no free

will after the fall. Immortality in the status of spiritual death would have condemned the human race in its entirety to the lake of fire. If allowed to continually eat from this tree, man would have been in bondage and slavery forever; therefore, the tree of life was put out of his reach. His free will would determine where he would spend eternity and whether he would be happy or miserable. The tree of life was provided by God's grace to be associated with man's positive volition, which was to be expressed in his free will toward the plan of God. Since the literal tree in the garden was now out of reach of man, God had to select a new tree in order for happiness to exist.

First Peter 2:24. "And He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." Having been expelled from the garden, man now could choose to eat from the tree of the cross. That is the first step toward having the desire for that which is eternal fulfilled in this life.

Thankfully, all of our sins were sent to another tree: the cross, the tree of eternal life. In the church age, we can only be happy in the pre-designed plan of God, but this means that God's perfect happiness is relative depending on capacity. So after the fall, the purpose for the creation of man, which is the resolution of the historical phase of the angelic conflict, could only be perpetuated by cutting man off from the tree of life and providing a new tree of life i.e., the cross. The first three categories of trees in the garden were designed to give man happiness and enjoyment as he was experiencing fellowship with God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not necessary for man's existence.

The spiritual death of mankind makes it necessary for the grace of God to function on our behalf. At the point of hearing the Gospel, the unbeliever has no ability as a spiritually dead person to comprehend spiritual things including the Gospel. There are two reasons why the unbeliever cannot understand spiritual information:

1. The spiritual death of all mankind at physical birth, which is total depravity, total separation from God, and total helplessness.
2. The fact that all mankind is born dichotomous, which means that all he has a physical body and a soul.

Many will ask, how does the unbeliever even search for God or respond to Him to be saved? The answer is, through the desire for that which is eternal in the heart of man. Even faith is not something

man contributes to salvation, even the faith to believe in Christ is the gift of God to the sinner. Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that [grace, salvation, faith] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Notice something very important in these next two passages, the word *under*.

Romans 3:9. “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.”

Galatians 3:22. “But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

The word, under, as used in these passages, does not imply merely a system of being under the law or being under grace. It actually implies a dominion over us and that we are totally slaves to sin. There are no exceptions; all of us are under sin. Therefore, the fairness and the justice of God have concluded that all members of the human race are under unbelief.

Romans 11:25-32. “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in [end of the church age]; and thus, all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” From the standpoint of the Gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.

Notice the word shut up, it is the aorist-active-indicative of *sugkleio*, which is *sunekleisen* meaning to shut up, to enclose, to imprison, and to deliver up. The aorist tense is constantive aorist, which means at the point that Adam fell in the garden, God shut up, enclosed, or imprisoned the entire human race in disobedience. The active voice tells us that God performed the action, mankind did not shut himself off from God; God shut him off. The indicative mood is a

dogmatic statement of fact. It means to shut up on all sides or to shut up completely, and to be shut in without a means of escape. Therefore, *justification* is God's declaration that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ stands justified in His sight since he has the very righteousness of God by means of his faith in Christ's substitutionary spiritual death on the cross. On the other hand, to be under sin is God's declaration that mankind is totally depraved. So then, it is the grace of God that has placed within man a desire for that which is eternal.

Galatians 3:22 teaches that man is restricted by divine decree to be under sin, "But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. In other words, we were born sinners, and therefore, we sin."

Psalms 51:5. "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

Thanks be to God, that we all have a solution. Galatians 3:22 continues the promise by faith or the promise based upon faith, "That the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." God is said to have confined all in unbelief that they might become the objects of divine mercy, which is the divine remedy. It begins with God placing a desire for that which is eternal in the hearts of man, since man is so helpless. The remedy for his hopeless estate is the saving grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ! All men have been placed under sin so that the grace of God may be exercised on their behalf, and this brings glory to God in the angelic conflict. Paul teaches this through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, and he makes some very interesting statements after Romans 11:32.

Romans 11:32-36. "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

John 1:12-13 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in

His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This does not mean that God violated our free will; it simply means that He did all the work, all we did was to respond. Our Lord repeated this doctrine in the upper room discourse, the night before His death.”

John 15:16. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”

Therefore, when the desire for that which is eternal is fulfilled, mankind not only experiences forgiveness for his sins but also justification before God. He is justified freely without one human work. Salvation is of the Lord, Jonah 2:9; Psalm 3:8. Romans 3:24, “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

We are also made perfect through our faith in Jesus Christ! Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Yet, the advantage to God in the salvation of a soul is even greater. To satisfy the love of God is a greater achievement than to bring measureless blessing to man. The ultimate objective in the death of Christ is the glorification of God, plus victory in the angelic conflict. Because of God’s infinite love for all mankind, the desire of all three members of the Trinity is met when one sinner repents.

Luke 15:7, “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

The Father’s love is satisfied, He gave His only begotten Son that men might be saved (Joh 3:16). The Son’s love is satisfied, the Son sees the anguish of His soul and is satisfied (Isa 53:11). The Holy Spirit’s love is satisfied, that by the Spirit many sons might be brought into glory (Heb 2:10). Therefore, the unlimited atonement together with the total depravity of man brings such glory to God that even the angels could not conceive it. The angelic host could have seen the power of God, the wisdom of God and the glory of God as disclosed in creation, but no angel could have conceived of the love and grace of God toward hell-deserving sinners.

Ephesians 3:8-11, “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which

for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

First Corinthians 4:9. “We have become a spectacle [the Greek word is *theatron*, a place of public show or theater] to the world, both to angels and to men.”

Because God is the author of salvation, it is complete in all its parts and leaves no place for any human contribution. God is not patching up imperfect structures, in the salvation of men, God has undertaken two purposes which make it impossible to accept any patched up imperfect structures like a cleaned up Adamic nature. First of all, God has declared that through His saving grace the believer shall be conformed to the image of His Son, and this excludes any improving of the old creature (Rom 8:29). Secondly, salvation has for its primary objective before the entire universe, the demonstration of the grace of God. God alone is glorified once salvation is truly understood. Salvation by works only glorifies the creature. For billions and billions of years throughout eternity-future, we will be learning of the details of salvation. If salvation were to incorporate any fraction of human merit it would not be a demonstration of God’s grace and God’s power only, but it would then become a demonstration of man’s power; and therefore, the glorification of the creature as well. God will not share His glory with creatures!

It is also true that those who are saved have a new and superhuman obligation to live as *one in Christ* should live. But even Christian faithfulness, though full of blessings for those who live in it, can add nothing to the new creation wrought by God. God is infinitely righteous and nothing can be added to that. He cannot accept anything which is not perfect in His own sight; therefore, He bases salvation upon the merit of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s perfection and infinite grace is rendered available for every sinner by means of faith.

It is also seen throughout the scriptures that the reckoning of all in unbelief or under sin and totally depravity is a necessity if all humans are to be placed before God totally without merit and are eligible to receive a gift from God. Therefore, the state of unregenerate man is subject to death in all its forms because of the

imputation of Adam's original sin. Also, man is born in depravity and in spiritual death and forever separated from God, unless God first initiates a solution to man. Being guilty of personal sins, each one of us is guilty in the sight of God, and being under sin, by divine decree, all human merit is disregarded. This means that the uncompromised saving grace of God may be exercised toward those who believe. Because of the perfect justice of God, anyone who dies under the age of accountability (the age of mental development when a person can understand the Gospel and believe in it) is safe and saved automatically. God uses this vehicle of His Justice to save whole generations of people who die as children due to war and famine in all corners of the earth. This should give great comfort to the believer in Christ who witnesses such tragic events throughout the world. God has everything under control. However, for those of us who have reached the age of accountability, our personal sins were judged in Christ, and the question is, what think ye of Christ?

God set the desire for eternal things in the heart of man, so that man can know the works of God. God then, through His eternal plan, set in place the means by which we can have that desire fulfilled. God provided salvation through His Son and God provided Bible doctrine so that we could learn of His works. Mankind has added nothing to the plan of God, and neither can he fulfill this desire for eternal things by living for things under the sun. We will only experience the happiness of God when this void is filled by Him, our own efforts to do so end up as vanity, and chasing after the wind.

CHAPTER 7

Life Changes with God's Perspective

(Ecclesiastes 3:12-15)

Think of how popular science fiction movies like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* have been throughout the years. What really holds people's attention in these movies is the existence of a world outside of our own in another galaxy. But these fictional worlds are counterfeit to man's real need to look for something outside of this world, namely, that which is in heaven. Being earthbound carries with it a certain number of limitations. For example, we are completely unaware of the world outside of our solar system, and being earthbound, we are assigned to a predictable and often routine lifestyle frequently to our dislike. God has designed the stage of mankind with just so much to see within the sphere of planet Earth. Hollywood is filled with imaginary characters that have supernatural powers, supernatural strength, and in some cases, are even from another planet. Everywhere you look people are looking for a hero, a super creature, someone with extraordinary powers. But we will not find one imaginary character in the book of Ecclesiastes. We will not even find much creativity, as this book relates to planet Earth. We will find inspired truth concerning life without God on this planet, and it is not in a galaxy far away.

Solomon gives the conclusion right at the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes,

Ecclesiastes 1:2. "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

What Solomon wrote, up to Ecclesiastes 3:10, has shown us that life without a divine purpose and without a personal sense of destiny from God is rotten. He makes clear that there's nothing here on this

earth that could ever give us real satisfaction. God planned that life under the sun can never satisfy the yearnings of man's soul.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11-15, there is a turning point taking us from one phase of Solomon's search to another. Solomon suddenly has insight into the vanity of man's existence. He says in effect, "My perception of life changes when I look at it from God's perspective!"

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13. "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God."

Notice that God has given us four things in this passage. First, He's the one who gives us the ability to rejoice and enjoy life; there's nothing better for us than to rejoice. God's perspective and hope gives the believer the ability to rejoice regardless of the circumstances. The second thing that God gives is the ability to produce divine good in one's lifetime. Notice that the doing of good is in this lifetime. Galatians 6:10, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

There's a third gift in verse 13, which is an appetite to eat and drink. People who are very successful and wealthy don't always have an appetite. Quite like a good night's sleep, it can't be bought. One can buy drugs to put him to sleep, but he cannot buy the ability to sleep. This is a gift from God. Then there's a fourth gift mentioned in verse 13, to see good in all our labor, it is the gift of God. Solomon said that each of these four things is a gift from God, as does James 1:17, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow."

Ecclesiastes 3:12 tells us what man's ultimate objective in time is. If we take that verse out of context we might become deceived, trying to perform human good, which only manufactures self-righteous, legalistic people. To receive the correct interpretation of this verse, let's examine this verse as a question, what is the ultimate objective of time? First, we must have knowledge of something. Verse 12 starts with the phrase *I know*, which is the qal perfect of the Hebrew word *jada* which is *jaada'tiy*. Under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, Solomon wrote this understanding life from every angle. From his own experience, he knew life from both reversionism and supergrace. Therefore, Ecclesiastes 3:12, "I have known," is in the perfect

tense and should be translated to “I have known that there is nothing better for them [mankind] than to rejoice.” The Hebrew word for *rejoice* is the qal infinitive construct of *samach*, which is *lismowach*, meaning to possess inner happiness. As long as you live in time, there is nothing better for you than to possess inner happiness. God keeps us alive in time, even during the mundane times, to discover this fantastic inner happiness. True happiness is inner happiness, no matter what the situation or circumstances. Psalm 128:1-2, “How happy is everyone who respects the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you.” Ecclesiastes 3:12 says, “I have known that there is nothing better for them than to possess inner happiness [Corrected translation].”

How do we possess inner happiness? The answer, of course, is from doctrine, and not from marriage, success, or feeling loved, or even from wealth. Inner happiness only comes from Bible doctrine circulating in your soul. Which comes first in verse 12, doing good or possessing inner happiness? In the Bible, the inner happiness from doctrine is to come first. We don’t decide what we’re going to do for God, we metabolize doctrine and let God decide what He’s going to do with us. We must never put works before doctrine; if we do, it is a waste of time and energy.

The phrase *to do* in verse 12 is the qal infinitive of the Hebrew word *asah* which is *walaasowt*, meaning to manufacture something out of something; and therefore, it refers to manufacturing something out of the inner happiness or the doctrine in our soul. We are to manufacture good out of doctrine. The Hebrew word for *good* is the noun *towb*, which speaks of divine good and not human good. Human good is corruptible because mankind has a sinful nature and commits acts of personal sin. Human good produces blind arrogance and corrupts the one who produces it. Matthew 23:5, “But they [the Scribes and Pharisees] do all their deeds [good works] to be noticed by men.”

Matthew 6:1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

Human good is never acceptable to God, Isaiah 64:6, “All our righteous deeds are like menstrual rags.”

Solomon is referring to divine good when he said in Ecclesiastes 3:12, “I have known that there is nothing better for them than

to possess inner happiness [which comes from doctrine] and to manufacture divine good in one's lifetime."

We are to manufacture happiness even from the details of life with doctrine in our soul, and not by being on a works program. We are to realize the true blessings, which come from doctrine in the soul. Doing good is taking every allotment that we have studied in Ecclesiastes 3 and under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit coupled with doctrine in our soul, functioning in the proper way toward these things. The means of producing divine good is through the filling of the Holy Spirit and the perception of Bible doctrine. We must always remember that divine good will be rewarded by God.

- Matthew 16:27. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."
- Ephesians 6:8. "Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free."
- Colossians 3:23-24. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."
- Ecclesiastes 3:13. "Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God."

We are allotted a certain amount of time for pleasure under heaven. Pleasure is often related to social life and being with people whom we enjoy. Eating and drinking with friends whom we love and enjoy is one of the most enjoyable things in life, and it is a gift from God. Again, the noun for good is *towb*, which refers to freedom and privacy in this life or the principle of live and let live. This is not something that we are born with, we all have an old sin nature (OSN), which is nosy and loves to mind other people's business. We cannot enjoy eating and drinking with people who violate the privacy and the freedom of others. But when we have privacy and freedom, then social life becomes a very wonderful thing. The phrase *his labor* is the Hebrew noun *amaalow*, meaning his hard work. Hard work is in contrast to eating and drinking, which represents social life. We enjoy hard work if we have a good social life, and we can enjoy a good social life if we've had hard work. It's when we mix them up that we

get in trouble. If we haven't finished all of our hard work and we try to have a social life, we will not enjoy life. Most don't know when to play and when to work. The laws of divine establishment demand that a man works for a living (Gen 3:17-19). This principle is the exact antithesis of socialism and communism with all of its evil. This is why the Word of God opposes both socialism and communism which rob people of their self-esteem and the reward for working hard. Ecclesiastes 5:12 says, "The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much." **Ecclesiastes 3:14** also says, "I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should respect Him."

In verse 14, we have an emphasis upon the quality of what God does. "I know" is the qal perfect of *jada* which is *Jaada`tiy*, meaning that at the time that Solomon wrote this he understood exactly what had happened to him, and he was able to relate it all to the doctrine that had been given to him. The perfect tense of *jada* indicates not only knowledge, but also great confidence in that knowledge. "Everything God does" is the qal imperfect of *asah* which is *ja`aseh*, meaning again to manufacture something out of something. In this case, it means that God has manufactured a perfect plan from His perfect character for our life. Since God's essence is perfect, His plan is also perfect. When God does something it is permanent as well as perfect. The word forever is *la`owlaam*, which means eternal or forever. God's plan is perfect as well as permanent. Any insecurities that have come into our soul are from different sources and never from the perfect and eternal character of God.

Stress and insecurities come from our own personal failure as a member of the royal family to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, which is merely looking at life from the divine viewpoint. When we face problems which might lead to the insecurities, fears, or frustrations; remember this, God's character is absolutely perfect. Since the day that we believed in Jesus Christ we are related to God and therefore related to His character forever, and God personally has a plan for our life. Since God is perfect, the plan has to be perfect. It's always comforting to know that for every problem that we will ever face in this life, the provision to that problem and the solution to that problem has come from God. The solution to every problem you would ever face was provided billions

and billions of years ago. Matthew 7:11, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” Ecclesiastes 3:14 says, “I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear [respect] Him.”

The word for fear means to respect or stand in awe because of Him. God has worked so that man should stand in awe of Him. Standing in awe does not mean that we are looking at somewhere. Don't try to stand around with your jaw dropped and your eyes drooping like a basset hound and think that you're standing in awe. Respect and awe for God is having a doctrinal attitude of the soul. The word for fear is the noun *shejir'uw*, which means to respect or stand in awe because of Him. Have you ever looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the ocean, and the mountains and realized that God created all of them? Have you ever considered how petty your problems really are compared to that? Psalm 8:3-4, “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?” Psalm 33:8, “Let all the earth reverence the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.”

The early church reveals how to stand in awe of Him in Acts 2:42-43, “And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' doctrine and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe.” When we are in fellowship with God, and we have our priorities straight, and we are learning about His magnificent plan, we find it very easy to stand in awe of Him. As **Ecclesiastes 3:15** says, “That which is has been already, and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.”

We don't have a problem or a situation, which God was not cognizant of in eternity past, and for which He did not make a perfect provision. Every need, every protection, every blessing for our life was a part of God's cognizance or God's awareness billions and billions of years ago, and He put it all in a plan called the divine decrees. God knew every problem, heartache, and situation we would face before we ever existed and therefore, we insult God when we pray, “God help,” as if He didn't already know you needed help. Matthew 6:8,

“Your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.” Ecclesiastes 3:15 says, “That which is has been already, and that which will be [the future] has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.”

The future has already been in the mind of God because He knows the beginning from the end. The Hebrew verb for *to seek* is the piel imperfect of *baqash*, which is *yabaqeesh* meaning to be on a desperate search. This is a reference to the fact that God searches what has passed by. *Wahaa-'Elohiym jabaqeesh 'et-nirdaap* is the original Hebrew to this last phrase in verse 15 and there are many differing translations to this. The most accurate interpretation is stated by the RSV, the Rotherham translation, Keil and Delitzsch, Leupold and Colonel R. B. Thieme Jr., which says in effect, “God seeks for the one who has been driven or fallen away.” This is interesting since Solomon has received a flash of divine insight after falling away for the first two and a half chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes.

In effect Solomon is saying in Ecclesiastes 3:15, “That which is [the present] has been already [the past], and that which will be [the future] has already been [has already taken place in the mind of God and executed through the divine decrees], for God seeks what has been driven away.

Whether something has happened in the past to drive people away from the plan of God, or whether it is something presently happening, God seeks the one who has been driven away. Throughout the scriptures we are told that God even seeks for those who have been driven away after they have found Him and have been in fellowship with Him. Hosea 14:4 [the Lord said concerning an apostate people], “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from them.” Galatians 6:1 [Paul writes], “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

God is not concerned about why they have been driven away; His desire is for them to recover. We all need to understand that salvation and forgiveness of sin has always been a nonmeritorious act on the part of mankind. God’s attitude toward faithless Israel who were worshiping idols instead of worshiping God is noted in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 3:12, “Go, and proclaim these words toward the north and say, ‘return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord; I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever.’”

God seeks those who have been driven away. We are told how this faithless generation could return to God, they are given simple instructions, in Jeremiah 3:13, “Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice, declares the Lord.”

The Hebrew word for *only* is *ak*, which means surely, or just, absolutely, no doubt, and nothing added to it.

In the book of Hosea we see another OT principle concerning the importance of rebound and recovery. The entire book of Hosea is about the backslidings and apostasy of Israel, and yet our Lord sought those who have been driven away. Hosea 14:1-4, “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you [that’s all, just words] and return to the Lord. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips. Assyria will not deliver [the things of this world], we will not ride on horses [the strength of this world]; nor will we say again, our God, to the work of our hands [relying on self]; for in You the orphan finds mercy. I will heal their apostasy [this is even more than sin], I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.’”

The OT saints had the same privilege of being forgiven for their sins as we do; Micah 7:18-20; Zechariah 1:3-4; and Joel 2:13 emphasize this as well.

Solomon’s view of life changed when he saw life from God’s perspective. He saw the blessings of God, how God can bring happiness and rejoicing in the little things like eating and drinking and finding good in one’s labor. He realized, for these few verses, that nothing can be added to what God has done and how that should motivate mankind to simply stand in awe of Him. Solomon even reflected on God’s grace by His desire to seek out those who had fallen away from their relationship with Him. However, Solomon’s divine perspective was not to last long. His brief journey beyond the sun to bathe in the perspective of God would soon be shadowed again by his return to his under-the-sun thinking.

CHAPTER 8

Back to Cynicism

(Ecclesiastes 3:16-22)

Solomon resumed his wild chase for happiness in Ecclesiastes 3:16 and began to become rather cynical. Looking at life from an under-the-sun perspective, Solomon saw only barrenness and emptiness. There are no real solutions to be found when we are looking at life from human viewpoint or at life under the sun. Solomon was about to discover the terrible effects of injustice, affliction, and suffering. Because he was operating with an under-the-sun perspective, Solomon saw the world as being out of control, where wrong prevails, and right is trampled underfoot. This state of affairs soured Solomon, and his cynicism is revealed in **Ecclesiastes 3:16**, “Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.”

We’ve all seen wickedness in the places of justice and righteousness. We would like to believe that the police department has not been corrupted, or that the courtroom isn’t marked by a lack of integrity, but we see that at times they are just that. In our day it is no longer a question as to whether one is guilty or innocent; rather, it’s a question of whether one has enough money or influence to hire the right attorney or to pull the right strings. Solomon had seen this and had become very discouraged by what he saw. However, if he had been positive toward doctrine and had been in fellowship with God, he would have agreed with what his father wrote in Psalm 73:2-20, “But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men; nor are they plagued like

mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. They mock, and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore, his people return to this place; and waters of abundance are drunk by them. And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?' Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning. If I had said, 'I will speak thus.' Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children. When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, Thou wilt despise their form."

Back in Ecclesiastes 3:17, Solomon arrived at a solution, and it's a good solution because it brings the divine perspective into this situation. **Ecclesiastes 3:17** says, "I said to myself, God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man" [he remembered what his father had taught him, that there would be a judgment of both the righteous and the unrighteous], for a time for every matter and for every deed is there."

Taken together, verses 16 and 17 offer some practical counsel: Although you are going through a hard time and been the victim of unjust treatment the chapter has ended, but the book isn't yet complete. You're going through something that you do not deserve, but somehow, in some way, some day, God's purpose is going to be revealed and His plan will be accomplished. He was at work all along. He's going to put the righteous in one camp, the wicked in another, and He's going to deal with both correctly and justly. In other words, there is a just God who will render a judicial decision in every situation. We are similarly advised in 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

There is a judgment for the righteous just as there is a judgment for the unrighteous. Our Lord taught in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil to a resurrection of judgment." As we have learned, the good and the evil referred to in this verse are those who are believers and those who have refused to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Daniel expressed the same truth in Daniel 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

It's interesting that we often think about resurrection as concerning the believer's being resurrected, but the Bible teaches that unbelievers will be resurrected as well. Acts 24:15, "There shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

Unfortunately, Solomon didn't stop at verse 17 with God's purpose, plan, and power because in verses 18-22, we are about to see some unbelievable heresy by Solomon. Solomon, influenced by the false gods and the cults of his many wives, delves into his humanistic background and extracts all types of humanistic answers. First Kings 11:4 says, "For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

In verse 17, he said some things concerning God. Now, in verse 18, he says some things concerning men. **Ecclesiastes 3:18**, "I said to myself concerning the sons of men, God has surely tested them in order for them [humans] to see that they are but beasts [or like the animals]."

If we devote our attention to the injustices of life, we will come to the same conclusion. When we see the evil we inflict on one another, the beastly characteristics of our nature and conduct, we will think such things as how can there be a God in heaven who would allow this to happen? The Bible warns us against committing evil against others. As 1 John 3:12 says, "Don't be like Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous." First John 3:15, "Everyone who hates his fellow-believer is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life alive in him."

Evil and sin eat away at our humanity, so that the more we yield to it the more subhuman and beast-like we become. The evil we perform demonstrates the beastly characteristics of our old sin nature. Psalm 73:21-22, “When my heart was bitter, and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before Thee.”

After Solomon focuses on man’s beastliness in verse 18, he explores evolution in verse 19. Evolution is a belief in the gradual process by which one species changes into a different species. The new species is usually more complex or has improved. This false view teaches that man has progressed or evolved from his origin as an animal. Paul refutes this in Romans 1:22-23, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” **Ecclesiastes 3:19** says, “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.”

It’s hard to believe that this statement is in the Bible, of course, it is not a true statement. It is a false view of evolution made by a man out of fellowship with God. He is saying that there’s no advantage in being a human being because we’re just like the animals.

Solomon’s involvement in humanism leads him next to the false concept of universalism in verse 20. Universalism is the belief that everyone and every thing go to the same place, and that there is no judgment after death. According to **Ecclesiastes 3:20**, “All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.”

A believer under demonic influence will search for his answers to life’s questions apart from the plan and purpose of God. Leaving out the spiritual assets and possibilities of man reduces him to the category of the beast.

From universalism, Solomon next gets into agnosticism. An agnostic believes that there can be no proof of the existence of God, although he does not deny the possibility that God exists. **Ecclesiastes 3:21** says, “Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?”

Once we start to fall away from Bible doctrine and we stay away, we begin to question whether or not the doctrines of God are true. Living in an unjust world without God, we become beast-like in nature, in reaction, in action, and beast-like in attitude. Check the

attitude of your own heart when you have been dealt an unjust blow, and you're operating from the flesh. Simply watching the news, or reading the newspaper confirms man's beast-like nature. Solomon had fallen away from doctrine and questioned whether man and beast were different at all. He rationalizes that man is no better than a beast. In fact, he's quite sure of it and he has made a case for his argument. He says in effect, man has nothing to say about his death, and animals have nothing to say about theirs. Both are subject to death, unfair treatment, and injustice throughout their lives. The bodies of both spring from the same dust, and return back into dust. Both have a life given to them by a creator, and though man brags about the fact that at death his spirit goes upward while that of the beast goes downward; who can prove it?

After ascending in the first fifteen verses of this third chapter to an almost doctrinal point of view, Solomon became disenchanted by the injustice and oppression of man and descended back into the depths of despair. We all must be careful not to develop this viewpoint. Don't allow the injustices and unfairness of life to make you disenchanted and drive you away from the plan of God. Don't allow mistreatment by other believers to cause you to become disappointed with the Christian way of life. Don't allow the legalism, guilt and manipulation that pour out from thousands of pulpits around the world to drive you away from Bible doctrine. Every problem or injustice that we encounter has a divine solution given to us by God in His Word.

From a position of weakness, apart from God's viewpoint of life, Solomon has immersed himself in the philosophies of the cosmic system. Beginning with evolution and culminating in humanism, Solomon's humanistic viewpoint is complete. Humanism is a system of thought which is centered on human beings and which esteems their values, capacities and worth as being the thing of utmost importance in life. **Ecclesiastes 3:22** says, "And I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?"

Solomon cries out again for happiness, but as in the past, he's going in the wrong direction because true happiness depends upon having the capacity to be happy. Only the believer who puts doctrine first in his life can find happiness in time and in the events of time. Solomon's rejection of doctrine has caused him to develop these different viewpoints: evolution, universalism, agnosticism, and

humanism. Without the truth of Bible doctrine, mankind wavers back and forth with many different opinions. There is no stability in any of these beliefs because Jesus Christ is the only solid foundation upon which happiness can be built.

So the question remains to be answered, how do we handle injustice? What do we do about the fact that in verse 16, “in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness?” What do we do about the fact that in verse 18, so many members of the human race act like animals? How do we handle all of this injustice? What do we do with our disadvantaged situation? This isn’t something that was asked for, nor is it something deserved. What do I do with my crippling disease, with my loss, this unfair thing that has happened to my life? What do I do about the wrong done against me by somebody else that has scared, or ruined me? What do I do about someone who lied about me and tried to destroy my reputation? What do I do about someone who robbed from me and stole from me things that I needed to live? How do I handle someone who has tried to hurt my children and stole from them as well?

The believer must operate in two major principles when faced with the injustice and unfairness of life. The first is the mental attitude response; the believer responds with a doctrinal rationale rather than react with mental attitude sins. The second is a brand new, practical way to handle the injustices and unfair situations that all of us must learn to deal with in life. It is called dynamic courage; a lifestyle whereby the believer uses God’s power and grace to turn the disadvantages of yesterday into the advantages for today and for the rest of his or her life.

The Mental Attitude Response: Many things happen in our lives that we simply do not understand. Although they seem to be unfair, we eventually find out that God was in control and that He has dealt with the situation justly and righteously. Second Samuel 22:31 says, “As for God, His ways are blameless.”

We may not understand the reason for the adversities and the sufferings that come into our lives, yet in the end we will discover that God knew all along exactly what we needed and what was best for us. As the Lord Jesus Christ said to Peter in John 13:7, “What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.”

All of us must remember that there is a God in heaven who is just and righteous and who has everything under control. We must also

remind ourselves of the fact that this is the devil's world, and for that reason there will be a lot of injustices and unfairness that we will see on a daily basis. If we react to injustice or unfair treatment with bitterness, resentment, hatred, antagonism, any form of arrogance or emotion, then the Lord Jesus Christ cannot act on our behalf as the Supreme Court Judge; instead, He must act against us, we are disciplined for our sins of reaction. We should not turn someone else's problem of treating us unfairly into our problem by getting out of fellowship and reacting. If we instead respond to the injustices of life and unfair treatment with the problem-solving devices, then the Lord Jesus Christ will handle the situation for us. Either we handle the injustices of life like Solomon did, with reaction from our old sin natures, or the Lord handles them because of our faith in Him. We either respond to our Lord, or react to the injustices. When it comes to injustice or unfairness in life, we fail most often because we try to take things into our own hands instead of putting the situation entirely in the hands of the Lord and leaving it there. One of the greatest areas of sinning consists of our reactions to the injustices of life and the unfair treatment we receive from others. However, we all need to learn how to handle these things by giving the matter over into the Lord's hands.

We are told to do this very thing in Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken."

If we leave all personal injustices, all slander, all maligning, all public lies, all of the injustices of life and the unfairness, all of it, in the hands of the Lord, He will strengthen and enable us, and thus prevent us from falling apart. John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." First Peter 2:18-19 says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle masters, but also to those who are perverse and unreasonable ones; for this is grace, if for the sake of conscience toward God, anyone bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly [corrected translation]."

Though originally addressed to slaves, this verse came to refer to anyone who is under the authority of someone else. Some people in authority are cruel, but we are just as responsible to submit to their authority as we are to the so-called good ones. We are to serve

those over us, and to do our best job as unto the Lord. A believer who handles authority in this manner has a strong conscience. The weak believer complains and rejects authority, and so becomes a loser. It is very important to have a soul filled with doctrine so that we can handle unjust treatment in the same manner that we handle fair treatment. A conscience filled with doctrine is important in suffering for blessing according to 1 Peter 3:14-16, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify [or set apart] Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience, so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

We must be very careful that we do not allow our conscience to become filled with bitterness when we encounter the injustices and unfairness of life. If we have a strong conscience, we will leave the situation in the Lord's hands and those who treated us unfairly will be put to shame without us ever trying to defend ourselves or answer back. This is why the apostle Paul said Romans 12:14, "bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not."

The Greek word for *bless* here is the present-active-imperative of *eulogeo*, which means to continue to speak well of them or to honor them. The Greek word for *persecute* is a present-active-participle of *dioko*, which in the present tense means they habitually pursue after us, they persecute us. The participle tells us that it is their purpose to make us miserable and to persecute us. However, we are to impersonally, unconditionally love them, speak well of them, and honor them, rather than wishing evil against them. Romans 12:17-22 goes on to say, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace [or live in harmony] with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with [the absolute] good."

If we function in grace without retaliation, the Supreme Court of Heaven handles the situation. By feeding our enemy when he is hungry, we put the problem of hostility from others into the Lord's hands. This is tantamount to dependence upon the integrity of God rather than on revenge and retaliation. Retaliation lowers the believer to the level of his antagonist. Therefore, we should never reduce ourselves to the level of what we despise in others. When we stoop to the level of our persecutors, we are overcome by that evil in which they operate, being conformed to that evil rather than to the (absolute) good. Psalm 58:10, "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked."

Justice is the function of the Supreme Court of Heaven. The psalmist is not advocating our laughing at our enemies, but rather our enjoying inner happiness because of the verdict of the Supreme Court of Heaven. Psalm 58:11 goes on to say, "And men will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth!'"

As we encounter the daily injustices and unfairness of life, we must not react as Solomon did. Instead, we must recall the following principles of doctrine.

1. God can take any type of evil situation and convert it into divine good. This is what Joseph said to his brothers who had betrayed him in Genesis 50:20, "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."
2. The Bible teaches that even when evil comes against us, the Lord can turn it into a blessing, providing that we operate in the faith-rest drill, and let Him handle the situation. Deuteronomy 32:41, "If I sharpen My flashing sword, and My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me."
 Balaam, who was a believer, tried to curse the Jews, and Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 23:5, what God did about that situation, "The Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you."
3. The believer does not have to fight and defend himself; God will do that for the believer who operates in the faith-rest drill. As 2 Thessalonians 1:6 says, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,"

4. The believer then is told to stop being anxious and worried, and to let God handle any unjust and unfair situation. Isaiah 35:4, “Say to those with anxious heart, ‘Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, and He will deliver you.’”
5. We are commanded never to take revenge on anyone for anything, Romans 12:19, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
6. If we are being mistreated in any situation, we must not lift up our hand against another person. First Samuel 24:12 says, “May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you.”
7. If we have been robbed by another believer, we must not take out our vengeance and frustration on him; we must give it over to the Lord. First Thessalonians 4:6 says, “And that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.”
8. We must never repay evil with evil and give someone what we think that they deserve. Proverbs 20:22, “Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and He will save you.”
9. When someone has wronged us, let the Lord repay him according to his deeds, 2 Timothy 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.” Proverbs 24:29, “Do not say, ‘Thus, I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.’”

The Lord is able and willing to handle these situations of injustice and evil. Solomon chose not to let the Lord handle the injustices and evils that he witnessed, and for that reason he was defeated by cosmic thinking. God’s will for us, as believers, is that we learn the doctrines, which teach us to operate in faith, and then utilize that truth when faced with injustice and evil. Once we have learned the doctrine, we must be careful to apply it to those situations when they arise. If we do not, we can expect discipline from the Lord. The measure of discipline and punishment on a believer, who has heard the truth of Bible doctrine and then has rejected it, is much worse than the

believer who has never heard it. This discipline is still more intense for the leaders of the church, because they are God's authorities to the church. To whom much is given, much is expected. The leaders of the church must operate under doctrine when faced with the evil of this world, and not resort to human viewpoint. We cannot change our lot but we can change our reaction to our lot. We cannot change our past; it stands in concrete. We can learn today to see our past from God's perspective. In so doing, we start to use the disadvantages of yesterday as advantages for today, and for the rest of our lives.

We all see people who are submerged in the swamp of self-pity. They can tell you how wrong something was, or how unfair she was, or how he walked away and left me with the kids, or how she took all my money and walked out right when I need her the most. They can tell you all these things, but the one thing they refuse to look at is how to get out of the swamp!

Solomon was saying, in effect in Ecclesiastes 3:22, I suggest to you that there is nothing better than for you to look for an advantage and then dwell on that! If we make that our life's message, who knows what impact it will have? Many believers don't realize that their life is like an open book that people can read. Second Corinthians 3:2-3 says, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts."

Since our life is like a walking Epistle, others will read it, and our lives will bring glory to God if during trials and adversities we persevere, and if we don't quit regardless of our problems.

Take a moment to examine yourself. What is your unjust disadvantage? Not the little petty irritations that happened this past week, but a real and unjust disadvantage. Maybe you even have more than one. Faced with this disadvantage, when do you plan to replace passive self-pity (the woe is me syndrome) with active courage?

A man named Tom Sullivan addressed five thousand men and women in Dallas as he spoke to the prestigious million-dollar-round table of the insurance companies around the world. Men and women were up and down in their seats applauding, expressing their gratitude to Mr. Sullivan for his talk. Mr. Sullivan is an actor, he is a world-class athlete; he holds two national championship records in wrestling. He was on the 1958 Olympic wrestling team. He earned a

degree at Harvard in clinical psychology; he's a musician, an author, and a sports enthusiast. He runs six miles a day on the beach, skydives, a great swimmer, and Tom Sullivan was born blind! The film *If You Could See What I Hear* is Tom Sullivan's autobiography. So 5,000 people who had their sight and who were able to attain great success were sitting in a prestigious club in Dallas listening to a man who couldn't see the podium behind which he stood. His one message was, you've got a disadvantage? Take advantage of it! He said people don't buy similarity, they buy differences; that's a great line. The disadvantages we have make us different, and the ability to overcome that great obstacle makes us stronger. God has given all of us the power we need to overcome any obstacle by means of His doctrine.

Tom Sullivan tells about the time when he was eight years old! He was in his backyard and heard a commotion going on down the street. Hearing the crack of a bat against a ball and the voices of the children, Tom realized that he was hearing some sort of game. After learning about the game of baseball, Tom had a great idea. He placed a transistor radio in his backyard and walked about ten feet away from it. He threw the ball at the sound of the radio. He kept moving farther back and throwing the ball again, now fifteen, now twenty feet away. After telling his father of his desire to play baseball, in fact to be a pitcher, his father talked the little league into letting him try out, and they allowed another player to stand by him to catch the ball after the catcher threw it back. After he knocked a few kids down, he decided to get out of baseball and he took up wrestling. In fact, he said, because he was blind, he had the ability to pop his eyes out. On a few occasions, he won some matches because his opponent would look at the eyes popping out of Sullivan's head and let up. When his opponent let up, Sullivan would nail him!

Tom Sullivan never looked at his blindness as a handicap; he only saw it as an obstacle that could be overcome. If not for his blindness, he would not have had an audience at all! It's his blindness that makes people listen. He says, "When you run, all you do is see, when I run, I hear fifty different kinds of birds in the air; I smell what people are having for breakfast!"

Tom Sullivan's story is significant in our study because it tells of a courageous person who not only accepted, but exploited his lot in life. So when do you plan to replace your self-pity with that kind of courage?

Solomon said, “I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who knows what impact it will have on others!” [corrected translation].

Beethoven wrote great symphonies, but could never hear them (since he was deaf), and he had the right idea when he said, “I want to seize fate by the throat!” Many Christians need to adopt this type of thinking because they have lived in the swamp of self-pity for too long, complaining about bad situations. They think they are drowning under the pressures of the details of life and of their own personal disadvantages. What’s worse, they are pulling other people under with them. Christians can be the most miserable and pessimistic sorts of people to be around, when they’re focused on their disadvantaged situation instead of being focused on the solutions that are given by God in His Word. We have all failed in this area; we all have disadvantages that we sometimes think give us the right to live in self-pity. In fact, when Thomas Sullivan talked about his past, he told of how he almost destroyed his relationship with his wife and family. There was a time in his life when he was full of resentment, hatred, bitterness and anger; a time when he was filled with self-pity and selfishness, but he decided to turn that all around with active courage. When do you plan to replace passive self-pity with active courage? Have you ever considered the impact your disadvantage could have on the world around you? God wants to show you something, but you must first escape the self-defeating disadvantage mind set long enough to let Him! If you could only see how God wants to use your disadvantage to encourage the lives of thousands who have their own disadvantages, you would be amazed! Have you ever considered the impact your distinctive message could have on the world around you? The Lord can use your disadvantage, whether it is physical, emotional, mental, financial, or anything else, to impact positively the lives of others. The only thing that stands in the way is your attitude, are you willing to change it? As long as you’re alive, it’s not too late!

Satanic strategy tries to get believers to be self-centered, which leads them to frustration, then to self-pity, resulting in the blame game and the sins of the tongue. To become occupied with self and filled with self-pity is one of the greatest distractions in life. Self-pity is stupid because it is self-induced and very painful. It intensifies problems and removes any possibility of finding a solution. As long

as we are occupied with self, there is absolutely no solution to be found to any problem in life. For those in a state of self-pity, there is no hope, comfort or doctrine, nothing that would ever help them. Self-pity is never broken by sweetness of others or by others feeling sorry for us; self-pity is merely increased by these things. We can be a sucker for the kingdom of darkness, or we can do it in God's way. We can take the disadvantages of our life and turn them into advantages by allowing them to make us stronger. We can face the odds and become not only a winner in this life now but also a winner in the spiritual life forever with God. Our life can have an impact, the fulfillment of which we will never see until we get to heaven. We can't let the injustices of life, its unfairness or our disadvantages get the best of us, we can overcome them by making something out of our life with God.

God can take any type of evil situation and convert it into divine good as Joseph did when he said to his brothers who had betrayed him in Genesis 50:20, "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Or in Deuteronomy 23:5, "The Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you."

Let's end this chapter with another illustration about dynamic courage: In the fourth century there lived an Asiatic monk named Telemachus who had spent most of his life in studying, praying, and raising vegetables for the cloister kitchen. When he was not attending his garden, he was fulfilling his vocation of studying and prayer. One day Telemachus felt the Lord was leading him to go to Rome, which at the time was the capital of the world and the busiest and wealthiest city in the world. Telemachus wondered why, because he didn't fit in Rome, he fit better in this little quiet place with his little garden, where his convictions were deepening and his faith in God was strong. But he couldn't fight God's direction, so he left. Finally, he found his way to the busy streets of Rome, and he was stunned by what he saw. The people were preoccupied, they were angry, they were violent, and injustice and unfair treatment were found on every street corner. On one occasion, he was swept up in the crowd of people and was pushed along, and finally wound up in a place that he didn't even know existed: the Roman arena. The Roman arena was the place where gladiators fought and killed one another for the amusement of the thousands that gathered in the coliseum at

Rome. Telemachus stared in disbelief as one gladiator after another stood before the emperor and said, "We who are about to die, salute thee, O God." Telemachus put his hands to his ears when he heard the clashing of swords and shields, as one man after the other died. Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer, he ran down to the rail and he jumped on top of the wall and screamed, "In the name of Christ forbear (stop this)!" No one listened! They kept applauding the fight as it went on and another man fell dead to the ground. Finally, he wasn't able to contain himself, he jumped down in the sand and stood out near one of the fighters and said, "In the name of Christ, forbear!" The crowd looked at him and sneered. One of the gladiators bumped him aside with his shield and went after another gladiator. This became sort of a comic relief in the midst of the fighting, and then to the sneering crowd, Telemachus became an irritation, and a gladiator came down and opened his stomach with one flash of his sword. As he slumped to his knees he said, "In the name of Christ, forbear," and those were his last words.

Then something strange occurred; as the two gladiators were fighting, and the crowd focused on the fight with Telemachus who was now lying dead in the sand, the arena suddenly grew deathly quiet. In the silence, someone got up and walked out, another followed, and yet another. All over the arena, spectators began to leave until the huge stadium was empty. That was the last gladiatorial contest in the Roman coliseum, never again did man kill each other for the crowd's entertainment in the Roman arena, all because of one man. There may be a Telemachus today, one person who will overcome the odds allied against him or her and make a difference. Or maybe there are more Tom Sullivans, someone who is not about to let the injustices of life, the disadvantaged situation that they're going through, keep them down. There are certainly many Solomons, people who have allowed unfair treatment, injustice, or maybe even some disadvantage to keep them down. We all face injustices and disadvantaged situations in life. Let us not complain and murmur about them or feel sorry for ourselves. Rather, let's have the courage to use the divine solutions to life as they are found in God's Word.

CHAPTER 9

Success and Wealth

(Ecclesiastes 4:1-8)

What Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:1-8 should be required reading at the finest business schools in the country. His statements ought to be printed in every professional journal received by the most successful individuals of our day. All college graduates should have these verses inscribed on their diplomas. This first section of Ecclesiastes chapter 4 is dedicated to those who believe they can find happiness in their obsession with acquiring wealth and success.

Today we have been flooded with books, seminars, courses, and speeches on the subject of top-level management and success-oriented leadership. The hype has never been greater nor the trap more effective. We have been convinced as a nation that gaining an impressive position brings lasting satisfaction and a liberating sense of pleasure. But for the successful executive, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is not what it appears to be. More often than not, successful executives have head-on collisions with intense pressure, political rivalry, economic anxiety, and inescapable loneliness. Centuries ago, King Solomon addressed the emptiness of those who make it to the top of their profession, and his words are remarkably relevant today. They can make a difference in our lives if we will listen and believe what he said.

Remember that Solomon is a king. He's not looking from the ground up; rather, his vantage point is that of looking down at those trying to climb up the ladder of success, and of looking around at those who have already reached the top. He is speaking to physicians, attorneys, top salesmen, entrepreneurs, presidents of corporations, and all those who have success and wealth. Solomon's view is realistic and empirical; there's nothing mysterious about it. **Ecclesiastes 4:1a**

says, “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun.”

Once again, Solomon is witnessing the effects of oppression. His is not the academic theory of a professor, or so-called expert, who has never experienced great wealth and success. Solomon observes three categories of life (in verses 1, 4, and 8 of chapter 4 respectively) from his vantage point on top of the ladder of success and finds that none of these categories are satisfying.

Solomon’s viewpoint is earthly; he is once again viewing life as it is under the sun. Ecclesiastes 4:1 says, “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression, which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.”

Both the oppressed and the oppressor had no one to comfort them. Solomon observed tears, oppression, and heartache, and there was no comforter. Heartbroken, Solomon was caught up in despair, and this reaction leads to the next two startling verses.

Ecclesiastes 4:2. “So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.”

In essence he said, I looked at those who have passed on and thought how fortunate they are to be six feet under rather than still be living under this oppression! There is also a message here for those who oppress others. If you have money, influence, control over other’s lives, what do you do with it? Are you fair or do you oppress? Do you take advantage? Do you rob others of their freedom, or do you release them to enjoy it? Are you a giver or a taker? Do you use your power to enslave or to liberate? Solomon witnessed those who oppressed, took advantage, stole freedom, and used their power to enslave others, and he says there’s no one to dry the tears of the oppressed. Solomon, with all of his wealth and power, was saying, the dead are sure lucky! Sadder still, he calls the one who never existed at all better off than both the living and the dead.

Ecclesiastes 4:3. “But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.”

Job said the same thing at one point in his life in Job 3:16, “I wish I was like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be.” Suicide probably never came to either Job’s or Solomon’s mind. In Solomon’s

day it was considered a heinous a sin, foreign to the Jewish people. Unfortunately, in our day, there is no such conviction against suicide. Today, suicide is seriously considered as a way out of tragedy, when in reality it's never a way out of anything.

In verse 4, Solomon turns from oppressive conditions to inordinate competition. He tells us what he saw as he watched other members of the human race who were climbing the ladder of success. **Ecclesiastes 4:4** says, "And I have seen [he was still looking] that every labor and every skill which is done is [the result of] rivalry [or we would say competition] between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind."

King Solomon was not referring to healthy competition between corporations, which is necessary for the function of the free enterprise system that helps make and keeps a nation great. He was talking about a one-on-one rivalry, referring to two people who are fighting, devouring, scraping, clawing, and pushing one another. This is a sort of maddening craze to outdo and outsell and outshine another person. Some of you may be caught up in that. You may be able to see yourself in verse 4 very plainly written there, even though your name is not. Maybe you are not the type that can easily take the second seat, or be second in command. No, you've got to have it all, and in so doing as so many do, you may even cheat, lie, steal, and betray people and friends who have been faithful to you for years.

On the other hand, there are those who react to oppression and rivalry by dropping out of society, and thus, avoiding the system altogether. They just give up and become hermits, locking out the world, or become drifters, like gypsies who are indifferent and complacent and who move on when faced with any pressure from the world. These dropouts live off others and refuse to work. Solomon in verse 5 has a name for such a person; in fact, he calls that person a fool.

Ecclesiastes 4:5. "The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh [or ruins himself]."

The Living Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:5, "The fool won't work and almost starves but feels that it is better to be lazy and barely get by, than to work hard, when in the long run it is all so futile."

Solomon balances this with advice for the competitive workaholic in verse 6. **Ecclesiastes 4:6** says, "One hand full of rest [or quietness] is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind."

One hand full is compared to two fists which are clawing, fighting, punching, striving, pushing, and pounding their way to the top. The book of Proverbs will help us to understand what Solomon is getting at.

Proverbs 15:16. "Better is a little with the fear [or respect toward] of the Lord, than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Proverbs 15:16 is an example of a comparative proverb, which often use the phrase *better than*. Here, Solomon says, you're better off with a little time for the Lord than with great treasure and turmoil.

Proverbs 15:17. "Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it." Better is a little bowl of vegetable soup, served at a table where there's a lot of love, than a big thick prime rib, or filet mignon, or chateaubriand, thrown at you by someone who can't stand you.

Proverbs 16:8. "Better is a little with righteousness than great income with injustice."

Competition begins to burn in us until we are ultimately burnt out. The world begins to drive us deeper and faster and farther, until finally, we begin to wonder where we are going. What is life all about? Many arrive at the midlife crisis. One author describes the midlife crisis as a time of intense personal evaluation when frightening and disturbing thoughts surge through the mind; that's a good description. Questions occur in the mind about who we are and why we're here and what it's all about. For many, it is a period of self-doubt and disenchantment with everything that at one time was familiar and stable. It is a time of terrifying thoughts that can't be admitted or revealed, even to those closest to us.

Enemies fight us during a midlife crisis. First is the body, physical aging accompanies the midlife crisis. The guy who was once a hunk now has all his hair falling out despite desperate attempts to coddle and protect every remaining strand. Then he notices he doesn't have the stamina he once had, he gets winded on escalators . . . going down.

Secondly, there's the man's work, it's no longer satisfying; now it's demanding, enslaving, and disillusioning. He begins to hate his job, but he can't get out of it. He's got to keep paying his large bills and maintain all his possessions. Solomon says, "better is a little . . ."

- Proverbs 17:1. “Better is a dry morsel [a piece of dry crust] and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife.”
- Proverbs 19:22. “What is desirable in a man is his kindness, and it is better to be a poor man than a liar.”
- Proverbs 28:6. “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich.”

Solomon is saying in Ecclesiastes 4:6 that it is better to have a handful of love and rest than two fists that keep fighting. This principle applies especially to marriage. Proverbs 21:9 says, “It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” Proverbs 21:19, “It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman.”

These first eight verses of chapter 4 are directed to the CEO, the senior executive, the top-ranking military officer—the top dog. Solomon was the king, and was looking down and around from his vantage point as the ultimate top dog. He had observed three categories of life, and none of them were satisfying. First, in verse 1, he saw in the masses of people those who were being oppressed and those oppressing them. Second, in verse 4, he saw the rivalry between two people. Now we have arrived at the third and final scene which consists of a solitary man. However, before we even get to that in verse 8, Solomon preempts things by telling us it will once again be a scene of vanity. **Ecclesiastes 4:7** says, “Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.” Solomon saw vanity in the three-piece suits, and he saw brokenness across the face of the career woman. **Ecclesiastes 4:8a** says, “There was a certain man.”

Did you notice something? In the first view that Solomon had of this old earth from the top in verse 1, there are many people, many oppressed and there are many who do the oppressing. In the next scene, there are two people, one against another and there’s a rivalry. In this third scene, there’s one: a certain man!

You see, as you climb higher and higher on this ladder of so-called success you get increasingly lonelier, fewer friends, less personal contact. You become a loner, and eventually a lonely man, a lonely executive. Ecclesiastes 4:8 continues, “There was a certain man without a dependent [this is a man who was all alone], having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, ‘And for

whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.”

In verse 7, we are introduced to a man who, although he was alone, continues to labor. This guy is such a workaholic; so entrenched in his work, that he doesn’t stop to ask the obvious questions, why isn’t my work satisfying and what is its outcome? Who am I working so hard for? Why am I knocking myself out and enjoying so few pleasures! Solomon’s message to such a man is, “this too is vanity and it is a grievous task.” However, the great myth is that if we labor, fight, sell, and claw our way to the top, that top will have all of those satisfying perks that we have been lusting for. We will be able to relax and rejoice when we have arrived, and people will look up to us and admire us. Solomon says that we will find no satisfaction or fulfillment there. So hang on to that step on that ladder for a moment and ask yourself, what do I gain by fighting up to the next step? Also ask yourself, if I’m not satisfied here, will I be satisfied there? Don’t climb until you can answer those questions. By the way, what about your responsibility to God? What about your responsibility to your family, your pastor-teacher, your local assembly, and the function of your spiritual gift? It is foolish to neglect your spiritual life as you labor and strive to reach the top. Remember the things of this world produce no benefit for the soul. The soul belongs to God who says in Ezekiel 18:4, “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine.”

God alone can satisfy your soul. The soul is shaped like God, and until He fills it, nothing will satisfy. If God fills your soul, mind, and spirit, then you will have the capacity to handle prosperity. This isn’t an argument against having prosperity or success, nor is it saying you should take a vow of poverty. Solomon is saying that if you think that climbing up the ladder of success in the business world without God is going to make you happy, you will be the most miserable person in the world, especially, if you make it to the top.

Verse 8 focuses not merely on how this certain man strives to attain riches, but also on the fact that he stands alone. Desiring only these riches for himself, he withdraws himself from others, so that he may not in any way be obliged to share what he acquires with anybody. He brings his loneliness on himself by his inordinate desire for wealth. Solomon is saying to us that wealth is a pretty sorry thing to acquire

if it isolates a man and robs him of good friends and relationships in life. Having isolated himself, this man gives himself unremittingly to that which has become the obsession of his life: the acquisition of wealth, but Ecclesiastes 4:8 says, “Yet there was no end to all his labor.”

CHAPTER 10

Friendship

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

We have seen, in verses 1-7 of chapter 4, Solomon talking about the oppressive, competitive, compulsive world of the person who tries to work his or her way to the top of the ladder. In verse 8, this entrepreneur has arrived and finds he is all alone. He is successful and alone, and he is faced with the fact that something is still lacking in his life. He has no one with whom to share his success, and most importantly, he has no relationship with God. The preceding prepares us for Solomon's wise counsel in verses 9-12. These next four verses cut to the heart of the modern, and particularly American, desire for isolation. Solomon probably drew from painful personal experience when he wrote these words, which address those who are lonely as well as those who are blessed with friendships. His message applies to those at the top, those in the middle, those at the bottom, those on the way up or down, and those who don't even know which way they're going. In other words, this applies to us all. Initially, we are given a simple statement of fact: **Ecclesiastes 4:9**, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor."

Let's stop here and address one idea that some may have. This verse is not referring to marriage, this is for the married and the unmarried. Marriage is never mentioned in this passage. This is for people wondering how to survive in our dog-eat-dog culture, driven to succeed. **Ecclesiastes 4:10-12** says, "For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."

Americans tend to be lonely people, perhaps more lonely than any other culture around the world even though we are the most advanced technologically. Perhaps it is our high tech mentality that creates such a low degree of involvement in one another's lives. But God did not make us that way. Remember what the Lord said when He first created Adam: Genesis 2:15-18, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.' Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'"

The doctrine of privacy, which tells us to mind our own business and not stick our nose in others' lives, is very necessary in the Christian way of life. But the notion of wanting to be alone is a relatively new concept. Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian, agrees that Western man was barely aware of himself before the Renaissance (fourteenth century). "He hardly viewed himself as an individual. Mostly he drew his identity from membership in groups, family, tribes, and guilds." Herbert Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian cultural critic and communications theorist, maintained that the method of communicating information has more influence on the public than the information itself. He states that "it took the invention of print to tear us from our tribes and to plant the dream of isolation in our brains." That's another way of saying that on a cold evening many would rather curl up with a book than be with a friend. There is a kind of love relationship with the inarticulate, those things that don't talk back. In fact, that's why a lot of people like pets. A news broadcast reported that the divorce rate was on the rise. This was hardly a surprise, but the real surprise was the reason given. The broadcast said that a surprisingly large number of married people stated that they are too busy with their computer to cultivate a relationship. Some even said that they were relieved to be divorced because they could now spend the time they had wanted to spend with their computer. It seems to be less important that we know and relate to each other and love each other, than that we master video games and computer programs. The irony is that there are so many people sitting in front of little boxes, which have been designed for only one. The box gives us all of the instructions, all of the answers,

and all of the challenges. It even rewards you with a new game once you learn how to respond to all those beeps and noises from the box. A teenager can sit still and concentrate on a little box for hours and hours, and yet can't sit still for ten minutes in Bible class. The same is true of Christian adults who can watch hours and hours of soap operas, but find it hard to make it to Bible class even once a week. Perhaps this is why the apostle John warned us in 1 John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." Psalm 101:1-3 (A Psalm of David), "I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, to Thee, O Lord, I will sing praises. I will give heed to the blameless way. When wilt Thou come to me? I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart. I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not fasten its grip on me."

I wonder if God is interested in the knowledge that many of His people possess concerning television shows. These Christians can't defend the deity of Christ, but they can tell you what's going on with their favorite soap opera. When they stand before God they'll be able to say, "You know I wanted to thank you for *All My Children* and for the *Days of Our Lives* because I've realized that *As the World Turns* there's *Another World* and really *Only One Life to Live*." One of the reasons that soap operas are so popular among the ladies is that women have a very difficult time loving the man with whom they have been familiar for so long a time. Women are good at fantasizing, thinking that the grass is always greener on the other side, they become disillusioned, finding that grass has worms and weeds wherever you go. Unfortunately, our dreams often end as nightmares because no one (other than Christ) can ever fulfill our dreams or our soap opera-like fantasies.

Psalm 101:4-7, "A perverted heart shall depart from me; I will know no evil. Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; no one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure [you want to see a haughty look and an arrogant heart, just watch those daytime talk shows]. My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land [those who have positive volition toward doctrine], that they may dwell with me; He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me. He who practices deceit shall not dwell within

my house [satanic viewpoint dwells in the house of born believers through much of technology?]; He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me.” First Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

How many people can you honestly say know what your deep needs are or what your pains are. Proverbs 14:10 says, “The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.”

We tend to keep our relationships with people at a distance, which is fine until things really start to go wrong. When something tragic occurs, or when a calamity strikes, when a loss drives us to our knees, we find that the computer, the soap operas and the video games won’t help us, none of them have the answer. Many individuals wonder when they are going through something, why people don’t help them out. We need to understand that true friendships must be cultivated; they don’t automatically appear when calamity strikes. Prosperity makes friends, but adversity tries them. Most of us have had certain friends who were there simply because we were signing their pay checks or because they could get things from us. When a little adversity strikes, these individuals go running to the next highest bidder. If there is anything that is priceless and rare to have in this life, it is a true friend, a companion (or companions) in whom you can trust. Proverbs 17:17, “A true friend loves at all times and as a brother is born for adversity.”

True friends are born for adversity; they are there to fight for you when someone is trying to take advantage of you. In fact, they will stick up for you and defend you even when you are absent. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** says, “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion.”

In many cases, people do not cultivate friendships and when they go through a difficult situation no one knows or understands what they are going through. This solitude and aloneness often causes people to pity themselves and to say to themselves, if only others realized how difficult things are. Self-pity is an attention getter that soon wears out the other person’s interest. “If you haven’t drawn me into your life, don’t blame me if I’m not there when calamity strikes!” If you haven’t drawn certain people into your life, don’t blame them if they’re not there when calamity strikes. Furthermore, feeling sorry for yourself won’t get you out of your predicament, a believer

must become spiritually self-sustained, and he must also cultivate friendships and companions. Friendship makes prosperity marvelous and lightens adversity by dividing and sharing it. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, "For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion."

We find out who our real friends are when we are faced with some difficult times. Job tells us that a true friend will be gracious and kind when we're going through a difficult time, Job 6:14, "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend."

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."

Many people have a tendency to feel like a martyr and think that nobody really cares, but anyone who doesn't know your in pain can't be criticized for not responding. There's an old Swedish motto that hangs in many Swedish kitchens which says, "Shared joy is a double joy, shared sorrow is half a sorrow." Marcus Cicero said, "A friend is, as it were, a second self." Aristotle asked a question, "What is a friend?" He answered by saying, "A single soul dwelling in two bodies." He also said, "Misfortune shows those who are not really your friends." Zeno, when asked, "What is a friend?" said, "Another I." A true friend is not revealed until a man is in need. This principle holds true even when we're rejoicing or enjoying ourselves. The enjoyment of great beauty and wonder is enhanced when we have someone to share it with. We don't like to see a great athletic event alone; we like to have a friend with us to share in the excitement. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one [why?] because they have a good return for their labor."

We gain perspective and objectivity by having somebody by our side. We gain courage in threatening situations. We receive better information to make better decisions when we have someone who says, now wait a minute; there's another way to look at that. We gain what is known today, in our technical world, as input. In other words, Solomon was telling us that it's better not to work alone. It's better not to minister alone. It's better to hurt with someone else. It's better not to face a crisis alone. This is a doctrinal principle not only for the Old Testament but also for the church age.

First Corinthians 12:13-26. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should

say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

This passage doesn't say that when a fellow believer is suffering that all the other members attack and kick him while he's down. The body of Christ was designed by God to exist in unity, not isolation. Some have a hard time accepting that, we are tough-minded individuals. As the song goes, "We are a rock; / We are an island," but that's not the life that God designed us for. The greatest man who ever lived sympathizes with us in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

No matter who we are, when the rug gets pulled up from under our lives, not one of us can go it fully alone and stay balanced. Two are better than one. "It is not good for the man to be alone," says the Lord. One writer states, "To man, friendship is indispensable and to that one who has no need and feels no need for it, he must be either much above the human nature or much below it." This

principle also rebukes the religious isolationist, that solitary being who doesn't belong to any church because there is no church that is perfect enough for him or her. "Take a ladder," was Constantine's advice to such a one, "and climb up to heaven by thyself." This is the crowd Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians 1:12, "Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'"

Surely it is better to belong to an imperfect church than to none at all. I'm not referring to a heretical church, but rather a church that is making mistakes along the way but that is still doing all that it can to glorify God. In fact, when our Lord was sending out the twelve disciples, we are told that He sent them out in pairs: Mark 6:7, "And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits."

This is why Moses was sent with Aaron, and why many others in the Bible worked in pairs. Acts 13:2, "And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

Revelation 11:3 [the Lord will send the two witnesses during the tribulation period]. "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

Solomon gave us some reasons for working in pairs that are very simple to grasp. We have been given three great reasons why two are better than one in verses 10-12, which we will study more closely. Reason number one is found in Ecclesiastes 4:10, "For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion."

In times of personal failure, in times when we would be easily ensnared, when we stumble or become entrapped, and when we fall flat on our faces, it's good to have a companion there to keep us from getting too wounded and bloody. True companionship is very profitable for one another and is rewarded by the grace of God as we read in 2 Timothy 1:16, "The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains." True friends do not forsake you in times of disaster, humiliation or defeat. Solomon says that a true companion will not leave you when you fall.

Now, I would like to talk to the men for a moment. You and I, men, were raised by well-meaning parents and teachers and a culture that thought it was doing us a favor and a service by telling us that

we were tough, rugged; that we can make it. We were given counsel like, “Tough it out, take it like a man, or be a man.” But the truth is that although we may sound strong, we’re really not. We may sound independent and seem as though we really don’t need anyone, but in truth we actually do need others. We need friends and companions. We are all weak, we all fall and it’s far better to have a companion by our side that can lift us up than to be alone when we make wrong decisions and fall on our face. Verse 10 concludes, “But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”

The phrase “woe to the one” in the Hebrew is *wa’yilow* which means God help, peril, danger, and horrors to the one who falls when there isn’t someone there to catch him. Who catches us when we fall? (Oh, I know what you’re thinking; you’re thinking what I would think.) Psalm 37:24, “When he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down because the Lord is the One who holds his hand.”

How does the Lord hold your hand or cause you to stand? Does He come down from heaven and do it personally? No, He does not, God uses people, and if you say, He uses doctrine, then where did you get that doctrine from? People. Who supported that doctrine and provided the finances for a local assembly, so that you could come and learn that doctrine? People. Who made the tapes that you listen to? People. There’s no way around it—God uses people to minister to our needs. Remember, we’re not referring to marriage, which can be a wonderful thing, especially, if the two people are best friends. However, the strange part of it all is that in many marriages the spouses are still lonely. Perhaps one of the greatest of all disappointments in life is to marry thinking that one is getting a companion, and instead one gains an adversary. **Ecclesiastes 4:11** says, “Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?”

There is a tendency to miss the meaning behind this passage. We sometimes make Bible verses read the way we want them to or think they should. What we have here is an element that we can’t change. We can’t get warm if everything around us is cold, and that is the point. We are exposed, unguarded, and vulnerable, and in that state we need somebody to warm us up. To put it another way this is saying, “It’s better to have two than one because mutual support helps us when we’re vulnerable.” In verse 10, we have mutual encouragement. In verse 11, we have mutual support. In verse 12, we have mutual

protection. As **Ecclesiastes 4:12** says, “And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him” [This is mutual protection when we’re attacked].

Remember that there is an adversary with whom we have to deal, one that is invisible, called the devil. He is a real being, he has a demonic force that, if it were visible, would be even be more intimidating. But we cannot see him, nor his demonic army. We feel their presence and at times we are under onslaught if they attack, and there are times a companion will be there to warn us, and the companion helps us through those times. Perhaps the adversary is some other person, some vicious person who spreads vicious rumors against you, and you have a companion by your side to help you endure it That’s when Ecclesiastes 4:12 becomes a comfort, “And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him.” Verse 12 concludes with the phrase “A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.”

This speaks of having more than one friend or companion. David had what the Bible calls three mighty men who were willing to put their life on the line for him. Second Samuel 23:16 says, “So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David. Nevertheless, he would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord.”

These were mighty men who made a pact with each other and they were not easily torn apart. In the book of Daniel, we have a cord of three strands that could not be broken, Daniel 3:16-17, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.’”

The three strands spoken of in Ecclesiastes 4:12 may also be referring to two believers who are friends with one another and who both have a relationship with the Lord. The Lord was the third person in David and Jonathan’s relationship, as brought out in 1 Samuel 20:23, “As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the Lord is between you and me forever.”

The Bible makes it clear that the Christian way of life is not to be lived alone. There will certainly be times when a believer is alone.

God may give us periods of isolation, times in which we are to search out His will. There are extraordinary situations, as when a believer is in solitary confinement in a hospital or a prison, or as Paul was when he was left alone, stranded at sea. Thankfully, most of us have a body of believers, in which we find a few dear friends and loved ones. The American drive for isolation is not what God intended for us. We are social creatures, and the Lord Jesus Christ has given us a body of believers to maintain fellowship with. We lift each other up when we fall, we help one another when we're cold and vulnerable, and we protect each other when we come under attack. This is God's design.

CHAPTER 11

Fate of the King and the Instability of People

(Ecclesiastes 4:13-16)

In Ecclesiastes chapter 4, Solomon has been evaluating relationships between people who are living under the sun. He turned his powers of observation onto human interactions. He saw the oppression of the many by the many, the rivalry between two, and the loneliness of the one. Solomon had been seated at his throne observing his subjects throughout most of the chapter. He observed the widespread oppression in verses 1-3, the head-to-head rivalries in verses 4-6, and the solitary workaholic in verses 7-8. In verses 9-12, he identified a solution to the vanity of oppression, rivalry, and isolation. That solution is friendship, fellowship, and companionship. However, Solomon's eyes are on people, and his perspective is that of living life under the sun. Whenever your eyes are on people, any solution you find there, even something as grand as friendship, will ultimately fall apart. In verses 13-16, Solomon turned his gaze inward to his own life and his own family, this family of kings. He became distraught at what he saw there. People that seemed like friends will one day turn on you. He discovered that you couldn't rely on people. Solomon also saw how a man could become his own worst enemy. There are few things sadder than an old and foolish king who once was wise, but who has turned away from the source of wisdom. In Ecclesiastes 4:13, Solomon is showing us what usually happens to a king when he becomes old. He grows self-sufficient and refuses counsel, and becomes a casualty of a life and reign lived under the sun. **Ecclesiastes 4:13** says, "A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction."

The old king referred to here no longer knows enough to accept advice. He's reached the top of the ladder—the kingdom is his—and he thinks he doesn't need anyone's advice or opinion. He is therefore a "foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction." At one time, when he was young and climbing the ladder of success, he was ready to accept counsel. That humility was an asset that helped him succeed. Having been promoted to kingship he is insulated, thinking that he needs no one. While not many of us will become kings, the warning in this passage is about self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency is a tragic fault that will most likely be found in those who are growing old, and in those who have tasted success. Solomon's words warn us that the person who cannot accept correction is one who has outlived his usefulness. The king is contrasted with a wise youth, who though he may be poor and lowly is certainly of more use to himself and to his subjects.

Ecclesiastes 4:14. "For he [the poor yet wise lad] has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom." In this illustration we are carried back to ancient times. The slightest acquaintance with biblical history teaches us how often it has happened that a prisoner has been led from the dungeon to the throne. For example, Joseph came out of prison in Egypt to be the prime minister of Egypt. Also, David came out of the shepherd herds to be the king of Israel. God promotes all of us when we learn to be humble and develop the capacity to handle privileges by learning His word. **Ecclesiastes 4:15** says, "I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him [the king]."

It's interesting to notice that Solomon was the second child of David and Bathsheba. He was not the child whom David would have chosen to be the next king. Verse 15 is a picture of the youthful king in the heyday of his glory. He writes in verse 15 that the people throng or flock to the side of the new ruler. For a time the new young king enjoys all the glory that he desires because of this following he has. Everyone honors him as the man of the hour and they support him. The adoration of the multitude for this new king is typical, but there is a hidden problem: This world's glory is fleeting. The common people are not necessarily interested in the new king. They just like to see the rich demoted and the poor promoted. The masses usually root for the underdog, and that is not a good thing, for them or for the king. **Ecclesiastes 4:16** says, "There is no end to all the

people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.”

Even this wise young man who wins the people’s hearts for a time, will soon be forgotten and even hated, so “this too is vanity and striving after wind.” In other words, the young man is first welcomed with enthusiasm, but then afterward he is disregarded. In the first part of verse 16, the new king is enjoying a period of success. In fact he is portrayed as one standing up before those who are giving him reverence. They are so numerous that they cannot be counted. The hope that his contemporaries placed in the young king, the one who had seized the throne and conquered their hearts, afterward turned into bitter disappointment. The second part of the verse pictures the king as facing the common fate of rulers: a new generation arises and mistreats him. The poor young man takes over the kingdom of an old king, who once ruled well but has now grown too old; but even this poor young man whose great success inspired adoration will see the day come when his own popularity wanes. It appears that Solomon is talking about King Saul, who is to him the old and foolish king, and his own father David, the poor wise youth who rose to the throne and took possession of the whole kingdom. This seems the case because in David’s latter days, he experienced desertion and adversaries, for those who came after rebelled against him as well. Today, it’s “Hosanna!” tomorrow, it’s “crucify Him!” A truth sadly demonstrated during our Lord’s incarnation. Hence, Solomon concluded that climbing up the ladder of success “is vanity and chasing after wind.” Mankind is unstable. One day you’re a king, the next day you are a peasant. One day people love you, the next day they hate you. One day your friend stands fast by you, the next day he’s your archenemy. Paul experienced this on the island of Malta in Acts 28:1-6, “And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, ‘Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not

allowed him to live.’ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.”

If it happened to Paul, and to David, and to Solomon, and even to Jesus Christ, it will happen to you. If you place your highest trust in the power you exert over others, the honor you receive from others, the approbation you get from others, this trust will have been a house built on sand. People are petty, fickle, and ungrateful. You may be smart and think you have all the answers. Solomon was the wisest, smartest man of his day, but he became arrogant and rejected instruction from the Lord. He learned that the answers to life’s problems are quickly misplaced when one no longer receives instruction from the Word of God. The only person who is completely faithful to you is God. Doesn’t it make sense to be building your relationship with Him, rather than the fleeting circumstances, approvals, acquaintances and rewards of this cosmic system, this life lived under the sun?

CHAPTER 12

Proper Worship

(Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)

In a recent survey it was reported that the American people continue to be hungry for basic answers and simple solutions to the problems of life. This is especially needed in a world that seems to steal our attention and waste our time on the complex, the fuzzy, and the confusing. While this is true in our society as a whole, the fact is that it is even truer in our private world of worship. For too long, worship has been curtained with the veneer of ritual, tradition, and complicated ways of reaching God. This is one of the main reasons why people do not like church today. People are looking for answers. Most people have a copy of the best-selling book of all time, the Bible. The Word of God is the best seller because it is brilliant on the basics, and it contains the simple solutions needed in a complicated world. Hebrews' chapter 4 tells us how this can be. The Bible is not a book that is filled with dull thoughts or dead sayings, it is a book that is alive and active; and not only that, it is also said to be sharp; it is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword."

Our Lord said this another way in John 6:63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

Because the Word of God is living and active, it does two things, and it works for two reasons. Looking closely in verse 12, we see the things that it does, and, in verse 13, we see why it works. First, what does the Word of God do? Hebrews 4:12, "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing."

First, it pierces. The Greek word means to cut through, God's Word cuts through the garbage, the fog, and the excuses. It cuts through the rationalizations and the traditions.

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing [notice how far it pierces] as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow."

This means that God's Word pierces to the innermost intimacies of man's being.

God's Word does a second thing as well; God's Word judges. Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge."

We get the English word *critic* from the Greek word *kritikos*, here translated judge. The word means to critique, to judge, to discern, or to evaluate. Therefore, it is said to be "able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart."

Now, why does it work so well? Why is it that God's Word, regardless of culture, age, sex, or circumstance, works when it is learned and believed? Hebrews 4:13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight,"

It works, first of all, because it is universal in scope. No one is hidden from God's sight. He knows everything about us, including our innermost secrets and all the skeletons we have in our closet. In fact,

Hebrews 4:13 continues, "All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

When God deals with a subject, all things are exposed. The Word of God works, first of all, because it is universal in scope; and, secondly, because it is limitless in exposure, all things are open and uncovered. The phrase "laid bare" means to be totally and completely exposed. God's two-edged sword reveals the thoughts of your heart and the intentions of your actions. It is able to go beyond our overt action to the motive within our thought life, so that He is able to expose and reveal to us the true motive behind our thoughts, our words, and our actions. The question is, will we simply listen to His truths?

In chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes, after having tried a lot of different experiments, Solomon decided it was time to go to church.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God, and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or

impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.”

In **Ecclesiastes 5:1** Solomon writes, “Guard your steps as you go to the house of God.” There will be difficulties when you go to the house of God; everything is not going to be perfect. You can very easily get your eyes on people. In fact, many people withdraw from a local assembly because of personality conflicts with others. While you should also guard your steps while in the house of God, the focus is on the phrase “as you go.” Solomon is writing to people who are on their way to the place of worship, and he admonishes them to guard their steps. The local assembly is not to be just another place to go. You should begin to prepare yourselves to receive the Word of God when you leave your homes.

The Hebrew word for *guard* is the qal imperative of *shamar* meaning to guard, take heed, pay attention, be aware, or to be careful. In the imperative mood it is a commandment. If you are on the way to the house of God, the place where doctrine is being taught, and since the Word of God is able to perform all those things mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, then you can bet that the kingdom of darkness has designed a plan to try to distract you from hearing the Word of God. If the kingdom of darkness cannot hinder you from coming to Bible class, it can try to hinder you from receiving the Word of God once you are there. This is accomplished through distractions that are introduced on the way to the house of God.

The kingdom of darkness can hinder you from being at the place you ought to be, as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, “For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.”

Not only can you be hindered from coming to the house of God, the seeds of distraction can be planted while you are on your way. It may be the children acting up and fighting in the backseat

and making you miserable. It may be an argument between the passengers, or a disagreement between husband and wife. It may be a misunderstanding amongst friends. It may even be that very difficult test to pass, or the Sunday-morning drivers on the road. It may be anything that can distract you and get you involved with mental attitude sins, which will disrupt your concentration on the Word of God. If you conclude that it's better to travel alone, don't think you are immune, since Ephesians 6:16 tells us about the flaming missiles of the evil one. You may be all alone, and suddenly, terrible thoughts begin to assault your mind, and you don't even know where they're coming from. These thoughts are designed to take your mind off of the real purpose of coming to the local assembly, namely, to concentrate on the Word of God, which is alive and powerful. **Ecclesiastes 5:1b** says, "And draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil."

When people go to the house of God, true worship is listening to the communication of the Word of God, and thereby hearing what God's Word has to say. Worship is a very interesting word, and people do not generally know what it means. The ultimate form of worship occurs during the communication of Bible doctrine. That's why our Lord equated teaching with worship in Matthew 15:9, "But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." John 4:23-24, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Truth is needed in true worship and truth must be taught in the local assembly. In Acts 18:13 Paul was accused of "persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." This reveals that worship in the Old Testament was also the communication of doctrine; however, it was the doctrine found in the law. Now the New Testament form of worship is found in the mystery doctrine of the church age; this is the worship of the church-age believer. The highest form of worship is either teaching doctrine or receiving doctrine. All of the nonsense that happens in churches today, the singing and raising of hands, clapping, and yelling out pious amen's and epigrams, is not basic to worship at all. We worship more by sitting and listening and concentrating on God's Word under the filling of the Holy Spirit than by anything else that we do, including our Christian service.

- Psalm 138:2. “I will bow down toward Your holy temple and will praise Your name for Your love and Your faithfulness, for You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word.” (NIV)
- Psalm 138:2. “I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name.” (NKJ)

Notice it is not “You have magnified singing and raising our hands to You,” but “You have magnified Your Word above all else.”

- Psalm 138:2. “I bow down toward Thy holy temple and give thanks to Thy name for Thy steadfast love and Thy faithfulness; for Thou hast exalted above everything Thy name and Thy word.” (RSV)

Notice that the word is *magnified* or *exalted* in all of these translations. In fact, we should never forget that all of us will be judged and evaluated based upon our love and desire for God’s Word.

- John 12:48. “He who rejects Me and does not receive My doctrines, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”
- Ecclesiastes 5:1b. “Guard your steps as you go to the house of God, and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.”

The sacrifice of fools is ritual and religion, and God is not interested in either of these things! He is interested in His word, which is active and living, and able to change your life for the better. Unfortunately, worldly thoughts, pleasures, and plans are not only brought to the very door, but they are also brought into the house of God itself. Nothing should ever be sold in a local assembly. Nothing should be sold in God’s house, as our Lord revealed in John 2:16, “And to those who were selling the doves [for the Lord] He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a house of merchandise.’”

Just think of all the people going through various types of ritual and tradition on a Sunday morning; the Bible says they are doing evil. How great this evil or darkness is, because these people think it

is light. A façade of light that covers an evil soul may impress people, but it does not make points with God.

- Matthew 6:23. “But if your eye is evil [soul perception deceived by evil], your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, “Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God.”

Be very careful with what you say and what you think in the presence of God. Do not malign others or gossip in the house of God, and even be careful what you think, because God can see your thoughts.

- Hebrews 4:13. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”
- Ecclesiastes 5:2. “Do not be hasty in word [the mouth] or impulsive in thought [the mind] to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.”

Let God handle any situation, as well as any other believers involved in a situation, rather than being hasty with your words. The fact that God is in heaven and you are on the earth is not a statement of distance, but a statement of perspective. Don't think about the fact that God is in heaven, billions and billions of miles away; rather, remember that He is within you. The proper perspective is that God is in the realm of the invisible, and He hears the inaudible and sees the invisible. That is the reason we are to be calm and quiet; God desires to establish communication with us. In fact, He is more eager to speak to us than we are to hear Him. Fortunately, He is incredibly persistent in trying to get through to us. Our real problem is that we tend to avoid hearing Him! But if we do hear Him, His truth liberates us. Truth not only reveals a Divine Standard, but it will set you free and empower you to live in that standard. This is what makes scripture so different from other ethical systems, which are powerless to help the struggler. However, you're not to be so quiet that you end up daydreaming, and that's what Solomon addresses in verse 3. **Ecclesiastes 5:3** says, “For the dream comes through much effort, and the voice of a fool through many words.”

When you're in the house of God, don't daydream. Often there is attendance without attention. The dreams in this passage appear to be daydreams reducing worship to a mere mental doodling. It's easy to sort of doodle your way through a worship service as you let your dreamworld take you to one place after another. While some are sitting in Bible class, their dreamworld is taking them to yesterday's experience of pleasure, or tomorrow's experience on the job, or the needs of the kids, or that decision you have to make, or did you or did you not shut off the oven, etc. Solomon is saying that now's not the time. When you're daydreaming, God's Word cannot penetrate your mind and heart; God's Word demands your utmost attention.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5. "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

These verses are best illustrated by biblical history: There once lived a rebel who was a prophet, and this rebel prophet had taken a vow before God that as God's spokesman, he would say what God told him to say and go where God told him to go. One might say that this is the basic job description of a prophet. God said to this rebel prophet, "Go to Nineveh." However, Jonah's political zeal outstripped his religious fervor, and he took a ship to a place called Tarshish (which is sort of like going to Canada by way of Mexico). This rebel decided that he would run from God, which was not a very good decision. Even as children we are taught the story of the huge fish swallowing Jonah and then spitting him out on the shores of Nineveh. It was no coincidence that the Ninevites worshipped an idol represented by a fish. We can just imagine what was going through their minds when a huge fish spit out a prophet on their shores! After Jonah's unusual arrival, he announced to the people of Nineveh what God had told him to say, and the result was the greatest revival in the history of mankind. What changed Jonah's mind to preach the Gospel to the Ninevites? Well, we usually think about this rebel prophet being thrown overboard on a ship and then swallowed by a fish and then spit out on the shores of Nineveh, but we missed the secret of the story.

Jonah 1:1-17. "The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of

the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. And the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. Then they called on the Lord and said, "We earnestly pray, O Lord, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased." So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. Then the men feared the Lord greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made

vows. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

We can entitle chapter 2 a beautiful expression of keeping a vow.

Jonah 2:1-9. “Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, “I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice. For Thou [Jehovah] hadst cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again [that means that he had looked before] toward Thy holy temple. Water encompassed me to the point of death The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars [was] around me forever, But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer came to Thee, Into Thy holy temple. Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, [Don’t miss that verse, he’s tired of doing that] But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation [or deliverance] is from the Lord.”

That’s the secret of the book of Jonah, the whole story took place because he made a vow, broke it, and then vowed to pay it. Jonah 2:10 says, “Then [when he said that he would pay his vow] the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.”

That’s what Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 is teaching. When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

Sometimes it takes a deep, difficult, painful experience. It takes a wake-up call (like being tossed overboard and eaten by a fish) to wake us up, and to remind us of our vow to God. Maybe it takes being

cast aside in a particular occupation, or maybe it's the consequence of sin that finally make us come to our senses. God has a way of teaching us to keep our vows. Jonah was very committed after God got his attention.

- Jonah 3:1-5. "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So Jonah arose [this time Jonah's attitude is "no problem Lord, just you and me, whatever you say"]. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day walk. Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them."
- Jonah 3:10. "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do [it]."

Keeping one's vows is analogous to making a commitment. The virtue of commitment is addressed to the believer. Some do not believe in making a commitment to something, but the Word of God calls upon us to do so. Psalm 22:8 says, "Commit yourself to the Lord"; Psalm 37:5 says, "Commit your ways to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it." Proverbs 16:3 adds, "Commit your works to the Lord, And your plans will be established."

Notice in these three verses we have: commit yourself, commit your ways, and commit your works. The Word of God teaches that God believes in vows and commitments. The following passages reveal this principle: Numbers 30:2, "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

God does not demand that you make a vow; however, if you have, or if you do, it begins with you making the vow or commitment privately to God, and then, if so required, to God's people. This

commitment is exemplified in the following passages from the book of Psalms:

- Psalm 16:2-3. “O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.” (KJV)
- Psalm 22:25. “From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear [or respect] Him.”
- Psalm 50:14. “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High.”
- Psalm 76:11. “Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; Let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared.”
- Psalm 116:14. “I shall pay my vows to the Lord, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people.”

The Lord said that you don’t have to make vows; however, if you do, you should keep them. In Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, this is a command. The questions that we all have to answer are (1) Do we keep our vows? and (2) Have we been faithful in the past to do so?

One of the things about God’s book, the Bible, is that you cannot perceive, metabolize, and apply Bible doctrine and remain unchanged. First Thessalonians 2:13 says, “And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

One of the reasons for the Bible’s popularity throughout human history is that it has a way of driving people to the point of spurring action. The Word of God circulating in our souls will cause us to change our thinking and make good decisions. One of the greatest decisions we could ever make as believers is to commit ourselves to the Lord and to the Lord’s people, as was shown in the churches of Macedonia (the Philippians).

Second Corinthians 8:1-5 states, “Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

Any vows or commitments that you make should be made first of all to God, and then to the people with whom you have made the vow. For example, if you vow to take care of some aspect of the local assembly, you first make that vow to God, and then that commitment to your local assembly. But remember, you don't have to vow. However, if you do, God expects that you carry out your vow.

In Deuteronomy 23:21-23, it is written, “When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.”

Charles Bridges, in his exposition of Ecclesiastes, writes: “Indeed this subject of vows requires a very careful and delicate treatment. A solemn engagement advisedly made with God is a transaction needing much prayer and consideration. It should rest upon the clear warrant of God's Word. It should concern a matter really important, suitable, and attainable. It should be so limited, as to open a way for disentanglement under unforeseen contingencies or altered circumstances.”

In light of the subject of vows, we should all be very careful to discern the difference between false and true guilt. We are living in a very troublesome time in which there are alleged authorities who feel that it is their calling to relieve us from any guilt whatsoever. False guilt should be relieved; it has no place in our lives. False guilt is destructive and is a killer; it leads us to poor mental health and certainly gives us emotional turmoil. But there is a place for true guilt, it is the work of the Spirit of God. True guilt has another name in the Word of God; it is called conviction. There are many who would take away even our convictions, and teach that we don't have to live under that load of guilt. It is here that we have to be very careful. Conviction is something for our own benefit that may feel like guilt at times. Conviction is the process of being rebuked by one's own conscience because of God's demands.

Psalm 32:1-5 says, “How happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How happy is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent [about my sin], my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to Thee, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Selah.”

The idea of conviction is a major theme of scripture, as in the following passages:

- John 16:8. “And He [Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.”
- First Thessalonians 1:5a. “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction”

What would a vow be if it weren't a commitment to accountability? What in the world is a commitment if it isn't saying to our heavenly Father and maybe to other people on occasion, “I will carry this out, you can count on me!” Be careful about relieving all commitments, so that you can be free. It's dangerous, and furthermore, it's not biblical. Those who avoid all such commitments and responsibilities are usually the types who are in bondage to their liberty. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

How many members of congregations all over the country can say that their doing their part to serve God's people, doing their part to be a bondsman of God? Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 2:16, “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondsmen of God.”

In Romans 3:19, there is a legitimate guilt that all members of the human race face as a result of the divine judgment of God, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

God desires the human race to experience this guilt so that they will recognize their need for a Savior. In Romans 3:19, true guilt is used to condemn the unbeliever. This particular guilt is not for the believer; it is only for the unbeliever. Once an individual believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, guilt under condemnation is no longer an issue, and has no place in the Christian way of life (Joh 3:18). Unfortunately, many believers have a difficult time learning the difference between condemnation and conviction. We need to learn to identify the difference between true guilt (conviction by Holy Spirit), and false guilt (condemnation by satanic accusation). True guilt or conviction will always free us and produce rest, whereas false guilt will separate us from the Lord and make us feel condemned and without hope. If we do not learn to distinguish the difference between the two, or if we confuse the two, we will end up being condemned even when under Holy Spirit conviction. We may end up saying that we are not going to keep our vows or commitments and if anyone reminds us that we should, then we will accuse them of trying to guilt us into action and we will refuse to accept the responsibility for our decisions.

Conviction is simply the act of convincing a person of his error and preparing him to admit the truth about his condition. Once the believer receives this conviction from God the Holy Spirit, and he names and cites his sins (1 Jn 1:9) to God the Father, then he is free from any condemnation that would follow. However, this does not mean that we should not keep the vows or commitments that we have made to the Lord or to His people.

True guilt from above is always conviction, and will always produce freedom, and never condemnation, as in John 8:32, “and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

It wasn't until Jonah accepted the conviction of breaking his vows to God that he was set free from the bondage and discipline that he had been under. Satan's policy is to place us on a guilt trip, so that when godly conviction comes into play, we will become confused as to which is conviction (legitimate guilt) and which is condemnation (illegitimate guilt).

Bible doctrine in a believer's soul will give the believer the ability to spiritually discern when God is correcting, and when Satan is accusing. So the believer must identify the difference between true guilt, which is conviction, and false guilt, which is condemnation. True guilt or Holy Spirit conviction will always produce freedom and liberty.

False guilt will produce legalism, religion, and manipulation, and condemnation. The only guilt the believer should ever experience is the conviction that comes from God the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this conviction is to correct the believer and to restore the believer's inner happiness.

Ecclesiastes 5:6. "Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?"

The last statement implies rendering unsuccessful whatever the person attempts. Suddenly, everything you do falls apart or doesn't work. Solomon draws his conclusion about worship in verse 7.

Ecclesiastes 5:7. "For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God."

Keep your promises, your commitments, and your vows; and most of all, fear God. God must be taken seriously, and our worship of Him must be taken seriously.

David Hubbard writes, "Babbling rambling wild words may be alright in dreams, but they don't belong in worship!" Our relationship with God should be one of sober, respectful, and reverent awe. False worship is as much an affront to Him as obscene insults are to a wife or a husband. Our adoring spirit and the true obedience of our heart are His demands and His delights. It is the believer who is truly serious about his relationship with God who grows the fastest. Why is it that so many people of the world reject doctrine and the happiness it can give? It's not that they don't want the happiness that God can give through doctrine; they simply have no idea that it exists. None of us really knew the happiness of God until after we had made a commitment to learn and apply God's Word. The real problem is that most people have no *respect* for God; they could care less about their responsibility to Him. They don't care about any obligations they've made and they don't care about their broken commitments toward Him. These people have more respect (or fear) for their banker, the electric company, the gas company, the phone company, and their creditors, than they do for God. After all, God would never shut them off, or would He?

However, when someone does respect God or fear Him, one of the many benefits God gives them through His Word is happiness, as well as peace and patience and kindness and other awesome things

too. The word fear in the Bible is many times translated respect, and that is a good translation, but there is such a thing as godly fear. For example, in Psalm 47:2 the sons of Korah sang, “For the Lord Most High is to be feared, A great King over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us, And nations under our feet.” In these passages, fear is in reference to the Lord’s power to subdue people:

- Psalm 76:7. “Thou, even Thou, art to be feared; And who may stand in Thy presence when once Thou art angry?” Here, fear is related to the anger of God.
- In Psalm 90:11, Moses prayed, “Who understands the power of Thine anger, And Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee?”

Here, fear is related to God’s anger and fury.

- Psalm 119:120. “My flesh trembles for fear of Thee, And I am afraid of Thy judgments.”
- Isaiah 8:13. “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread.”

In all of these passages, fear is used in the sense of fright or dread because of His power, and the ability that He has to destroy. Don’t be so naive to think that the power of God is only to be respected; it is also to be feared.

The phrase “fear God” occurs in six verses in the book of Ecclesiastes (3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12, 8:13, and 12:13). Six is the number of man, and this stands as a warning to every member of the human race. Keep your promises, your commitments, and your vows; and most of all, fear God. God must be taken seriously, and our worship of Him must be taken seriously.

CHAPTER 13

The Fifth Experiment: Money

(Ecclesiastes 5:8-20)

A long time ago a very famous queen visited an even more famous king. Although she was skeptical of all that she had heard of this king, the queen traveled a great distance to see the grandeur of his kingdom. She had heard that he was a remarkable architect who had overseen the work of an impressive number of buildings. It was also said that he was a gifted and creative artist, who had written many stanzas of verse, and over a thousand songs. It was also reported that this man was something of an authority in the field of the natural life sciences, and was an incredible diplomat. This great king's ability to rule enabled him to administer all of the affairs of his vast kingdom. He was renowned for his close relationship with Jehovah Elohim, the Lord God of Israel, to Whom this king gave all the credit for his amazing prosperity. All of this, combined with his being extraordinarily rich, powerful, and handsome, was enough to make her suspicious about what she had heard.

The queen arrived at his kingdom and talked with the servants. She had the privilege of eating at the man's table and she listened to the words of his counselors. For some unknown period of time, she witnessed the entirety of this man's splendor unfold before her. The more she saw, the more unbelievable it seemed, and yet, she found that everything that she had heard of this great king was indeed, true.

Chapter 10 of the book of First Kings (1 Kings 10) is an historical account of this woman's visit with the man whose name was King Solomon. The woman is recorded in history as the Queen of Sheba. In fact, one day our Lord Jesus Christ made a statement about her. Luke 11:31 says, "The Queen of the South shall rise up with the men

of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

The dialogue of this incredible visit is recorded in 1 Kings 10:1-5, “Now when the queen of Sheba [She was not the wife of a king; she was a queen and the ruler of her kingdom] heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, [notice that Solomon’s fame at this time was related to the name or the person of the Lord] she came to test him with difficult questions. So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue [or entourage], with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. And Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from the king which he did not explain to her. When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.”

The phrase “no more spirit in her” means that she was breathless or her breath was taken away. She was overwhelmed and astounded.

It continues in 1 Kings 10:6-9, “Then she said to the king, “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless, I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness.”

She beheld amazing sights. Not only was the finest food elegantly prepared for her, but also everything that Solomon touched dripped of luxury. The dishes on which the food was served were made of pure gold. The drinking vessels not only needed to be washed after drinking from them, but they also needed to be shined, for they also were crafted of gold. She witnessed staircases and gardens and designed works and elegant displays of this man’s creativity. She saw the treasury of Solomon and even though she was a wealthy queen herself, she was stunned with amazement. Therefore, she said in verse

7, “And behold, the half was not told me.” Then she, according to the custom of those times, presented King Solomon gifts, a portion of which was more goods for his treasury!

First Kings 10:10. “And she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold [that would equal about four million dollars], and a very great amount of spices and precious stones. Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon.”

We often hear of the wisdom of Solomon and the words of Solomon, but we don’t spend as much time thinking about the wealth of Solomon as was evident in 1 Kings 10:11-15, “And also the ships of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought in from Ophir a very great number of almug trees [which is where they got sandalwood sticks from] and precious stones. And the king made of the almug trees supports for the house of the Lord and for the king’s house, also lyres and harps for the singers; such almug trees have not come in again, nor have they been seen to this day. And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested, besides what he gave her according to his royal bounty. Then she turned and went to her own land together with her servants. Now the weight of gold which came in to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold [over twenty million dollars a year], besides that from the traders and the wares of the merchants and all the kings of the Arabs and the governors of the country.”

The grandeur of Solomon’s kingdom was incredible to behold. The queen saw all of the wonder of Solomon’s gardens, the trees and the forests, and the incredible structures, and the treasuries of Solomon.

First Kings 10:21. “And all King Solomon’s drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon [his country cabin] were of pure gold. None was of silver; [because silver] it was not considered valuable in the days of Solomon.”

His kingdom wasn’t simply a kingdom; it was a kingdom of gold. His home wasn’t simply a residence; it was a museum.

First Kings 10:22-23. “For the king had at sea the ships of Tarshish with the ships of Hiram; once every three years the ships of Tarshish came bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks. So King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth [notice what is mentioned first] in riches and in wisdom.”

We cannot imagine the riches of Solomon. A man as wealthy as Solomon deserves a hearing when he addresses the subject of money. In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon writes about money and the love of money, and we should all pay very close attention to what he has to say. As we shall see, Solomon introduces his fifth experiment in Ecclesiastes 5:10. Experiment No. 5 is looking for happiness from money, wealth and prosperity. Solomon understands both the pros and the cons when it comes to the vast and intriguing subject of wealth, prosperity and money. His words are inspired by God the Holy Spirit and he is a man of enduring wisdom.

It was Solomon who said in Proverbs 10:22, "It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich," When he said this, he did not mean that money and wealth are the means of God's blessing, but rather that if you are blessed by the Lord in any area of your life, you are truly rich.

Solomon also said in Proverbs 28:20, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." In Proverbs 11:28, this man who knew what it was to be rich said, "He who trusts in his riches will fall."

He also taught that loving money and wealth can lead you to rest on unstable foundations in Proverbs 23:4-5. If you start trusting in money, you are trusting in something that is here today and gone tomorrow. Proverbs 23:4-5, "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." Solomon cautioned us not to put our stock in money! He also taught that the love of money can make you proud in Proverbs 28:11, "The rich man is wise in his own eyes."

In Ecclesiastes 5:8-12, we have three principles on the subject of money that apply to any generation. Anyone who has a trend toward materialism or greed should especially note these principles. After this, in verses 13-17, we find two grievous evils. And then in conclusion in verses 18-20, we see the results of Solomon's experiment. In Ecclesiastes 5:8, Solomon begins his treatise on money by noting some principles on oppression! **Ecclesiastes 5:8** says, "If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them."

This is a scene of oppression. Solomon says that the rich tend to take charge, and with their money and power, intimidate the poor. The rich, simply because they have money, tend to take charge of a territory, of a province, of a nation or even of a continent, and often they become the lawmakers and officials who sit in public office. In fact, the last half of verse 8, “For one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them,” sounds like a description of bureaucratic government. The red tape can get so thick that the poor can no longer be heard. The rich tend to take charge and the poor tend to be denied justice and righteousness, and if you think that corruption in politics is something new, read the following quote from the first century: “The glimpse of that vista of officials suggests possibilities of evasiveness, to baffle the citizen who presses for his rights. He can be endlessly obstructed and deflected. As for moral responsibility it can be sidestepped with equal facility. Every officer can blame the system while the ultimate authorities hold sway at an infinite distance from the lives that they affect.”

We all understand something about the system. We can reach just so far and are unable to reach any further because one official watches over another official. In the mix, woven into the very fabric of that system which lacks accountability, there is money, and plenty of it. An illustration of this sort of oppression in our nation would be slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What slave could ever hope to be heard by the wealthy? How could he or she possibly have a grievance acknowledged by their owner? There was so much oppression that a war between the states took place which dealt with certain terms of that oppression.

Many will ask, why does God allow this oppression to go on? There are three answers:

1. This is the devil’s world; he is in charge and he is the god of this world (2 Co 4:4). He is the father of oppression.
2. Mankind is a product of his own decisions and he brings this oppression upon himself.
3. Oppression may result from being under divine discipline. You may be objecting to something that is consistent with God’s justice disciplining an evil people.

Oppression does exist, but if you do not have God's viewpoint, you will think as Jeremiah did in Jeremiah 12:1, "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?"

Even though there is oppression by rulers, we still need to have leadership and authority. This is why Solomon adds verse 9. **Ecclesiastes 5:9** says, "After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land." If the leader cultivates the field, then it is an advantage to the land, but, if the leader or king is rich he must guard against being oppressive.

Next, Solomon turns to something very personal. In **Ecclesiastes 5:10**, he writes, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity."

We may not make money our everything, but we may agree with the late Joe Louis who said, "I don't love money but it quiets my nerves." The fact is, it doesn't quiet our nerves; in fact, the pursuit of it keeps us awake. Solomon is one of the richest men that ever lived and he's going to tell us that the working man has an edge on him. Ecclesiastes 5:10 proves this point, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity."

Before we go any further, observe that the verb is *loves* and not *possesses*. This is not an attack, nor is there any attack throughout scripture, on those who have money. This is an attack on the lovers of money and the greedy As exemplified in 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from doctrine, and pierced themselves with many sorrows."

Notice that we don't read, money is the root of all evil, the scripture says that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. You can have a lot of money and not love it, or you can have a little money and love it; when it comes to money, it's all a question of attitude. Money is a powerful thing in our lives, we deal with it all the time. When we talk about money, we're talking about life. We spend a lot of time working to get the money we need to survive. Money is always a part of our life, we are always dealing with money in some way. Therefore, it is extremely important that we have the right attitude toward it. Money was never designed to give contentment, it

is spirituality that gives the believer contentment. Says 1 Timothy 6:6-8, “But godliness [living spiritually] actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.”

When you’re living the spiritual life and you’re happy with what you have, it’s a great place to be, but if you love money, you will find that it’s going to bring you all kinds of problems. First Timothy 6:9 says, “But those who want to get rich [that’s tantamount to loving money, they’re going to get rich one way or the other] fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction [or drown them in destruction and loss].”

People might say, their going to make a million so they can give it to the Lord. Don’t make a million for the Lord, the Lord is not poor; He doesn’t need your million. Don’t cloak your desire to be rich in that kind of a guise. The Bible says, “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,” and then let the Lord worry about whether or not He’s going to give you a million. When a person wants to get rich and they love money, that person is useless to God. That’s why the Lord said in Matthew 6:24b, “You cannot serve God and money.”

For money, Achan brought defeat on Israel’s army and death to himself and to his family. For money, Balaam sinned against doctrine and tried to curse the living God. For money, Delilah betrayed Samson and ultimately slaughtered thousands. For money, Ananias and Sapphira became the first hypocrites in the church and God executed them as a testimony against their misuse of money and their deceit. For money, Judas betrayed and sold out Jesus. People who love money are not in very good company! 1 Timothy 6:10a, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil,”

What sorts of evil does loving money lead a person to? Loving money leads a person to forget God (Pro 30:7-9). Solomon wrote most of the book of Proverbs, but a man named Agur wrote the thirtieth chapter. Agur watched Solomon, who was rich beyond belief, as he got trapped into accumulating more and more riches, and into marrying foreign wives to bring in more and more treasure, which brought Israel into idolatry and ruined Solomon’s life. Seeing this, Agur wrote, Proverbs 30:7-9a, “Two things I asked of Thee, Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches;

Feed me with the food that is my portion, Lest I be full [rich] and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord?"

Agur asked that the Lord not give him too much for fear that he would tend to deny Him and become self-sufficient. A love for money can also lead us to stop trusting God, as stated in Psalm 62:10 and Job 31:24,28. One of the great dangers in having money is that we begin to trust in it. Psalm 62:10b says, "If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them." Job 31:24 and 28 also says, "If I have put my trust in money, And called fine gold my trust, . . . I would have denied God above." Solomon said in Proverbs 11:28, "He who trusts in his riches will fall." 1 Timothy 6:17-19, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

By the way, do you realize that, in comparison to almost the entire world, every single person in the United States is rich? There are millions of people in the world who couldn't even dream of earning in a year what most of us earn in a week. Notice in 1 Timothy 6:17 that whatever you have, God gave it to you; don't forget Him. Deuteronomy 8:10-11 also says, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today."

It's interesting that in most cases, the more money a person has, the less they're willing to part with. Not only can the love of money cause us to forget God and to not trust Him, but it will also cause us to be deceived according to Mark 4:19. When a believer loves money, the kingdom of darkness will use his misdirected love to deceive him. Mark 4:19 says, "The worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

It happens over and over again; the love of money takes people away from doctrine. The love of money can bring a believer to a place where he actually compromises biblical standards and instructions. Have you ever thought about your price? Is there a certain amount

of money that will cause you to forsake God and His people? What will you sell out for, a new car, a new house, a new relationship, or a new position, or maybe it's power? Whatever it may be, it isn't worth it. Whatever your price is, be sure of one thing: sooner or later, the kingdom of darkness is going to find out and it's going to make you an offer at that price. In vain, Satan tried with all his might to make an offer that even the Lord couldn't refuse. Luke 4:5-7 says, "And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.'"

Solomon also taught that loving money will cause you to trust in something that can be taken away very fast. According to Proverbs 23:4-5, "Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." Don't put your stock in money. Rather, invest in the kingdom of God.

Solomon also said that the love of money can make you proud, Proverbs 28:11, "The rich man is wise in his own eyes." One translation says, "rich men are conceited."

The love of money can even cause you to rob God, Malachi 3:8-10. When you love money and you want it for yourself, you actually end up stealing from God. God's treasure house is right in your pocket, your wallet, and your bank account, everything you have, you have received from Him. Malachi 3:8 says, "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings." The Lord is condemning those who have kept back what belongs to God. When you love money, you rob God, and usually rob others also. You rob your brother and you end up robbing yourself and putting yourself under a curse. First John 3:17 says, "But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" As Malachi 3:9 says, "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me."

It's a very serious thing to love money. This misplaced love has caused some of God's people to be under the curse of Haggai 1:5-7, "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! You

have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Consider your ways!’”

The whole issue with money is not its amount, but your attitude toward it; and the wrong attitude is to love it. The wrong attitude is to hold it back from those to whom it is justly due. The right attitude is that money belongs to God. Solomon said in Proverbs 11:24, “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty” (NIV). As Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.”

This is an attack on the lovers of money, the greedy, and the materialists. Let’s not forget who said this in 1 Kings 10:23, “King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.” Solomon wrote, “those who love money will never be satisfied.”

He who loves the abundance that comes with that kind of wealth will never know the day when he can say, I’ve got enough, that’s plenty; I don’t need any more! Money can never buy contentment. Profits, dividends, investments, interest payments, capital gains, only whet the appetite for more and more when you’re living life under the sun without God. The one who loves money is addicted to it and will never have enough.

Ecclesiastes 5:11. “When good things increase, those who consume them increase [or the more you have, the more you spend]. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on?”

- Ecclesiastes 5:11. “The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income. So what is the advantage of wealth—except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers?” (TLB)

It’s not a question of having more money and doing more with it; it’s a question of what you are doing with what you have. Rich people have more problems than you can even imagine. There are many problems that accompany wealth; and Proverbs 19:6 says, “Many will entreat or beg favors from a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.”

It's very difficult for a wealthy person to make friends because they never know if someone is truly a friend or merely a leech, Proverbs 30:15, "The leech has two daughters, Give, Give."

When you read Ecclesiastes 5:11, think about those rich individuals who have come from nothing to become something overnight, and then begin to get an entourage about them. Think of some heavyweight fighter who comes from a dirt-poor background into the center ring, and with amazing talent he gains the golden belt, and he's now the champion of the world. The next time you see him he is surrounded by this entourage of people who didn't even know his name earlier, but have now attached themselves to him. Tragedy can strike, as it did in the life of Elvis Presley, a dirt-poor young man out of Memphis, who with a guitar slung over his shoulder struck it rich. It was only a matter of time before he had more people in his outfit than he even knew by name. They were leeches who consumed his increase, with increased money and possessions come an accelerated number of people and worries.

J. Vernon McGee wrote, "Growth just for the sake of growth is no good at all. This is true of a business or even of a Christian organization or church. I have learned it by personal experience. For years I was the pastor of a large church. Just to grow for the sake of growing so one can have a big church is nothing in the world but a big headache. There is no fun in it. There is no joy in it. The Lord taught me that to grow for the glory of God is to be my one purpose in life. I keep this goal before me: 'Vernon McGee, you do this one thing, get out the Word of God.'" **Ecclesiastes 5:12** also says, "The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep."

We have here a contrast between the working man who may have little or much, and the rich man who has an abundance. The working man has peace of mind, which allows him to have a pleasant night's sleep, while the rich man tosses and turns with worry. The working man is the blue-collar worker with a hard hat that welds all day, or the painter with his overalls blotched with paint, or the mechanic in the garage. He's the kicker of the foot press in the jewelry factory, who punches in at seven in the morning, works all day, and is unconcerned about what his job is or where it is; he just works. He checks out, drives home, enjoys his family, eats supper, watches some of the news, hopefully goes to Bible class, goes home to sleep and could care less

about what happens tomorrow. He sleeps peacefully and at seven in the morning he's going to punch in again; there's no anxiety in that. In many cases, there are not even people to worry about or to deal with, he has freedom from anxiety, worry, or concern. But the rich are concerned with many things. The Living Bible translates in Ecclesiastes 5:12, "The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia."

The rich man tosses and turns during the night as he wonders about the deal that he is working on, will it pay off? His worried thoughts turn him over and over while he tries to get some sleep. Solomon said in Proverbs 19:4-7, "Wealth adds many friends, But a poor man is separated from his friend. A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape. Many will entreat the favor of a generous man, And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts. All the brothers of a poor man hate him; How much more do his friends go far from him! He pursues them with words, but they are gone."

The poor man is alone because people are usually looking for somebody who has money. People attach themselves to those who have money, and that adds to the problems of the wealthy. Someone once wrote, when man's possessions increase, it seems that there's a corresponding increase in the number of parasites who live off him: management consultants, tax advisors, accountants, lawyers, household employees, and sponging relatives!

The queen of Sheba said that the half was not told her when she witnessed Solomon's splendor, and she was right. The half that wasn't told her is found in Ecclesiastes chapter 5. From the externals we would be greatly impressed with this wonder of the world called Solomon's temple and Solomon's kingdom, but that's only one half of the story. The other half of the story is imbedded in the brain of the person who becomes the victim of his fame and wealth; the increased number of worries and people in his life and the fact that he can't sleep (Ecc 5:12).

In short, more money equals more people, more people equal more worries, and more worries equals less sleep. From the outside, the life of the rich may seem delightful, satisfying and carefree, but on the inside it is frequently marked by frustration, discontentment, anxiety, and loneliness. One commentator remarks, "He is rich not who possesses much, but who desires little, for this man will sleep

well. A good night's sleep is a gift from God." Psalm 4:8 also says, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety."

David even said to his son, Solomon, in Proverbs 3:21-24, "My son, let doctrine not depart from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet."

After Solomon rebounded and recovered he wrote in Psalm 127:2, "It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep." **Ecclesiastes 5:13** also makes this point, "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt."

The Hebrew word for *hoarded* is *shamar*, which means to guard, to protect with thorns, or to store up for oneself, which Solomon describes as a grievous evil. Now, what does he mean by the riches being hoarded by their owner to his own hurt? Well, first of all, in verse 14, there's a bad business deal. **Ecclesiastes 5:14** says, "When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him."

Some unfortunate enterprise or bad business deal brings about the collapse and utter loss of his fortune. Solomon is not implying that this always happens, but that it could, which makes it another worry for those who have money. Notice in verse 14 that the loss is so complete that his son, who follows him, never gets a cent of the fortune. Solomon is saying that it is better for such a man not to have had a fortune than to have one and lose it, because the loss of it brings much distress and disappointment that would never have been experienced had he not grown rich. Even if the father had not lost his wealth, he could have left it all behind to his son, and the son could have lost it through bad decisions. All in all it is better to have the peace of heart that comes through the filling of the Holy Spirit and circulation of Bible doctrine in the soul. It is because of this that Solomon now reminds us just how brief life is.

Ecclesiastes 5:15. "As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand."

You'll never see a dead man carrying something out of this world. The dead man leaves his child nothing and returns his body to the

ground just as naked as he came forth, and Solomon says this is a grievous evil. This man used all his energy, pouring out his heart upon the world to receive the world's goods; and then in the end he discovered that all he really did was chase after the wind.

- Hosea 8:7. "For they sow the wind, And they reap the whirlwind."
- Hosea 12:1. "Ephraim feeds on wind, And pursues the east wind continually; he multiplies lies and violence."

In the end, the individual discovers that he has been chasing after the wind, embracing a shadow, and just grasping at the air. He has been wearying himself for that which has no substance and no satisfaction in it.

Ecclesiastes 5:16. "And this also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So, what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?"

Those who grabbed and clutched and held onto all their riches will ultimately lose them and crash. Solomon put it another way in Proverbs 11:24-25, "There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, but [it results] only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered."

Proverbs 11:24-25, "It is possible to give away and become richer! It is also possible to hold on too tightly and lose everything. Yes, the liberal man shall be rich! By watering others, he waters himself" (TLB).

The man in Ecclesiastes 5 hoarded what he had and he lost it through a bad investment. Most of us will have a chance at some time in our lives to be in the presence of some elegant, lavish, rich person who has the best of everything. He lives in a place of grandeur with fine food and fine wine. Solomon gives us some counsel concerning this:

Proverbs 23:1-2, "When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Consider carefully what is before you; And put a knife to your throat, If you are a man of great appetite."

This is not a literal knife and it's not a literal throat. It is a symbolic statement that means catch yourself before you fall into the trap of wanting all that you see!

Proverbs 23:3-5. "Do not desire his delicacies, For it is deceptive food. [You don't know that there are entanglements that come

with it.] Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.”

If you look at the back of a dollar bill you'll see that it has an eagle on it with outstretched wings. That is appropriate and absolutely perfect, it's even biblical. That old dollar bill will fly right out of your wallet and so will the next one, and the next hundred and the next thousand, they make themselves wings. That's what this passage is talking about, the man who had much, but he made a bad investment and he lost it. The man who strives for riches considers them good while he's striving for them but once he gets them, he sees them as evil, because they have not given him the satisfaction and joy that he thought they contained. This of course applies to those who stay under the sun in their endeavors and their aspirations.

Ecclesiastes 5:17. “Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.”

Here's another grievous evil; those who live high often die hard. Let's look at a real life example: He was the world's ultimate mystery, so secretive, so reclusive, so mysterious that for more than fifteen years no one could say for certain that he was alive, much less how he looked or behaved. Howard Hughes was one of the richest men in the world with the destinies of thousands of people, perhaps even governments, at his disposal, yet he lived a sunless, joyless half-lunatic life. In his later years he fled from one resort hotel to another throughout the world and his physical appearance became odder and odder. His straggly beard hung down to his waist, his hair reached to the middle of his back, his fingernails were two inches long, and his toenails hadn't been trimmed for so long they resembled corkscrews. Hughes was married for thirteen years to Jean Peters, one of the most beautiful women in the world, but never in that time were the two seen in public together, and there is no record of them ever having been photographed together. For a while, they occupied separate bungalows at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and later she lived in an opulent and carefully guarded French Regency house atop a hill in Bel-Air, making secretive and increasingly infrequent trips to be with Hughes in Las Vegas They were divorced in 1970. Hughes often said every man has his price or a guy like him couldn't exist, yet no amount of money bought the affection of his associates. Most of his

employees who have broken the silence reported their disgust for him! We can see why Solomon says, “He eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness, and anger.”

Yet, there is good news, this cloud of doom is going to blow away. Fortunately, Solomon also shows us the antithesis to the man who hoards money to his own hurt and who works only for selfish gain. We are going to find three gifts that are attainable in our life and worth claiming. They are the only things in life that will endure, and they are things that you cannot buy. Verse 18 names the first one, verse 19 the second, and verse 20, the third. Here are the gifts and the results of Solomon’s experiments so far and they are said to be good and fitting. Solomon is going to come to the right conclusion in the end and discover how to attain true happiness.

Ecclesiastes 5:18. “Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.”

The first gift is to enjoy the life and the job that God has given to us. Claim the gift of enjoyment in life, it is a gift from God, and it’s called a reward. Let’s look at some of the areas of life that we should enjoy, according to the Bible: First of all, how can we enjoy life in this world? Remember what Solomon wrote back in Ecclesiastes 2:25, “For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?”

God gives us the capacity to enjoy the things of life. What things does God wish for us to enjoy? They include the following:

1. Ecclesiastes 9:9 says, “Enjoy life with the woman you were designed to love whom God has given to you under the sun.” This is the enjoyment of right man, right woman, and 1 Corinthians 7:17 is the New Testament commentary on this principle.
2. You should also enjoy a good meal, with fine wine if you prefer (Ecc 10:19).
3. You should enjoy the results of your labor (Jer 31:5).
4. You should enjoy any success that you have while you have been faithful in your perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine (Dan 6:28).
5. You should enjoy the communication of Bible doctrine (Mar 12:37).

6. You should enjoy any prosperity that you have while doing your best to live in God's plan (Acts 9:31).
7. You should enjoy fellowship with doctrinal people (Rom 15:24).
8. You should enjoy your wealth and riches (1 Ti 6:17).

In Ecclesiastes 5:18, Solomon says eating and drinking and enjoying ourselves come to us as a reward from God. God has given this as a reward and we should enjoy it. Solomon is telling us to laugh a lot and find pleasure in the simple things. Go back to the type of things that brought you happiness as a child and capitalize on them. Enjoy the love of the little ones and the beauty of the earth, enjoy the pleasure of a friend and a good simple meal. **Ecclesiastes 5:19** says, "Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth [this is the rich person], He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God."

A second gift, enabled when you're in fellowship with God, is that God empowers you or gives you the capacity to enjoy any riches and wealth that you have received from your labor. In other words, if you have money, enjoy it. Paul said to the rich and wealthy in 1 Timothy 6:17, "Fix your confidence on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

Find fulfillment in your work. Enjoy the wealth, the riches, the prosperity, and the blessings that God has graciously bestowed upon you. **Ecclesiastes 5:20** says, "For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart."

The third gift is contentment and happiness in your heart, and what a gift this is. Therefore, the three gifts are: enjoyment in your life, capacity for your wealth, and contentment in your heart. Please notice something in these three verses; God is back in the picture.

Solomon told us about the grievous evils, the warnings, the proverbial principles, and these three great gifts that have no price tag. Solomon could be saying, "I look so successful and secure, but the half hasn't been told you. I appear to be fulfilled and happy, but the half hasn't been told you. My possessions would lead people to think that I've got it all together, but those who think that don't know the other half." Without the Lord at the very center of our life and

without God being in first place in our priorities and motivations, we cannot know fulfillment, contentment, and enjoyment.

How much more true does this passage now seem? Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

With God, experiment number 1 on academic education, can be fantastic. With God, experiment number 2 on pleasure, eating, and drinking and being merry, can be fabulous. With God, experiment number 3, the All in the Family experiment, can be magnificent. With God, experiment number 4 on time orientation, can be full of meaning and purpose and happiness. With God, experiment number 5 on money, wealth and prosperity, is extraordinary. There’s nothing wrong or evil about any of these things in themselves; the sin and the evil come from our abuse of them and misuse of them. This is why Paul said in Romans 14:14, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.” First Timothy 4:4 says, For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude.” Paul put it another way in Titus 1:15, “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.”

Also in 1 Corinthians 6:12, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” 1 Corinthians 10:23 further expounds, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

There is nothing wrong with the things that Solomon has attained. The only time that these things become wrong is when they take you away from the plan of God, and you can take that to the bank!

CHAPTER 14

A Self-portrait

(Ecclesiastes 6:1-12)

Dimitri Vail was an artist; he was by profession a portrait painter. For a number of years, Dimitri Vail's gallery was in Dallas, Texas. He had a preference for celebrity types, and they returned the favor, appreciating how he used his brush in such a beautiful and literal manner on the canvas. In his gallery, there would be a comedian, or perhaps several of them in a row, always with their names fixed in brass at the base of each frame, although the names were unnecessary since one glance at the photograph-like painting revealed clearly who it was. Next to the comedian there would be a film star, or a television celebrity, alongside that person would be a couple of professional athletes, and occasionally an athlete with his wife or her husband. There would be places in the gallery where he would set aside room for certain statesmen, those who were very famous, and some of the great minds of the world. In the midst of these joyful, famous, happy paintings, there was one picture that was no larger than the average size Bible. It was framed, but it wasn't named. It was smaller than the others, many of which were larger than life-size. The painting had been done in dark and grim colors: the deep blues and the grays and a few of the browns. The picture that appeared in this frame was exceedingly grim. It was one of the most popular paintings in the gallery because no one knew who it was. When the guides who worked in the gallery were asked who it was, they told everyone it was a self-portrait of Dimitri Vail. It surprised many people, who assumed that since he painted with such color and such excellent beauty, he had to have been a man of great color and excitement. The truth was that he was exactly how that painting portrayed him: grim. He sat in front of a mirror, and he painted what he saw.

Ecclesiastes chapter 6 is a very solemn scene in the life of Solomon. If Ecclesiastes is to be seen as a painter's gallery, chapter 6 is a self-portrait. Sometimes a self-portrait looks a lot different from the way we appear to be to others. So while this is not an attractive chapter, it is realistic to the person who is living life under the sun, without a relationship with God. Solomon is about to describe an evil, and when we compare scripture with scripture we see that Solomon is about to describe himself.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-2. "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent or common among men. A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction."

Remember those three words: riches, wealth, and honor. Here is a man who has the world by the tail, he has riches and wealth as well as honor. When we read Second Chronicles 1, we see these three words there, and we see that they refer to Solomon himself. They are the very same terms, and in the very same order.

- Second Chronicles 1:7. "In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, 'Ask what I shall give you' [or ask what you want and I will give it to you]."

Wouldn't that be great? Imagine having God appear to you at night and say, "Ask what you want and I will give it to you." What would you ask for? Most people would ask for riches, wealth, or honor, for the life of those who hate them, or for long life for themselves. Solomon asked for something quite different.

- Second Chronicles 1:8-12. "And Solomon said to God, "Thou hast dealt with my father David with great lovingkindness, and hast made me king in his place. Now, O Lord God, Thy promise to my father David is fulfilled; for Thou hast made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can rule this great people of Thine?" And God said to Solomon, "Because you had this in mind, and did not ask for riches, wealth, or honor, or the life of those who

hate you, nor have you even asked for long life, but you have asked for yourself wisdom and knowledge, that you may rule My people, over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge have been granted to you. And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed, nor those who will come after you.”

The Lord said in reply, On top of this unselfish request I will add riches and wealth and honor. Yet the same God who gave Solomon these things in verse 2 continues, “but God has not empowered him to eat from them.” In other words, although God has given this man great blessings, He has not given him the capacity to enjoy them or draw from them the pleasure that they can bring. On the surface, this seems unfair. Why would God give these things to someone but then remove from that person the ability to enjoy those things? However, it was not God who removed Solomon’s capacity; it was Solomon’s negative volition toward doctrine that removed his capacity. Doctrine gives us the capacity to enjoy the blessings of God.

- Proverbs 8:1-3. “Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand; Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out.”
- Proverbs 8:14-22 (she, wisdom is speaking or doctrine is speaking and she says). “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, All who judge rightly. I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me. Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield than choicest silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries. The Lord [Jesus Christ] possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old.”

The point is that God does want to bless us, but our capacity to enjoy the blessings God bestows must come from doctrine resident in the soul. Keep in mind also that the same man who wrote the

book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, also wrote this chapter of the book of Proverbs! He knew the doctrine, but for a period of time in his life he ignored the doctrine. When we look at the conclusion of Ecclesiastes 6:2, “For a foreigner enjoys them,” we see the reason that the man can’t enjoy them. It is because a foreigner has come and taken away his enjoyment. The foreigner is not identified, but we know that it was not a war because during Solomon’s reign he had peace. It could be a sickness; bad health can destroy the enjoyment of riches and wealth and honor. It could be domestic conflict; trouble at home can take away the enjoyment of riches and wealth and honor. It could be a disaster, a tragedy, or a sudden calamity, something that was never expected to happen. In Solomon’s case, a foreigner could also have been one of his wives because most of them were foreigners. The point is that foreigners can wipe out our dreams and cause us to look back to God and rethink our priorities. However, the fact of the matter is that God has not removed Solomon’s ability or capacity to enjoy these things, Solomon did it himself through negative volition toward doctrine.

Ecclesiastes 6:3. “If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things, and he does not even have a proper burial, then I say, ‘Better the miscarriage than he.’” Having many children will not make a person happy; quite the contrary. If the eulogy of your life is that your soul was not satisfied with good things, then, Solomon says, “it would be better for you to have been a miscarriage.”

Ecclesiastes 6:4-5. “For it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he.” Please notice that the miscarriage is called an *it*, in fact, even the fetus of our Lord’s body was called a *that*

Matthew 1:20 says, “Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” There is no soul life or human life in the womb; abortion is not murder says the Word of God. The NIV translation says Matthew 1:20, “because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

The Greek word translated *that* or *what* is the definite article *to* which is in the neuter gender and not in the masculine. Therefore

it cannot and does not refer to a person, in fact this Greek article is properly translated *the thing*.

Luke 1:35. "And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also, that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (KJV)

The Bible should be interpreted without personal bias. Since the Word of God is ultimate truth, it should be taught as it is written, and not be skewed for the sake of acceptance by other people or other denominations. Standing up for the truth means that at times others are going to hate you and ostracize you; so be it. Have the courage to stand up for the truth. There is no soul life in the womb, and this is extremely important to understanding Ecclesiastes 6.

Jewish law reflects the fact that there is no soul life in the womb. Jewish law was the greatest law in all of human history, because God gave it to the Jews. The Law came straight from the Supreme Court of Heaven. In a corrected translation of Exodus 21:22, "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury to the woman, the offender will surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand from him; therefore he will pay damages as the judge decides."

If there were human life in the womb, this would be a murder case. However, there is no human life in the womb. According to the Law of God, which is holy and righteous, if this incident were to happen, it would not warrant a criminal trial for murder, the husband may only sue for damages. Exodus 21:23 further says, "But if there is any further injury [to that woman beyond the miscarriage], then you will appoint as the penalty a life for a life."

A *life for a life* means a trial for murder. The Word of God teaches that capital punishment is appropriate for murder (Gen 9:5-6; Exo 21:12; Num 35:30; Mt 26:52; Rom 13:3-4). But capital punishment is not mentioned in Exodus 21:22, which deals with the legal consequences of miscarriage. Since there is only biological life and not soul or human life in the womb, there can be no death penalty for murder, since miscarriage or forced abortion is not murder. The fetus is not on an equal basis with the mother. It is not a human being; the mother's life is infinitely more important than the fetus. However, if during the struggle the woman is killed (Exo 21:23), then the death penalty or capital punishment for murder applies.

The Bible teaches that if you died in the womb you would not be a person; Job taught this principle also in chapter 10 verse 18 to 19, “Why then hast Thou brought me out of the womb? Would that I had died and no eye had seen me! I should have been as though I had not been, carried from womb to tomb.”

Job said that as long as he was in the womb, he was not a human being. However, since he is out of the womb, he is a human being. Job had no human life until God imputed it to his soul. Job, in his misery, is asking why God ever let him become a human being. The limits of human life are from birth to death, and this is the sphere in which the angelic conflict is being resolved. There is no resolution to the angelic conflict inside the womb or inside the tomb. God gives human life at birth, and takes it away at death. If God does not give soul life at birth, there is no soul life and there is no existence. This is why Job says in verse 19, “I would have been as though I had not been.”

Job 3:11-15 says, “Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why did the knees receive me, And why the breasts, that I should suck? For now [if he had died when he came forth from the womb] I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, With kings and with counselors of the earth, Who rebuilt ruins for themselves; Or with princes who had gold, Who were filling their houses with silver.”

Notice, in these verses that if he had died at birth when he came forth from the womb, as verse 11 states, “he would have lain down and been quiet; he would have slept then and would have been at rest with kings and counselors or the earth.” But in verse 16, if he were a miscarriage, he would have not have existed at all.

Job 3:16. “Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, as infants that never saw light.” The miscarriage that never saw the light of day, because it never had human life, is better off than the man who has good things and is not satisfied with them. So, who is the one who has the riches and wealth and honor but couldn’t enjoy them? Solomon says, “I am that man.” Solomon said it would have been better for him to have been a miscarriage and not to have existed. Job said the same thing. Interestingly, Job said this under extreme adversity, while Solomon said this under extreme prosperity. Adding more children (verse 3) didn’t help matters any, and in the next verse adding more years won’t help either.

Ecclesiastes 6:6. “Even if the man lives a thousand years twice [that’s two thousand] and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?” Solomon remarks that if life is marked by pain and hardship, calamity and tragedy, what good is it to add a thousand years? Most people in this predicament want to live shorter lives, not longer ones. They would rather escape their situation than prolong their misery. Keeping yourself busy with hard work won’t help this predicament either. Sometimes when people get bored because they don’t have the capacity to enjoy the blessings of God, they try to distract themselves with work to occupy their thoughts. Solomon said that they would still be unsatisfied in verse **7 of Ecclesiastes chapter 6**, “All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.”

The Hebrew word for *appetite* is *nephesh*, which is often translated as soul. Therefore, it is the soul that is not satisfied. Work doesn’t bring satisfaction to an empty life, a life without God. Hard work doesn’t bring relief from depression and boredom when there are conflicts that feed the soul with discouragement. Many men have tried to run away from a bad marriage or a bad environment by sublimating, by working so much so they don’t have time to face the problem; Solomon says that’s not the answer.

A morbid insatiability has set in to this man’s life. Nothing can satisfy him even though he has everything. Something is radically wrong within our heart when a state of affairs such as this prevails. Fortunately, if you find yourself becoming bored with life in general, it could be a fantastic blessing in disguise. It could be a wake-up call or an indication that you need to get serious about your relationship with God. Any time that God calls you or tries to get your attention, it is a blessing. The truth is that when the soul departs from its true function in life, which is to get to know God and to glorify Him, man finds himself in a pitiful state. However, in God’s grace, his state is pitiful but not hopeless. In grace there is always an answer. God has provided Bible doctrine in grace, and if we heed the wake-up call and return to doctrine, there can be recovery. However, without doctrine, without a serious relationship with God, even the wise man has no advantage over the fool, and even the poor man, who lacks the distractions of riches, honor and wealth, has no advantage. All the advantages belong to God and to those who follow Him. **Ecclesiastes 6:8** says, “For what advantage does the wise man have

over the fool? [The answer, none] What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?”

Even if the poor man can walk with charisma and confidence, he has nothing over the man who is depressed, because he has no capacity to enjoy the blessings of God either. Solomon says nothing satisfies either man, and they both go to the same place. By the time Solomon gets to verse 9, he is literally saying, stop dreaming! Stop adding those additional details that you think can put color in a life that's grim. Having many children, many wives, longer work hours, additional years, more money, a better car, a better home, etc., none of it will work. None of it will satisfy the soul living under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 6:9. “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.” Solomon is saying, wake up to reality, face the music, what your eyes see is better than all the dreams that you're hoping for. He is saying in effect, don't reach for the stars. While there's nothing wrong with dreaming, at times you need to face the facts. Don't think by imagining positive thoughts that suddenly your life will become something positive. Face the truth: You need God!

The real lesson behind verse 9 is this, what the soul desires many times is some unattainable goal or something that can never be achieved. This is where many people waste their time. They try to achieve something that they can never attain. Solomon says that this useless, fruitless search for things that we will never possess is futility and chasing after the wind. We need to stop dreaming about what we don't have and start to become content with what we do have. Dreams can give us goals to strive for, but they cannot fill empty stomachs, pay outstanding bills, and provide lasting satisfaction. We will never begin to discover contentment until we face reality. Solomon makes some observations as he speaks to us in this self-portrait. **Ecclesiastes 6:10** says, “Whatever exists has already been named.”

First observation: God is sovereign. You see, at the heart of this struggle is a theological issue. It's an issue concerning the living God. Is He in charge and in control or is He not? Do you realize that there is no panic in heaven, even though the present state of this earth seems to be in a panic? If we could take a trip to heaven right now,

we would be stunned at how calm things are around the throne of God, and how God has everything on earth under control.

One poet put it like this:

*Not till the world is silent,
And the shuttle cease to fly,
Will God unroll His pattern,
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful,
In the weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and scarlet,
In the pattern He has planned!*

From down here on planet Earth we see the underside of this beautiful tapestry. We see knots, twisted threads, and frayed ends. Often, the pattern is confusing, and we think it's not a very pretty picture, but from God's perspective, everything is under control. You may doubt that when the foreigner invades, or when things seem to go wrong for no obvious reason. But in every circumstance, there is one thing that you should remember: God is sovereign, and He has everything under control. Sovereignty means that God is supreme in rule and has authority over all things. There is no higher authority in the universe than God. This is why we read in Isaiah 46:10, "He declares the end from the beginning and from eternity past things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'"

That, my friends, is sovereignty. It is also important to remember, however, that God will never use His sovereignty to coerce human volition. God honors your decisions, whether they are for Him or against Him. Therefore, we cannot blame God for anything that happens. The sovereign will of God for mankind is expressed entirely in one verse in the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:4, "God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." And the very fact that all men are not saved, and that all believers do not come unto the knowledge of the truth, reveals that although God is sovereign, He will not violate or coerce human volition. Ecclesiastes 6:10 says, "Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is [who knows man? God does]; for he [man] cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is."

Solomon actually points to the creation of the human race. What man actually is, Solomon claims, is revealed by the name he was given, Adam. Man was called Adam because he was formed out of the dust (or dirt) of the ground (Gen 2:7). The point that Solomon is making is this: How can any such frail being, having such a humble origin, ever dare to attempt to strive with God or contend with Him? Paul put it another way, God is the potter and we are the clay.

Romans 9:20-21. “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?”

Isaiah 45:9-12. “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’ Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’ Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: ‘Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, and you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands, and I ordained all their host.” Daniel 4:35 also says, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He [God] does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’”

How many times have believers uttered, what have you done? from a gravesite? How often has the same phrase come out of a hospital room? How often, after the defects in a birth are discovered, has the cry come, what have you done, or why are you doing this? God would say, “I have done My will!”

Here is another of Solomon’s observations: disputing with God is a waste of time and effort. To argue with God is to argue with the very power that makes it possible to argue at all. We all must think about our adversities from God’s viewpoint. Who, rationally, on this earth finds it worth his time and effort to shake his fist in the face of God? Yet, such fist-shakers exist everywhere.

Ecclesiastes 6:11. “For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?” As long as you fight the hand of God by murmuring and complaining, you do not learn

the lessons that God has for you. Everything that touches you comes through the hands of your heavenly Father, who continues to love you. It is He who maintains charge of your life, and who continues to be totally responsible; He is never irresponsible. You may not understand why things are happening as they are, but you need to trust that the potter is doing to the clay what needs to be done, as Job said chapter 13 verse 15, “Though He slay me, I will trust in Him.”

Solomon is saying that it’s futility for you to fight against the sovereign hand of God and he’s right. When we find ourselves getting anxious in life, it is always because we have made our ego too big and our God too small. Solomon really drives it all home with two questions in verse 12. The first question is found in **Ecclesiastes 6:12a**, “For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow”.

Think of how many times we have said, if I could only have that, live there, make that, have this, etc., it would bring me peace; only to find that when you do make it, and live and work and have it, it never provides what you were looking for, it doesn’t satisfy. We have all disputed with God, fought with God, and God has graciously tolerated us in our travails, meeting us at the end to say, “I’m working on your life; don’t fight Me.” Paul put it this way in Philippians 1:6, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” The Philippians further write in chapter 2 verse 13 to 14, “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”

Solomon’s second question is found in **Ecclesiastes 6:12b**, “For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?” Who knows what the future holds, where you’re going to be ten years from now, what you’re going to be doing, what you’re going to have or when death may hit? Only God does.

James 4:13-15. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’”

Only God knows your future. If you are in fellowship with Him, He will prepare you for the future as a loving father tries to prepare his

children. The point is that no one is able to discern what is coming in the future. The next turn of the road of life will be completely hidden from us. Solomon asks in the conclusion of chapter 6, why should man make extensive preparations, like acquiring wealth and riches, if he has absolutely no knowledge of what the future holds? In the future, you may require patience, but you were too busy acquiring the things of this world. You may require strength of character, but all you have is a large fortune. You may need the certainty of divine hope and confidence, but you built your hope on the uncertainty of riches. None of us knows what we're going to need in the future, except God. You will never be prepared for the future until you work closely with God and His plan for your life. This involves more than hearing the right information. During the Sermon on the Mount, when the Lord was drawing the message to a close, He made an interesting observation. Matthew 7:24-28 says, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall." The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching."

Notice the difference between those who can handle the rain, the floods, and the winds, and those who can't. One group applied what they heard and the other group did not. They both heard the same message but one group applied that message to their lives. The difference was not in the hearing but in the acting. Those who apply the Word of God will be prepared for the future, whatever it may hold.

CHAPTER 15

The Sixth Experiment: Building a Reputation

(Ecclesiastes 7:1-24)

There is a very important principle that is found throughout the next six chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is, “wisdom comes in various ways, but never quickly and never easily.” By chapter 7, Solomon has lost his youth, youth is always stolen by wisdom. One writer put it like this:

*When I have ceased to break my wings,
Against the faultiness of things,
And learned that compromises wait,
Behind each hardly open gate,
When I can look life in the eyes,
Grown calm and very wise,
Life will have given me the truth,
and taken in exchange . . . my youth.*

So it happened to Solomon. As we begin to read the second half of Ecclesiastes the man’s journal becomes a little bit different. There’s still the mention of life under the sun; he says that no less than eleven times in the latter half of this book. But now a new word appears, one which was seldom used in the first half of Ecclesiastes. Solomon uses the words *wise* and *wisdom* over thirty times in Ecclesiastes 7-12.

Through all of his searching, all of his labor, all of his striving and all of his resultant emptiness, Solomon found wisdom. The beginning of chapter 7 reads like a section out of the book of Proverbs. A proverb is a brief or a wise saying that helps us handle life. It’s always brief,

simple, and always insightful. In chapter 7 Solomon gives us at least seven comparative proverbs.

Chapter 7 verse 1 marks the beginning of Solomon's sixth experiment. Solomon thought that building a reputation would give him happiness. Although this experiment taught him a lot, he will tell us in the end that even a good reputation or being well spoken of by others will not fill that void that only God can fill. **Ecclesiastes 7:1** says, "A good name is better than a good ointment [or an expensive perfume]."

The Bible must be interpreted in the times in which it was written. In the ancient world many people did not practice the modern concepts of hygiene. They did not take baths or showers daily like we do. Pure water was scarce, so they drank it rather than clean themselves with it, and this was also true of their clothes. In the ancient world, they had a very simple system: they would wear a garment until it was covered with various types of sauces and greases and salad dressings and until they couldn't stand it anymore and no one else could either! At that point they took it off and threw it away and bought a new robe, and they put that new robe over a very unclean body. If you could afford to, you would use ointments and perfumes to cover your body odor. In the ancient world these precious ointments were very expensive and valuable. Their ingredients came all the way from India and China and parts of Africa. So when Solomon says that a good name is better than a good ointment, he is talking about something of value and something that was attractive to the rest of the human race. In fact, when a wealthy person who had covered himself with perfume would walk down the street, the people liked to walk behind him just to sniff. The ointments of the ancient world made a person very attractive.

A good name is attached to a person who has influence and an excellent reputation. Solomon says in verse 1 that a having a good name is better than simply smelling good! Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 22:1, "A good name is to be more desired than great riches." Nothing is more valuable to an individual than the character behind the name. What matters is not being popular with your friends or your peers, but rather your reputation before God. Luke 16:15, "And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."

Men said that our Lord was of the devil (Mat 9:34). They said He was a glutton, a drunk and that He hung out with prostitutes (Mat 11:19). They said that He blasphemed (Mat 26:65). They said in Matthew 26:66 that He deserved to be dead. In Mark 3:21, our Lord was accused of being insane. They said He was demon-possessed (Mar 3:22). In Mark 3:30, they said our Lord had an unclean spirit. They accused Him of being unpatriotic in Luke 23:2. In Luke 23:5, they accused our Lord of always stirring up trouble. They said He caused rebellion among the people (Luk 23:14). In John 7:12, they said He was a cult leader, and that He led multitudes astray. In John 8:48, they said He was a Samaritan and had a demon. In John 10:20, they said He had a demon and was insane.

If they said all this about the only perfect person to ever live, it should be obvious that it is your reputation before God that is important and not your reputation before men. The apostle Paul said to the legalistic judgmental Christians at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 4:3, "But to me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by any human court."

Nothing is more valuable to the individual than the character behind the name. That's the point of this proverb in Ecclesiastes 7:1. The next proverb is going to shock many of you because it is goes against western culture. Ecclesiastes 7:1 says, "And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth."

A Thracian tribe, the Trausi, wept for their newborn, but buried their dead with laughter and rejoicing. Our culture celebrates birthdays, but mourns death-days. Yet, this comparative proverb has it right: one's death is to be preferred to one's birth, if one has been born again. This truth is grasped by seeing the outcome of both from divine viewpoint.

Philippians 1:21-24, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions [I'm between a rock and a hard place], having the desire to depart [die] and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."

Paul is saying that if he had a choice, he would rather exit this life and be with God in eternity. When you believe what the Bible has to say about death for the believer, you have to agree with Paul. However, you do not get to choose the day of your death. The day

of your physical death is a matter of the sovereignty of God based on His omniscience, Psalm 68:19-20. He knows when it's time for you to go. And since His timing is perfect, the day of your death is the best time for you. Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." (KJV)

When believers die, they have no appointment with judgment. They will not be judged or condemned (Rom 8:1). Hebrews 9:27-28 teaches that death is a terror to the unbeliever. At death, the believer, however, will be face to face with the Lord (2 Co 5:8). What's better, the day of your birth, when you were face to face with a strange doctor and relatives, or the day of your death, when you will be face to face with Him who loved you and gave Himself for you? Revelation 21:4 teaches that there is no pain, sorrow, or embarrassment beyond the grave, (except for a brief moment of shame for the loser-believer at the judgment seat of Christ). No human language can describe the fantastic blessings in heaven. No joy in this life can compare with the inexpressible happiness that we will enjoy in heaven.

Isaiah 57:1-2. "The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; And devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil, He enters into peace; They rest in their beds, Each one who walked in his upright way." Why would we want loved ones to stay on earth and suffer any more than what they have been ordained to suffer?

Revelation 14:13. "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them." This of course is not true for the unbeliever such as Judas, as the Bible teaches in Matthew 26:24, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Revelation 21:8. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Verse 2 continues this theme with two more comparative proverbs. **Ecclesiastes 7:2** says, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart." The Living Bible says in Ecclesiastes 7:2, "It is better to spend your time at funerals than at festivals. For

you are going to die, and it is a good thing to think about it while there is still time” (TLB).

There are two idioms here. The house of mourning simply means to take life seriously. The house of feasting means to take life lightly. There’s a time to be serious and there’s a time to relax, but remember, Solomon is trying to find the meaning of life, and that’s a time to be serious. When trying to find answers to hard questions, such as discovering the meaning of life, visiting a funeral parlor is better than going to a banquet. A stroll in the graveyard is better than an afternoon spent at a carnival. This becomes clearer when we compare scripture with scripture.

- James 4:6-10. “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”
- James 1:1. “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.”

This Epistle was written to the born-again Jews in Jerusalem, as well as to those Jews who had been scattered throughout the Roman empire. In fact, James was the head of the first Christian church at Jerusalem, and this was probably the first book written in the New Testament (AD 45-50). At the time of the writing of this Epistle, the Jews who lived in Jerusalem were under much persecution. Jerusalem was one of the most horrible places to live in the ancient world. It was filled with religion and the resultant evil of legalism. Religion is the brainchild of Satan and it saturated Jerusalem; it was so filled with religion and legalism that the born-again Jews in the city had been persecuted and contaminated by it. In fact, the Lord was about to destroy the city by the hand of Titus in AD 70. In Jerusalem, Christianity was in great danger, and this is the background for what James writes in chapter 4. He is saying to them, stop living as though

you're not in any danger! These Jews needed to be serious and alert, not filled with laughter and joy. He was not telling them to walk around with a dark and gloomy complexion, rather he was saying that there is a time in everyone's life when they need to face facts and be prepared to meet their Maker. Sometimes affliction and difficulty are good for us, there are many people who have to learn things the hard way. Isaiah 29:24 teaches that all of us learn, one way or the other: "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine" (KJV).

Many people need to have a shock or a great disaster to wake them up to what is really important in life. You can learn a lot more about life in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting and partying. Stubborn people learn only one way; they have to be hit hard, and sometimes again and again! Only after hurting badly will they finally concentrate on what the Lord is trying to say to them. God uses adverse circumstances to awaken the believer to his apostasy and to bring him to that repentance necessary for recovery. This is why you must learn to correctly evaluate the adversities in your life. You must be able to look at your own adversities objectively. If you look at them subjectively, you will blame others and enter into mental attitude sins. If you look at your adversities and become jealous, angry, bitter, reactionary, or judgmental, then you fail to learn the lessons that adversity can teach. But if you look at your adversities objectively, in the light of Bible doctrine, you will learn the great lessons that God desires to teach you. Many times you will be aware of suffering and adversity, but will not understand their fantastic implications in the overall plan of God. Much of the suffering in your life cannot be understood while you're going through it. However, God is not only faithful in blessing his people; He is also faithful in disciplining his people. He is faithful in what He withholds from us, just as He is faithful in what He gives to us. He is faithful in sending sorrow as well as joy. Therefore, the faithfulness of God is a truth to be acknowledged by us, not only when things are going great, but also when we are in great trouble.

- Psalm 119:65-68. "Thou hast dealt well with Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word. Teach me good discernment and knowledge, For I believe in Thy commandments. Before

I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Thy word. Thou art good and doest good; Teach me Thy statutes.”

- Psalm 119:71-72, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Thy statutes. The doctrine from your mouth is better to me Than thousands of gold and silver pieces.”
- Psalm 119:75. “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me.”

God is not only faithful in stopping affliction but also in sending it.

- Psalm 89:33. “Even if they sin and rebel I will not deal falsely in my faithfulness.” [Could not find the A part in any translation.]
- Hosea 5:15. “In their affliction they will seek me earnestly.” (ASV)

Life really begins at death, that’s when you will see where you’re going to spend eternity. Will you be in the lake of fire, where the worm (or the conscience) doesn’t die (Mar 9:48), or will you be in a place where there are no regrets? For those who have rejected Christ in this life, their conscience will remind them of all the times that they rejected Christ, laughed at Christians, mocked, jeered, and made fun of those who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you be in a place of torment (Luk 16:28), or in a place of no more sorrow and no more pain (Rev 21:4)? Will you be in a place where desire is never met (Luk 16:24), or will you be in a place where He will fulfill the desires of your heart? Will you be in a place of unspeakable misery indicated by the term, *everlasting fire* (Mat 25:41), or will you be in a place of perfect happiness? Will you be in a place where the fire is never quenched (Mar 9:44), or will you be with Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose eyes are a flame of fire (Rev 19:12)? Will you be in the lake of fire, a liquid form of lava which burns with fire and brimstone (Rev 21:8), or will you be drinking from the waters of life (Rev 22:1)? Will you be in a bottomless pit (Rev 9:2), or will you be standing on the solid foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ, forever and ever? Will you be in outer darkness (Mat 8:12), or will you be with the light of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever? Will you be in the place where there is no rest day or night (Rev 14:11),

or in the place of eternal rest (Rev 14:13)? The day of one's death is a very serious matter, this is why 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "Now is the time of acceptance; now is the day of salvation."

Now is the moment to be prepared for eternity by personal faith in Jesus Christ. That's why you should live your life in the light of eternity. Death is the thing that we should really be concerned with, not birth, because death determines our eternal destiny. Solomon says, "you want some real answers to life?" Go to the house of mourning; sit down, relax, fold your arms, look at that coffin, and take it to heart. Realize that that's the beginning of your life. Here's the point for all of us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ: as strange as it may sound to you, death is like a birth. You feel like you're dying, but you're really being born. You feel like you're losing everything, but you're about to gain it all.

Philip Yancey wrote in his book entitled *Where Is God When It Hurts*: "Your world is calm, safe and secure. You are bathed in warm liquid, cushioned from shock. You do nothing for yourself; you are fed automatically. A murmuring heartbeat assures you that someone larger than you are fills all your needs. Your life consists in simple waiting. You're not sure what to wait for, but any change seems far away and scary. You meet no sharp objects, no pain, no threatening adventures. It's a fine existence. One day you feel a little tug. The walls are falling in on you. Those soft cushions are now pulsing and beating against you, crushing you downwards. Your body is bent double, your limbs twisted and wrenched. You're falling, upside down. For the first time in your life, you feel pain. You're in a sea of rolling matter. There is more pressure, almost too intense to bear. Your head is squeezed flat, and you are pushed harder, harder into a dark tunnel. Oh the pain. Noise. More pressure. You hurt all over. You hear a groaning sound and an awful, sudden fear rushes in on you. It is happening—your world is collapsing. You're sure it's the end. You see a piercing blind light. Cold, rough hands pull at you. A painful slap. Waaahhh! *'Congratulations! You've just been born.'*"

Death is very much like that, for many, death is a scary tunnel that they're being sucked toward by a powerful force. None of us really look forward to it, most people are afraid of it. It's full of pressure and pain, darkness and the unknown. Beyond the darkness and the pain, there's a whole new world. When we wake up after death in that bright new world, our tears and hurts will be mere memories,

which will eventually be wiped away. However, the only person who needs to be frightened of it is the one who is not ready for it. This is an extremely important point because you're not really ready to live until you're ready to die. If you're not ready to die, you really ought to take Solomon's words seriously: "The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting." It is written in **Ecclesiastes 7:3-4**, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may [still] be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure."

When listening to a foolish joke, our thinking becomes shallow, Ephesians 5:4, "There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." Another translation: Ephesians 5:4, "Dirty stories, foul talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, remind each other of God's goodness, and be thankful" (TLB).

There may be a quick laugh but it's amazing how quickly it is forgotten. However, we don't forget a stroll through a graveyard, you learn there. Words fail you as you quietly move from one stone to another. A pastor seldom has a more attentive audience than at a funeral service; people really listen then. Death can give you wisdom, which is why after a funeral many families experience some sort of reconciliation where there was enmity before. If you were to get a terminal disease you would be amazed at how differently you would spend your time, and what would happen to your conversations also. Paul put it like this in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "For our light affliction which is only for a moment, is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Open your eyes to the fact that there are tremendous blessings that come from times of difficulty, heartache, and sorrow. Peter put it like this in 1 Peter 1:6-7, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

There are many things that we must face as members of the royal family of God and as His children. We are in a training school

from heaven and we learn from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ the importance of going through sorrow and suffering at times. Sorrow and adversity strengthen us and make us stronger. Hebrews 5:8 says, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

Have you ever been hated and ostracized and insulted as you’re living in the PPOG for your life? Luke 6:22-23 says, “Happiness belongs to you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.”

In Acts 5:41, the early Christians considered it a privilege to suffer shame and embarrassment because of their relationship with God, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”

By the way, the council represented the religious self-righteous group of that day, the ones who always attack those who communicate and support Bible doctrine. Second Corinthians 12:9-10 makes its point, “And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” The meaning is taken further in James 1:12, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Most of us don’t look at life from the divine viewpoint. We think that a life without problems and difficulty is the ideal life. We’d rather be in *the house of pleasure* than in *the house of mourning*. However, the Bible reminds us over and over that life must have adversity, and that we will encounter discipline, but all of it is for our training to maturity; therefore, we should welcome it.

- Hebrews 12:5-11. “And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved

by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Ecclesiastes 7:5. “It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.”

There is a greater happiness in being rebuked by a wise person, than in singing with fools. We don't listen to the rebukes of the wise well enough. Sometimes that wise person is a boss who tells us we are not doing our job. Sometimes the wise person is a parent who pulls us up nose-to-nose and tells us straight out the things we need to hear but don't want to listen to. Sometimes the wise person is the judge who pronounces a sentence against us because we have done wrong. Sometimes the wise person is a teacher of the Word of God who teaches no-nonsense truth that hits us right between the eyes. Sometimes the wise will come across to us as too straight, too strong, or too abrasive while seeming uncaring and unsympathetic. Would you rather have the song of the fool? For some, you've sung that tune too long already. It isn't time for laughter, it isn't time to create some silly little jingle, or to laugh at some silly little joke. Life's crashing in on you and it's time to wake up to wisdom.

Wisdom is a rare ingredient that never comes easily or quickly. There is no such thing as a truly wise young person. There are a lot of bright and intelligent ones who are good people, even exceptional people, but never truly wise. It takes time to become wise, it takes pain, loss, brokenness, and most of all humility, to begin to be wise. James 3:2, “For we all stumble in many ways.” None of us, therefore, are beyond needing a rebuke from time to time, but do we value it? It is naturally unpalatable, and hard to receive it from one another.

However, just like many sweet things are poison, so many bitter things are medicine. It is written in Proverbs 17:10 that “a rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.”

A rebuke to a person with humility who understands the purpose of the rebuke, will do much more than the hundred blows into a fool. Proverbs 27:5-6 says, “Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

Sometimes the best friend that we have is the one who, in a spirit of meekness and gentleness, gives us corrective advice. According to Proverbs 28:23, “He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.”

You will have more respect for the person who cares for you by telling you the truth than for the one who just shows love and lets you get away with murder. By the way, this really becomes apparent in parenthood, a parent shows so-called love to the children, letting them get away with murder, and then the children grow up and have no respect for that parent they have been allowed to manipulate. Another parent metes out discipline, which is true love, and hurts the child when necessary, and the child grows up with tremendous respect for that parent. We all need to humbly receive the rebukes of those who are wiser than we are. This open rebuke is much more valuable than the songs of fools, songs Solomon describes for us in the next verse from **Ecclesiastes 7:6**, “For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool; And this too is futility.”

In the ancient world they would do their cooking over a fire. Thornbushes could not provide heat; instead, they would just crack and pop. In other words, thorns make a lot of noise, but don't provide anything useful. Therefore the crackling of thornbushes under a pot is an idiom for something that makes a lot of noise, but does nothing useful. This is a perfect description of the fool. Fools also oppress others, and so Solomon continues in verse **7 of Ecclesiastes chapter 7**, “For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”

Let the fool who wants to oppress others continue to do so; in the end he will get what he deserves. As believers we must always leave discipline in the hands of the Lord. If we fixate on the mistreatment of others, it will eventually drive us crazy or mad. No normal person likes watching people being mistreated. However, we cannot take

the world upon our shoulders, the poor and oppressed will always exist. Our Lord taught this lesson in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. Jesus was reclining at the table when a woman with very costly perfume came in and poured it over His head. Some of the disciples were indignant, remarking to one another, why has this perfume been wasted? It could have been sold for a fortune and the money given to the poor. We read our Lord's wise rebuke: Mark 14:6-7, "But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me."

Don't get burdened by all the needs that people have and by the oppression that you see. These things will always exist; they will never go away. Moses learned this the hard way in Exodus 2:11-14, "Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down [or murdered] the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And he went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and said, "Surely the matter has become known."

Moses ended up running away for forty years because of this incident. Sometimes it's very difficult for us to stand by and watch the oppression and unjust treatment of others. However, we must be very careful. We are not God, nor are we to play God in people's lives. If you have the power to do something and you are convinced that you should, go for it, however, don't carry the burden of every injustice you witness. **Ecclesiastes 7:8** says, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning."

How many times has someone said, "If only I could have lived that part of my life over again, or if I only knew then what I know now." How many have wondered, after several years of marriage, "If I had only known what marriage was really all about." It is only at the end of something that we see what it really was. The dreams and false hopes are long gone, and at the end you see the reality, and many are unprepared for reality when it hits. With beginnings

come exciting dreams and hopes for joy and happiness. At the end of the matter, the whole story is known and the facts are evident. Often, when reality strikes, a person will sit back and wonder if it would have been better to have done things differently, or simply to have just waited for the timing of God rather than to have done things on their own.

One translation of Ecclesiastes 7:8 says, “Finishing is better than starting,” and that’s also a correct interpretation. A lot of people start things, but they neglect to finish them, we generally call these people procrastinators. Our Lord dealt with this in detail in Luke 14:26-27, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate [literally, love less] his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple [student of doctrine]. Whoever does not carry his own cross [a reference to God’s plan for your life] and come after Me cannot be My disciple [they can be saved but not be a student of doctrine].” Now, we are told that there is a cost to becoming a serious student of the Word of God.

Luke 14:28-35, “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions [this means to give them up as important in your heart, not to give them away]. Therefore, salt is good [being a believer, you are the salt of the earth]; but if even salt has become tasteless [or if you do not become an invisible hero or a spiritual champion], with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Ecclesiastes 7:8. “The end of a matter is better than its beginning; [and then notice the next proverb] Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.” As you look back at your life, think of how often it would have been much better to wait. Think of that time that you wanted to blow off steam and you got angry. At the end of

the matter, you realize how much better it would have been to have remained calm rather than get angry. A believer who has a patient spirit has much wisdom. A patient spirit will listen, rather than run off at the mouth. Patience is a very important virtue for all of us, and we can all be comforted by the fact that patience is not something that we are to develop in our lives. Patience is the production of God the Spirit in the life of the believer. Patience results only from the filling of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22), it is a system of thinking, and not an emotion.

Colossians 3:12 says, "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart [right lobe] of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." A patient person will be slow to anger. Let's note in the book of Proverbs the lessons Solomon learned about patience. Patience will give us the power and the gracious system of thinking to have great understanding and sensitivity toward others, Proverbs 14:29, "He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly."

Patience with others will also help us resolve and reconcile differences, Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention."

Patience is also a virtue which gives the believer fantastic strength under pressure, Proverbs 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city."

Patience will also allow us to be discreet and overlook the sins of others, Proverbs 19:11, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression."

When you're patient with people, you do not hold them accountable for the wrongs they have done against you. Patience allows us to rest in the Lord and let the Supreme Court Judge handle any unfair or unjust treatment, Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes."

If someone is carrying out wicked schemes against you, be patient, and relax because the Lord has everything under control. Patience gives us the strength and power to handle undeserved suffering and mistreatment and to bring glory to the Lord. As 1 Peter 2:19-23 says, "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure

it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

Having your doctrine and the faith-rest drill tested will give you patience. James 1:3-4 says, “Knowing that the testing of your faith [your doctrine; faith-rest drill] produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Perfect and complete, lacking nothing does not mean sinless perfection; it means maturity and contentment. Pastors are told that they must have extreme patience with members of their congregation. The pastor needs patience because even though he may teach accurate doctrine for years, he will still have parishioners who reject or neglect it. He is commanded to have patience and to not get discouraged. According to 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

Patience is also needed concerning the promises of God. Hebrews 6:12, “That you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And in Hebrews 6:15, “And thus, having patiently waited, he [Abraham] obtained the promise.”

Patience is also needed after you have done all that you are supposed to do and things in your life still have not changed. Hebrews 10:36, “For you have need of patience, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”

Patience also allows us to put up with each other as we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4:2, “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love,” and in **Ecclesiastes 7:9**, “Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.”

In contrast to the virtue of patience, anger is a mental attitude sin. As a mental attitude sin, anger expresses antagonism, hatred, resentment, and irrationality. It can be mental or emotional or

both. Anger is a sin that motivates honor code violations like gossip, judging, and maligning others. Most sins can lead to chain-sinning, and this is especially true of anger. If it is unjustifiable, anger is a mental attitude reaction of antagonism. Justifiable reaction is never irrational. In our passage, anger is related to stupidity since it resides in the bosom of fools. Satan had anger and it turned a genius into a fool; anger turns any person into a stupid fool. A person is never smart when he is angry, which is why many stupid and embarrassing things are said in anger. If you have to deal with some problem, if you must have your senses about you, it is important that you don't lose your temper. Solomon has many things to say concerning the subject of anger.

Jealousy produces anger in a person, as expounded in Proverbs 6:34-35, "For jealousy enrages a man, and he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be content though you give many gifts."

This means that an angry, jealous person will have no mercy as he takes revenge. Jealousy causes anger, and then the anger leads to revenge. This is why angry people love to inflict injury upon others. They love to hurt others because it pacifies their anger. In fact, in their anger, they even think that they are getting even for something that most of the time they have only imagined. Solomon also says that an angry, quick-tempered person acts foolishly. According to Proverbs 14:17, "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated."

This means that an angry person and one who plans evil are both alike.

Anger can be stirred up through the sins of the tongue, Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Many individuals are not careful about what they say; and therefore, they stir up anger in others. In fact, when a person is angry and they want to recruit other people to their cause, they will use the sins of the tongue to do so. An angry person also stirs up strife and dissensions, Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention."

Anger is also the reason why people try to dig up or invent evil about others, Proverbs 16:27, "A worthless [or ungodly] man digs up evil, while his words are as a scorching fire."

Notice that the ungodly man's words are as a scorching fire because his brain, which is filled with mental attitude sins, controls

his tongue, therefore, his words are set on fire by the anger in his soul, and he *digs up* evil. The Hebrew word for *digs up* is *karah*, which means to devise evil for the purpose of destroying someone, it also is used in Psalm 119:85, “The arrogant have dug pits for me, men who are not in accord with your doctrine.”

Anger is the reason why people try to dig up or invent evil about others. A person who is slow to anger is better than the mighty in life, Proverbs 16:32, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”

Therefore, self-control, which is a virtue developed from life in the pre-designed plan of God, gives the believer fantastic strength and poise under pressure. In fact, Solomon tells us that wisdom makes a person slow to anger, able to overlook faults in others, as stated in Proverbs 19:11, “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.”

We are also told that anger brings on punishment to self, and therefore, it is a form of self-induced misery, Proverbs 19:19, “A man of great anger shall bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.”

If you fail to interpret history or your circumstances correctly, you will become frustrated, and then angry, which results in self-induced misery.

Anger also causes misery to those in your periphery, Proverbs 21:9, “It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious [or angry] woman.” The Taylor translation says, “It is better to live in the corner of an attic than with a crabby woman in a lovely home.” Proverbs 21:19 further says, “It is better to live in a desert land, than with a contentious [bitter-tongued] and vexing [or angry] woman.”

The Bible also teaches that those who ridicule and criticize are controlled by anger, Proverbs 22:10, “Drive out the scoffer, and contention [or anger] will go out, even strife and dishonor will cease.” Therefore, we are told to separate from angry people, Proverbs 22:24, “Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man.” The reason is given in Proverbs 22:25, “lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself.”

Angry people pass on their anger to others; therefore, you should not have fellowship or make friends with a person given over to anger. An angry person is said to be a whisperer, contentious, and to have burning lips. He has a wicked heart filled with hate, flattery, deceit,

lies and a flattering mouth (Pro 26:20-28). Proverbs 26:20-22 says, “For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.” This means that you should be very careful what you listen to. You may not think that angry words will affect you, but it will go down into the innermost parts of your being and surface at a future time. Proverbs 26:23-28 goes on to say, “Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”

The Bible also teaches that it is impossible to restrain an angry person, in Proverbs 27:15-16 we find, “A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious [angry] woman are alike; He who would [try to] restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.”

Anger, losing your temper, results from a lack of wisdom, Proverbs 29:11, “A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.” This tells us that we all have a temper, but we need to control it, rather than have it controlling us. Anger, be it emotional (which is usually easily detected), or a mental attitude, (which is frequently hidden), is never an isolated sin says Proverbs 29:22, “An angry person stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered person abounds in transgression.”

Many individuals cause problems and stir up trouble simply because they have some form of anger within them. They are simply looking for someone to blame for their anger, and usually their anger is related to the fact that they have not succeeded in life; therefore, they get angry with those whom they imagine are in their way. This is why Solomon tells us that anger resides in the bosom of fools. When you see a person spouting off with anger, you are looking at a fool. If someone has told you something in a fit of anger, forget it; those words just came from a fool or someone acting like a fool. We learn nothing when we're angry, and we learn nothing from others

when they're angry. On the other hand, there is such a thing as righteous indignation, but that is not an emotional anger. Righteous indignation means we respond to unfair treatment by concentrating on our relationship with God. It is a correct assessment of a wrong and includes not appreciating it at all. The Lord Jesus Christ expressed what might be called righteous indignation in Matthew 23:13-36 against the scribes and Pharisees. He wasn't angry when He chewed them out, but rather expressed righteous indignation. **Ecclesiastes 7:10** advises, "Do not say, 'Why is it that the former days were better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this."

Many people long for the good old days and reminisce about the way things used to be. Older people long to be young again. However, what many fail to recognize is that those good old days created these bad new days. Ten years from now, today will be one of those good old days that you will long for, so why not long for today right now? Some people wish they had been born in a different generation because they think that things weren't as bad then as they are now. These people falsely think that a past generation was better than the present one. But according to the Bible, no generation is the good old days. Every generation has been depraved and filled with problems. All generations, past and future, are in desperate need of God's instruction and grace, without which they would self-destruct. Very simply, there is no such thing as the good old days because every generation consists of men's lives, and the Bible says that every man is totally degenerate. God says that there is not even one righteous man among mankind. Romans 3:10 as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one."

Romans 3:13-14 says, "Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Man is described for us by God in Isaiah 1:5-6, "The whole head is sick, And the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, Only bruises, welts, and raw wounds." Thinking that the former days were better than these keeps you living in the past, and that means you are going in the wrong direction. The Bible teaches us to press on to the things ahead (Phil 3:13). Isaiah 43:18 also says, "Do not call to mind the former things, Or ponder things of the past." The NIV puts it like this "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." God tells us what He's going to do in the future in Isaiah

65:17, “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

Notice what Solomon concludes in verse 10: “For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.” The former days, or the past, may seem to be better in our memory because we have a tendency to remember the good times and to forget the bad. On the other hand, we recoil from the suffering we face now.

C. S. Lewis aptly describes this tendency in his book *The Problem of Pain*: “We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven— . . . whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, “a good time was had by all.” . . . I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don’t, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction. . . . The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble [or baffling] so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love,” and look on things as if man were the centre of them. Man is not the centre.”

That’s God’s wisdom. You may look at some tragedy that took place in the past and think that it was a terrible thing, when in reality it made you a better and stronger person. God allowed that tragedy out of His love. Verse 10 is directed against those who are dissatisfied with the present and who forget their present blessings, while they exaggerate present evils. A lot of men think that others have it so much better than they do. A lot of women wish they could have a husband like so and so, when so and so is just a phony who appears to be something, overtly, that he is not, inwardly. One thing that Solomon surely had in mind is the fact that many of God’s people are implacable, unthankful and ungrateful, not appreciating what God in His wisdom has done for them.

Ecclesiastes 7:11. “Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun.” What Solomon is saying is that if you have children and you give them Bible doctrine along with providing for them, they may go astray but they will come back to it.

Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.” The phrase “when he is old” means the child may have to grow to middle-aged or older before he gets back to doctrine, but he will return. Some who were brought

up in a home that taught the Word of God are going to realize that while many of their friends had more material things than they did, they in fact had something far better. They had a parent or parents who prepared them for life by giving them what was really important: God's viewpoint on how to handle life. Solomon, out of fellowship for years, started to recall the things that his father, David, taught him. Through bitter trial, he had discovered things that were true about life, and these discoveries lined up with doctrines he had learned as a child. The older you get, the more you're going to find out that your parents were right! If parents are faithful in teaching doctrine to their children, and they have the opportunity to provide for them some form of inheritance, that's a wonderful blessing. However, doctrine is the most important thing you can leave to your children, and doctrine doesn't cost a thing except your time and dedication. In their youth, your children may not look like they're going to amount to much, but if you persist in teaching them Bible doctrine, and you stick with it yourself, it will pay off in the end. You may not even live to see it, but it will pay off. Ephesians 6:4, "Parents, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Notice what Solomon said about his father David in Proverbs 4:1-13, "Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commands [my doctrines] and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her [wisdom], and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom [or the beginning of becoming wise is to acquire doctrine]; And with all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty. Hear, my son, and accept my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths. When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; And if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold of doctrine; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life."

The primary responsibility of Christian parents is to inculcate their child with Bible doctrine. This is the greatest responsibility and opportunity for a parent.

The Lord said to Moses in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

It may not take now, but if you keep on teaching them and inculcating them with doctrine, the time will come when they will come back to doctrine. However, if a parent teaches a child the importance of doctrine and of having a relationship with God, but is not faithful to this teaching themselves, then the teaching will not be as effective.

Ecclesiastes 7:12. “For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.” Solomon compares doctrine to money because doctrine is orientation to life, just as is the proper use of money. Knowing how to use both is profitable and advantageous. However, between the two, it is wisdom that will continually preserve our lives from human pitfalls; money is always only a temporary aid. Money is certainly a protection, but money can be gained and it can be lost. The advantage to wisdom is that it remains, and it preserves our lives at all times. Wealth gained from wisdom is a wonderful blessing, but wisdom received from God is far better. This is not the wisdom from below, which is called earthly wisdom in James 3:14-15, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.”

Wisdom from God is the greatest thing we could ever possess, while earthly wisdom is natural and demonic. God’s wisdom has warnings. This wisdom keeps the spirit humble, it teaches us how to handle and value money. It can preserve our lives from human pitfalls such as pride and doubt. Wisdom tells us that God loves us no matter what, and that, whatever we go through, our loving Father has designed it for our own benefit. Most believers are happy when in prosperity and miserable in adversity, but both are from the hand of God. Sometimes adversity becomes the best thing that ever happens to us. Remember, it was when the prodigal son was at the lowest point

of his life that he came to himself. Luke 15:17-18 says, “But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight.”

Every prodigal has times of temporary insanity. It is not until the wisdom of God begins to break through, like rays of light that their sanity is going to return. For this reason, when you pray for that loved one or family member who is a prodigal, you should pray that the wisdom of God would break in upon them because you cannot make it happen yourself. Even God’s wisdom dawns on them; many times their arrogance won’t allow them to admit that they were wrong and they end up digging a deeper pit for themselves. Arrogance is self-induced misery.

Psalms 7:15. “He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made.”

In Ecclesiastes 7:13, notice also that wisdom provides our lives with divine perspective.

Ecclesiastes 7:13. “Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent?”

The work of God is always a matter of grace. Consider His work in salvation: God sent His Son so that He would die for our sins. God did all the work in salvation, so that whosoever believes in Christ shall never perish but have eternal life. Consider God’s providence: He has provided for us in time everything that we could ever need. He has provided God the Holy Spirit, promises and doctrines in His word, which give us great peace, joy, and blessing in this life. He has also provided for us in eternity by preparing for us an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and which will never fade away. This inheritance is reserved in heaven for us who are kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. At our death, we will be absent from the body, face to face with the Lord. There will be no more sorrow, no more tears, no more pain, and no more death, for the old things have passed away. God has done everything, in both time and eternity, perfectly. What God does is perfect because God is perfect. God has provided for us a perfect happiness and a perfect orientation in every facet of His plan. Therefore, Solomon says, consider the work of God. If we are ever going to get properly oriented to life as believers and develop God’s happiness we must start by considering the work of

God as it is revealed in Bible doctrine. The Word of God gives us the wisdom to comprehend the work of God, and when that happens, our lives are filled with divine perspective. Even when life gets tough and it seems as if the bottom is about to drop out, if we consider His work we know that He will deliver us. Considering His work means to put God in the center of every part of our life. His work is perfect and no one can straighten what He has bent. In **Ecclesiastes 7:14**, it is written, “In the day of prosperity be happy [enjoy the prosperity and the blessings from God], But in the day of adversity consider—[same word as in verse 13] God has made the one as well as the other So that man may not discover anything that will be after him [in his future].”

God wants us to walk by faith, He won't show us the future. This is why we should never make a major decision in our lives without asking for the wisdom of God; and when He gives wisdom, we develop divine perspective. When we go through adversity, if we would consider it as part of the work of God, then we would submit to it as God's will and know that it is for our own benefit. The next time that you are faced with a difficult situation and the odds seem desperately against you, remember these words of 1 Samuel 12:24, “Only respect the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.”

It is very comforting to remind yourself about the great things that the Lord has done for you. If you can't recall any, start with the air that you breathe, and His work for you on the cross. When Job was going through evidence testing, and suffering to glorify God in the angelic conflict, it was Elihu who said to Job: “Listen to this, O Job, stand and consider the wonders of God” (Job 37:14).

After this, God spoke directly to Job, and in the end, Job received twice as many blessings as he had lost. Job began to consider and think of the tremendous wonders and power of God. When the disciples were concerned about their financial condition, our Lord told them a parable that taught them not to worry.

- Luke 12:24. “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!”
- Luke 12:27. “Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these.”

When the apostle Paul was going through undeserved suffering he said, in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

We are told in Hebrews 12:3 that when things go wrong and we are faced with adversity to “consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.” James reiterates the point in chapter 1 verse 2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”

In Hebrews 11:11, we are told, concerning super-grace, that what made Sarah a great woman was that “by means of doctrine resident in her soul, Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised”; Psalm 107:43 says, “Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things; And [notice this] consider the lovingkindnesses of the Lord.”

It is easy to forget the principle behind the lyrics of an old hymn, that most of us have heard at some time in our lives, which says He’s got the whole world in His hands! He’s got the little baby in His hands. He’s got all of us in His hands, which means He has a whole lot of trouble on His hands! Yet God is omnipotent and able to handle us all; it’s a simple principle but it’s easy to forget. God has everything under His control, even when it seems as though He is not there, and as though He is leaving us to our own decisions. There are times when we find it truly hard to believe that our circumstances are in His hands. Those minor interruptions and those major feelings of desperation make it difficult to believe at times that everything is under His control. Not only is everything under control, but also our circumstances will never leave His attention. Everything you think: why you think it and the environment in which you think, were all known to God in eternity past. In Luke 12:6-7, it says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Although it may not seem to some of you that your life has been perfectly blended together by God in heaven, you will understand that it was. God is perfect; and therefore, He gave you life at the exact time that He knew would be the best time, and in the best environment for you personally. He picked your parents, the color

of your skin, your gender, and your environment. God has always known everything that every person would do, and God has decreed for all these things to exist.

There was a time in the history of Israel when there were threats all around them and signs of impending destruction. The enemy could be seen on the horizon, and the danger of bondage to another people was imminent. The Jews thought that the Lord had forsaken them. This was evident in Isaiah 49:14, “But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.”

Many times that’s how God’s people feel; they pray for healing, for relief, or for financial help, but none of it comes. They pray for their children, but the children are still going astray. They pray for things to get better at home, but things only get worse. Therefore, they conclude, as Israel did, that the Lord has forsaken them, but God never forsook Israel, just like He will never forsake any of His children. The Lord said to them that He was more faithful to them than a nursing mother is to her little baby. Isaiah continues in chapter 49 verses 15 to 16, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; [He’s got the whole world in His hands] Your walls are continually before Me.”

Walls speak of the unbelievable protection around you. As Isaiah said, He has inscribed us in the palm of His hand and He has given to us wisdom, knowledge, and joy. The tragedy is that we can live our lives rejecting the wisdom of God. It is God’s wisdom that equips us to see and handle life. Wisdom is the God-given ability to see life objectively and to handle life with stability. With wisdom, there is an absence of fear no matter what the situation. With wisdom, you can handle both adversity and prosperity fantastically because you know that God sees everything. He can give you the objectivity and the stability to handle whatever you’re going through because you are protected, you’re in the palm of His hand. A perfect illustration of this is the contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom which is brought out in 1 Corinthians 2:4-6, “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of [man’s] wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature [spiritually mature]; a

wisdom, however, not of this age [not of this world], nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away.”

The Bible says that the whole world is under the deception and power of evil. First John 5:19 says, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” While in Revelation 12:9, we find, “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan deceives the whole world.” Because of these principles, the wisdom of this world makes a lot of sense to the average person who is under the power of evil and deceived by the devil. Your worldly friends will agree with evil thinking because they are under the power of evil and are deceived by the devil. That’s why Solomon says in Proverbs 13:20, “Be with wise men and become wise. Be with evil men and become evil” (Living Bible). As 1 Corinthians 2:4-8 says, “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of [man’s] wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature [spiritually mature]; a wisdom, however, not of this age [not of this world], nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

Human wisdom impresses people, but it falls flat under pressure. Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 2:4-8 that God’s wisdom is entirely different from man’s wisdom, and you can’t learn God’s wisdom in school or from experience. God’s wisdom comes as the direct result of walking with Him and abiding in His plan. He gives it to you. **Ecclesiastes 7:15** says, “I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.”

Often, it seems that the righteous perish while the wicked prosper. Upright people meet with tragedy, while wicked people meet with prosperity. This is what Solomon saw during his lifetime. His father David said the same thing in Psalm 73:12-13, “Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence.”

However, because David had received divine wisdom, he saw their end. In Psalm 73:16-19, he says, “When I pondered to understand this,

It was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!”

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed the same thing and said in chapter 12 verse 1, “Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?”

Starting in verse **16 of Ecclesiastes 7**, Solomon begins to describe for us the benefits of wisdom, none of which come naturally to even the best of humanity. He tells us, first of all, that wisdom gives us balance; secondly, that it gives us strength; and thirdly, that it gives us insight. These are not inherent human qualities; they are divine gifts.

Ecclesiastes 7:16. “Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?” This verse could appear in the freshmen dorm of every Christian school in the world. All who have not reached spiritual maturity should also heed its warning. When believers first get into Christianity, they often try to impress others and make a great effort to show how spiritual, pious, or wise they are. Many Christians have gotten a hold of just enough scripture to be dangerous. They have great zeal, talking to everyone about Christ regardless of the situation. They’re going to change the world by trying to change everyone around them. They will often push themselves on others and try to give the impression that they are not just righteous, but *excessively righteous*, and not just wise, but *overly wise*.

The Amplified Bible puts it this way in Ecclesiastes 7:16, “Be not morbidly exacting, and externally righteous overmuch, neither strive to make yourself pretentiously appear overwise, why should you get puffed up and destroy yourself with presumptuous self-sufficiency.”

This is the picture of an overzealous Christian who finds it terribly important to impress people with his righteousness and his wisdom, which in reality is only human righteousness and human wisdom. However, if you’re spiritual, then you don’t have to say a word; your thinking, speech, and action will automatically be of God and people will clamor to be around you. Excessive zeal is a violation of the royal family honor code, which in Romans 14:1 says: “Give a warm welcome to any brother who wants to join you, even though his faith is weak.

Don't criticize him for having different ideas from yours about what is right and wrong" (TLB). Our Lord warned His disciples about this in Matthew 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."

Many preachers ask their congregation if people notice that you're a Christian. They teach their congregations to be *excessively righteous and overly wise*. Don't fall into that trap, God's Word is to give us balance. If you're a member of the church of Jesus Christ, you are a member of the Royal Family of God, and you should operate in protocol, with good manners, and should not be obnoxious. So many Christians think it's up to them to change the world, and they end up turning people away from Christianity. They're trying to change everyone around them by forcing people to agree with their viewpoints. These people think they're doing all of this for the Lord, but they are not. If anything, they are an embarrassment to the Lord because they are acting like idiots. Zeal without wisdom is foolishness because it lacks doctrine. Romans 10:2 says, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge."

Verse 17 ought to be written over all the senior dorms in Christian schools.

Ecclesiastes 7:17. Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

The senior believer is sophisticated and knows the doctrine of privacy. These believers are the types that think they've heard it all before and that they have it all down pat. They don't need to be a member of a local church, nor do they need to serve the body of Christ. They are their own people. According to 1 Corinthians 1:12, "Some say I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, I am of Christ."

This type of believer doesn't submit to anyone's authority. This is the type of believer that says *I'm of Christ*, no one tells me what to do; I'm my own person; I am a rock; I do things my way. Real problems come with being spiritually independent and not being accountable for your lifestyle. Many believers rebel against legalism and religion and end up going to the opposite extreme, in which they think they'll really show the world what grace is all about. They believe they are free, but the funny thing is that they're more in bondage than anyone.

- Galatians 5:13. “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
- First Corinthians 8:9. “But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”
- First Peter 2:16. “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.”
- Second Peter 2:19. “Promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”

Solomon concludes verse 17 with, “why should you die before your time?” This is a reference to the sin unto death. The Bible teaches that you can die before the time that God has ordained and designed for you to live. Your free will does matter. Genesis 38:7 says, “But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord took his life.”

In 2 Kings chapter 20, a man was going to die because of his wickedness, and yet he ended up repenting and God gave him fifteen more years to live. “In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.”’ Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, ‘Remember now, O Lord, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And it came about before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of your father, David, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake’”’” (2 Ki 20:1-6).

Hezekiah was given an extra fifteen years because he repented. But if he had not, his life would have been cut short. Solomon put it another way in Proverbs 10:27, “Respect for the Lord prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.” **Ecclesiastes 7:18** says, “It is good that you grasp one thing, and also not let go of the other.”

In other words, don't get involved with legalism and religion, but don't get involved with licentiousness or lasciviousness (meaning loose living) either. Fall deeply in love with the Lord, but don't lose touch with reality. Take in Bible doctrine consistently, but don't spend all of your time walking around with a walkman listening to doctrine. Witness if you have the opportunity, but don't go around putting Jesus tracks on every car window. In verse 18, Solomon teaches us that there is a balance we must reach. Wisdom from Bible doctrine gives us that balance and teaches us to avoid extremes. "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, But a just weight is His delight" (Pro 11:1).

It was Reinhold Niebuhr who made that very famous statement, which says, "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

Wisdom not only gives us the balance we need, but it also provides us with strength.

Ecclesiastes 7:19. "Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city."

- Proverbs 24:5. "A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge increases power."

Ecclesiastes 7:20. "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins."

How does this fit into our subject of wisdom? Remember that Solomon, in his frantic search for happiness, is on his sixth experiment, which is building a reputation. He now realizes that it's no good having a reputation with people if you have no reputation with God. What good is it to have a reputation with men when there isn't one of them who is righteous? Even the best of believers are imperfect. God says that there is not even one righteous man among mankind in Romans 3:10-18, "In the eyes of God, the best man is only vanity." While in Psalm 39:5b, "Surely every man at his best is nothing but vanity."

Even man's good deeds are said to be filthy dirty rags as indicated in Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment."

Man's head is described for us by God in Isaiah 1:5-6, "The whole head is sick, And the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot

even to the head There is nothing sound in it, Only bruises, welts, and raw wounds”

Man’s heart is described for us in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”

Given man’s condition, there is absolutely no way that God can have any respect for us. This is why the apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”

Wisdom teaches us the truth about human nature. Wisdom gives each of us the strength to accept life’s imperfections. If you’re a perfectionist, you’ve got problems, and if you live with a perfectionist, God help you! The more you grow in wisdom, the more you will learn how to accept those imperfections that you must deal with on a daily basis. For example, divine wisdom teaches us that our children have an old sin nature, which means they sin. We have to learn to handle this behavior wisely. We have to learn to live with the fact that they are sinners just like we are, and so they’re going to let us down from time to time. Divine wisdom gives us the ability to accept that, and to be understanding, rather than to freak out, when faced with failure.

Solomon begins to discard the notion that you have to have a great reputation, or that success in the world will make you happy. Being successful, having people notice you’re successful, or even feeling successful will not bring you happiness. Solomon discovers that while he has been pursuing reputation and success, he has been missing out on fellowship with God. And since God is the only source of happiness, happiness has eluded him. Solomon discovered in verse 20 that no matter how good your reputation is with people, it is meaningless. He did all he could to establish a good reputation with people, only to discover it was all useless. Unless you have a good reputation with God, you have no reputation. Reputation with man is worthless. In Philippians 2:7, we find, “but He (TLJC) made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men” (NKJ).

- Galatians 2:1-6. “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. But not even Titus who was with

me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.”

- Proverbs 9:12. “If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, and if you scoff, you alone will bear it.”
- Psalm 4:8. “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety.”

Most of the problems that you face in life you will face alone. Therefore, you are to derive your strength from within, not from without. In order to solve your problems you must be spiritually self-sustained. Being spiritually self-sustained means that you value your reputation with God more than your reputation with men. It is then that you can say with the apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phi 4:13). Paul didn’t say that he could do all things through people, or through the “body of Christ,” but through Jesus Christ.

- Hebrews 13:5-6 says, “Be content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” So that we confidently say, “the Lord is my helper [not people], I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?” People will leave you and forsake you, but the Lord will not. He is eternally your helper, and so it is your reputation with God that counts—not your reputation with men. The Lord Jesus Christ definitely did not think much of man’s reputation!
- John 2:23-25 says, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man.”

As you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you learn long before maturity, that people are generally

undependable, unreliable, irresponsible, stupid, never have the facts, run off with their mouths, and are generally no damn good. It's your reputation with the Lord that is important. And your reputation with the Lord doesn't have a thing to do with other people. It has to do with the amount of doctrine in your soul. People will come along as tests, distractions, and sometimes with encouragement; but in the final analysis if you are to ever reach spiritual maturity, one thing that you must shed in a hurry is concern about public opinion. What other people think about you, or are saying about you, is of absolutely no consequence whatsoever.

Of course, people won't understand that attitude. They will be highly insulted or incensed that you have not consulted with them, or that you haven't considered their opinion. They will be perplexed as to why you haven't given attention to their ponderous wisdom. But when you have maximum doctrine at spiritual maturity, one thing you will understand is that it's always between you and the Lord and no one else. Even though there may be a lot of people who have their own opinions about what's happening in your life, you answer to God only.

David made a decision that resulted in people dying like flies and he made this statement about it in Psalm 51:4, "Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight."

He understood the justice of God, and he understood the issue so well that he didn't go into any of the usual hysterics and guilt that most individuals would have gone through. There was none of that phony breast-beating about all the poor people who got hurt along the way. Instead, he appealed to the justice of God. As you advance in your spiritual life, you will make your own mistakes, and you will not become involved in the failures of others. You will be concerned about your reputation with God, not your reputation with man. Shakespeare once said, "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving." Montaigne said, "How many virtuous men have we seen to survive their own reputation?"

So if your honor depends on your reputation and public opinion, then you will end up striving every day to try to please the public, a group of individuals who are unstable themselves, and who will love you today and hate you tomorrow. Therefore, the one who is concerned with his reputation with people will have great anxiety while trying to retain that reputation. The public is unstable, unsure,

easily swayed, and deceived, as well as erratic. If a reputation is not carefully preserved, it dies quickly.

We have noted thus far the following principles concerning wisdom:

1. Wisdom gives us balance, Ecclesiastes 7:16-18.
2. Wisdom gives us strength, Ecclesiastes 7:19.
3. Wisdom allows us to accept the imperfections of life, Ecclesiastes 7:20.

The fourth principle about wisdom appears in verse 21.

4. Wisdom gives us the strength to overlook the faults of others, Ecclesiastes 7:21.

Ecclesiastes 7:21. “Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.” Now, the word “also” is used for a continuation of verse 20, which says in effect that we all sin and stumble. Therefore, we sometimes say things we should not have said, and don’t even mean, but because of our corrupt nature we do so anyway. Solomon instructs us not to take everything that someone says about you too seriously or to heart. Sometimes people say things without thinking. Sometimes people say things they don’t mean. Sometimes people have a difficult time expressing themselves and they say things that are stupid. Sometimes people say things from their emotions, which cannot think.

The word *servant* is the noun *abdakaa*, which speaks of someone who lives with you and knows you very well. This refers to the fact that someone close to you may say something negative about you that he didn’t really mean. Solomon says, “So what?” He could be a good friend having a rough day and his sin nature could have control of him for a time. And it is not as if you were immune. How many of you can say you don’t stumble with what you say and you control your tongue and body? None of us could actually say that. We all stumble at times in what we say. James 3:2 says, “For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”

Because there is not a just man or a righteous man in all the earth (verse 20), don’t let the negative things that people say about you (verse

21) get to you, even if they're your friends. We all make mistakes; even the wise and doctrinal man or woman sins. And when they do, they are out of fellowship with God, in which case wisdom has forsaken them and does not protect them. However, wisdom again proves itself a means of defense as the person rebounds and recovers. Wisdom from doctrine gives us the strength to overlook the faults of others.

- Proverbs 10:12. "Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions."
- Proverbs 19:11. "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression."
- Proverbs 17:9. "He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends." Sometimes intimate friendships are hurt because one friend just has to bring up the other friend's sins, failures, or faults.

There is also another meaning behind verse 21. Wisdom also gives you strength to restrain yourself from gullibility and flattery when you *don't take seriously all words that are spoken*.

Wisdom also gives us the strength to avoid the pitfalls of flattery and gullibility. This is true for women as well as men. Men will flatter women for what they can get. Solomon would say, "don't take them seriously." And Solomon would know, for he was a master at this. In fact, we have Master Solomon (Sir Wolf, if you will) in action in his love letter to a woman that he couldn't have. She is called the Shulammite woman, a dark skinned, beautiful woman who kept herself for the man she loved, who was just a shepherd. But Sir Wolf tempted this woman with everything. He gave her all the money, jewelry, chariots, boats, and gold that she could ever imagine. Solomon went berserk trying to gain her heart, yet she refused his flattery with the power of wisdom. In Song of Solomon chapter 4, we can see Sir Wolf in action.

Solomon 4:1-11. "How beautiful you are, my darling, How beautiful you are! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil; Your hair is like a flock of goats That have descended from Mount Gilead. "Your teeth are like a flock of newly shorn ewes Which have come up from their washing, All of which bear twins, And not one among them has lost her young. "Your lips are like a scarlet thread, And your mouth is lovely.

Your temples are like a slice of a pomegranate Behind your veil. “Your neck is like the tower of David Built with rows of stones, On which are hung a thousand shields, All the round shields of the mighty men. “Your two breasts are like two fawns, Twins of a gazelle, Which feed among the lilies. “Until the cool of the day When the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh And to the hill of frankincense. “You are altogether beautiful, my darling, And there is no blemish in you. “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, May you come with me from Lebanon. Journey down from the summit of Amana, From the summit of Senir and Hermon, From the dens of lions, From the mountains of leopards. “You have made my heart beat faster, my sister, my bride; You have made my heart beat faster with a single glance of your eyes, With a single strand of your necklace. “How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, And the fragrance of your oils Than all kinds of spices! “Your lips, my bride, drip honey; Honey and milk are under your tongue, And the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.”

But the Shulammite woman had wisdom, and wisdom has a filtering system that rejects the flattery and the praise of men. Wisdom gives us the strength to ignore flattery. Every believer should be wary of flattery and praise from people.

Psalm 5:9. “There is nothing reliable in what they say; Their inward part is destruction; Their throat is an open grave; They flatter with their tongue.” In this passage, “flatter” is the Hebrew verb *chalaq* which means to be smooth with your speech, or to form and create deceit with the mouth through compliments. A flatterer is said to be a beast that bites while smiling. The flatterer loves to praise excessively for self-interests or self-promotion; and therefore, he is smooth. Another example is in Psalm 55:21, “His speech was smoother than butter, But his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords.”

David warned Solomon about the female flatterer in the book of Proverbs. “For wisdom will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverse things; From those who leave the paths of uprightness, To

walk in the ways of darkness; Who delight in doing evil, And rejoice in the perversity of evil; Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways; To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words” (Pro 2:10-16).

There is probably no one more vulnerable in the world than the male under the flattery of a female. He is so arrogant that he actually believes everything that she says. Meanwhile, she’s as dumb as a fox. In Proverbs 7, David told Solomon and all men to beware of the female flatterer who compliments and praises you!

Proverbs 7:1-27 says, “My son, keep my words, And treasure my commands within you. Keep my commands and live, And my teaching as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; Write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister,’ And call understanding your intimate friend [verse 5 tells us the only way to be protected from the female flatterer is by holding to the wisdom of God.] That they may keep you from an adulteress, From the foreigner who flatters with her words. For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice, And I saw among the naive, I discerned among the youths, A young man lacking sense, Passing through the street near her corner; And he takes the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and in the darkness. And behold, a woman comes to meet him, Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart. She is boisterous and rebellious; Her feet do not remain at home; She is now in the streets, now in the squares, And lurks by every corner. So she seizes him and kisses him, And with a brazen face she says to him: “I was due to offer peace offerings; Today I have paid my vows. “Therefore I have come out to meet you, To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you. “I have spread my couch with coverings, With colored linens of Egypt. “I have sprinkled my bed With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. “Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; Let us delight ourselves with caresses. “For the man is not at home, He has gone on a long journey; He has taken a bag of money with him, At full moon he will come home.” With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she

seduces him. Suddenly he follows her; As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it will cost him his life. Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.”

So flattery is something that the Bible definitely warns us against. The flatterer is one who preys on weaker vessels, especially “the lonely ones.” Loneliness is a signal to the flatterer to do his thing. It’s an invitation to the flatterer to take advantage of someone’s weakness. Loneliness makes a person’s soul vulnerable. And what makes the soul vulnerable, makes the body vulnerable.

Wisdom also gives you the strength to resist criticism. You shouldn’t believe every word of criticism that you hear. Some people have the gift of criticism. They are gifted to tell everyone what’s wrong with them, and everyone else in their life. They are faithful to carry out the exercise of their gift of criticism, by mail, by phone, through others, and maybe even face to face. Thankfully, divine wisdom gives us the strength to resist criticism or handle it properly. Therefore, Solomon warns us not to take all words seriously, *lest you hear your servant cursing you*. Some words are spoken unadvisedly, or in a fit of passion, and they should not be taken seriously. In many cases, they were not intended for us to hear, and we have no right to hear them.

- Mark 4:24. “Take care what you listen to.”
- Luke 8:18. “Therefore take care how you listen”

Remember, in this passage, negative things could be spoken by a servant, someone who knows you very well. It could be an employer, a relative, or a friend. Solomon says, “So what? Don’t take it seriously!” Some of you are living your life intimidated because of criticism. Many of those hurtful things should never have been said, and they should be forgotten. When a mule or a jackass kicks you, consider the source.

Wisdom will give you strength to resist criticism. We will receive unjustified and untimely criticism from others, even from those

individuals who are closest to us. If we put stock in all the “bad press” we receive, we will end up with a distorted view of ourselves, one that could cause us to become intimidated, defeated, and guilt-ridden. Wisdom can help us separate valid and valuable criticism from that which is inaccurate and destructive. There are always going to be critical people who view your work with a critical eye, especially among Christians. There are rivals who are for the most part involved in healthy competition, but unfortunately, people sometimes begin to hit below the belt and play dirty. Listen to how George Whitfield responded to one critic: “I thank you heartily. May God reward you for watching over my soul. And, as to what my enemies say against me, I know worse things of myself than they say about me.”

Richard Wurmbrand, who was imprisoned by the Romanian communists for his work in the Christian underground, was actually subjected to medieval torture. For fourteen years, he shared his faith with suffering cellmates and dying patients in communist prisons. He was placed in what was known as Room Four, the “death room,” where he developed tuberculosis and saw his body lacerated and bloody from whips and kicks.

I had the privilege of spending a lot of time with Mr. Wurmbrand and I’ve always remembered certain things that he taught me. At the time, I was part of a ministry where it seemed as though all that the pastor did was defend himself from all the accusations being made against him (and there were many).

Richard Wurmbrand said to me: “Your pastor is too concerned about what other people say about him. He needs to just teach the Word of God and let the Lord handle the situation.”

And then he told me something else that I will never forget. He said, “My enemies speak evil of me all the time and what they say is not true. I’ve done a lot more wicked things and I’m really a lot worse than what they say!”

If you’re the type of person who curses others, try to remember that. You know far worse things about yourself than anyone else will ever know . . . So when you get pounded by the blow of someone’s verbal missile, just remember, if they only knew how bad you really are, they would have much worse to say. So give God thanks that they are just scratching the surface . . . Wisdom gives us strength to resist criticism, and to keep a balance by not believing, or taking seriously, everything that is said.

Verse 22 of Ecclesiastes 7 tells us why we shouldn't take everything seriously that people say, especially, if they have cursed us, "For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others."

James also taught this principle, and put it in a very interesting way. "So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way" (Jas 3:5-10).

If you are conscious of the fact that you're a sinner, and that you have cursed others at times, then you will not be so quick to condemn others who have spoken evil against you. Solomon is saying that we should all take heed to avoid that practice of talebearing, which finds pleasure in exposing the shortcomings of others. In fact, later on Solomon wrote in Proverbs 11:13, "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter." Few, if any of us can plead "not guilty" to this indictment of speaking evil, slandering, maligning, or gossiping. And if you don't do it any longer, remember that there was a time that you did, so don't be so quick to judge those who are doing it now.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear."

I don't think any of us can honestly say that, during this past month, we have never failed concerning this verse. Every form of communication that comes out our mouth should be words of edification that minister grace to those who are listening to us. However, if we recalled our conversation at the end of each day, I wonder how many times we would discover that we have violated the law of love, or have repeated something that we had no business repeating. Remember that the Bible says to speak evil of no man as in Titus 3:1-2, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men."

Wisdom also gives us insight. Wisdom teaches us that we can neither understand ourselves, nor make ourselves wise in Ecclesiastes 7:23-24.

Ecclesiastes 7:23. “I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me. You cannot make yourself wise. Wisdom comes from the hand of God. And not only can you not make yourself wise, you can’t even understand yourself at times.

Ecclesiastes 7:24. “What has been is remote [distant] and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?” You hear people say many times, “He or she just doesn’t understand me.” The truth is that you don’t understand you either. If we can’t understand ourselves, how are we going to understand others?

As Psalm 19:12 says, “Who can understand his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.”

The apostle Paul brought this same principle out in Romans chapter 7, which was written twenty-eight years after he was born again. Romans 7:14-15 says, “For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand.”

This is the confusion caused by inherent weaknesses, which manifest themselves in impulsive behavior. We all have a legitimate desire to please the Lord, and this desire even increases as we increase our intake of doctrine. These good intentions are hindered by the overtime work of the OSN with its trends toward evil and good. The OSN can control the believer in many ways. The OSN can make us think we are good enough without a steady diet of doctrine. And if you don’t take in doctrine consistently, you will be under the control of the OSN.

Romans 7:16-17. “But if I keep doing the very things which I do not desire to do, I agree with the Law [or the doctrine] that it is good.” So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin or the sin nature which indwells me [living in me].” What is Paul saying? Because he has received TLJC, he is no longer the one alive, but Christ is living in him (Gal 2:20). And therefore, when he sins, it is no longer he, the new man or the new creature, but rather the old man that is within. If God’s people could only realize this, they would become free from bondage and slavery to their OSN. They wouldn’t be blaming others for their failures. Because the nature of God cannot sin, and Christ is in him, Paul has learned to separate the two natures.

Have you? Most believers have not. That is why self-righteousness, legalism, guilt, and condemnation exist in the lives of most believers today. What made Paul such a great apostle is the fact that he realized that his sins had been paid for, and were totally forgiven. He discovered the true meaning of John 8:31-32; he was truly free.

Romans 7:18-25 says, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body [these are his genetic, inherent weaknesses and flaws from the OSN], waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God [or the corrected translation “But grace belongs to God”] because of Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

We all have an old sin nature and we all fail. Therefore, do not think more highly of yourself than what you ought to think, and do not become guilty and condemned if you have failed. Verse 24 of Ecclesiastes chapter 7 says that you are remote and exceedingly mysterious. You won't find too many people who, after years of self-analysis, are wise. It is better to spend your time examining the mind of God, asking Him to open unto you the mysteries concerning you. Many of the things that make you “you” are mysterious. This is what makes life so exciting; you never know which you is going to show up!

Now, Solomon hasn't really gone all out and tried his trump card yet. His trump card is going to be the one thing most men admired him for: sex. He's tried almost everything else, so now he says, “It's time to try my seventh experiment. I'm going to look for happiness in sex.”

CHAPTER 16

The Seventh Experiment: Sex

(Ecclesiastes 7:25-29)

By this point, Solomon has tried almost everything in his frantic search for happiness. His first six experiments in earlier chapters included academics, pleasure, family, time orientation, money, and building a reputation. None of which made him happy, so he is ready to try the thing that so many think will make them happy; now, he is ready to try sex. However, in Ecclesiastes 7, verses 25 to 28, wisdom reveals the fact that intimate relationships are compelling, but often not satisfying. This is the beginning of Solomon's seventh experiment, the experiment of seeking happiness in sex.

- **Ecclesiastes 7:25.** "I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness."

The word *folly* is the Hebrew noun *kecel*, which means stupidity, the propensity or inclination to make stupid or foolish choices. *Madness* is the Hebrew noun *howleelout*, which means insane or an irrational thought process. Therefore, the corrected translation of verse 25 is:

- Ecclesiastes 7:25. "I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly [or stupidity and the inclination within man to make stupid or foolish choices] and the foolishness of madness [an irrational thought process]."

Solomon conducted an investigation by interviewing men and women. He sought to understand the inclination within man to

make stupid or foolish choices, and the reason for man's irrational thought process. Verse 26 gives us his discovery.

Ecclesiastes 7:26. "And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her."

Remember, Solomon had a thousand women: seven hundred princesses as his wives and three hundred mistresses. He was a sexual athlete, but his experience did not gain him any wisdom or fulfillment. Instead, Solomon found out that his sexual pursuits had trapped him. He went looking for love, thinking it would support and strengthen him, and make him feel that life was worth living again. He was sure that an intimate relationship with a woman would do the trick. What he found was nothing but a fleeting sexual thrill. He found himself involved with women who did not give him what he was looking for. Now, if we're really going to understand this passage, we need to note some of the original language used in verse 26.

The phrase "*I discovered*" is a qal active participle of the Hebrew word *matsa*. It doesn't mean that he suddenly discovered it, in the qal active participle it means that he lived with this most of his life, and that it was a dogmatic finding. This passage teaches that Solomon did not heed his father David's teaching. David taught Solomon the principle of right man, right woman, and Solomon rejected it just as certain Christians also reject it. This mistake practically ruined Solomon's life. Solomon had an edification complex; he had a soul structure that was built upon doctrine, but he turned away from the truth. One of the truths that he rejected was the doctrine of right man, right woman. Solomon did accept this truth later on in Ecclesiastes 9:9, but like so many, he believed it after having learned it the hard way.

The doctrine of right man, right woman is clearly taught in the scriptures. It is taught in Genesis 2:18-25, Ecclesiastes 9:9, 1 Corinthians 7:17, Proverbs 18:22, 19:12, Proverbs 5, and Proverbs 31. Briefly, the doctrine of right man, right woman teaches that God has designed one woman for one man. If the man and woman wait on God's timing, the Lord will bring the right woman to her right man. They are designed perfectly for one another, and that includes both soul compatibility and sexual compatibility. The simple truth is that if anyone rejects this doctrine it is their loss and their problem.

Solomon came to a place of bitterness of soul concerning women because he never had his right woman. In Ecclesiastes 7:26, Solomon describes his own failure to wait for his right woman. Song of Solomon also describes this same failure and misery of his. Solomon had every opportunity for happiness with a woman, and yet the *qal* active participle of *matsa* indicates that he was constantly bitter against the female species. Solomon characterizes the first six experiments as vanity, futility, and chasing after the wind, but he describes his seventh experiment, seeking pleasure in sex, as “more bitter than death.”

When it comes to relationships with the opposite sex, men have a problem or a weakness with bitterness; in fact, so much of a problem God’s Word commands them in Colossians 3:19, “Do not be bitter against them [your woman].”

Solomon’s seventh experiment was also the only experiment that caused him to become bitter. Remember our principle, intimate relationships are compelling but they’re often unfulfilling. This principle originates in the Garden of Eden, when man was placed here on earth in a perfect environment, lacking one thing: his right woman. None of the first six experiments involved intimacy with people, in particular, intimacy with a wife or right woman. It is in the intimate relationship that the man will inevitably let down his guard and share with the woman such deep secrets that he would not share with anyone else. For intimacy to exist, both people will reveal their deep secrets to each other. Once this happens, it is extremely important that they protect each other’s privacy and keep these deep things confidential. In other words, trust is at stake. It is usually very difficult for a man, because of his makeup, to reveal himself like this. Therefore, if the woman ever betrays his trust, or does not protect his privacy, it is very easy for him to become bitter. Solomon didn’t become bitter because of lack of sex; rather, because he could never find that one woman in whom he could confide in, and with whom he could be truly intimate. In fact, this passage seems to indicate that throughout his entire lifetime, Solomon had only one male friend, and never found the woman that God had created for him. It may also be that if he did find her, too much fornicating destroyed his ability to recognize that woman.

In the garden, God created a perfect environment so man would be happy, and as part of that perfect environment He designed a helper for him. It is said in Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”

The phrase “I will make” is the *qal* imperfect of the Hebrew word *asah*, meaning that God keeps on making helpmates for man, it means to manufacture something out of something. Out of the woman’s soul, God manufactures a helper suitable for the man. The Hebrew noun for *helper* is *‘ezer*, which means someone to aid the man, to help him, to assist, and someone to respond to him. Men need that, Solomon needed that, but he never found it, which is why he became bitter.

Genesis 2:19-25. “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, “This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

The word *ashamed* is a key word in our study. They were not ashamed, even though they were naked. However, this does not refer to the nakedness of the body only. There were no other people on earth to hide their nakedness from, so what was the big deal? This refers to the nakedness of the soul, and when each other’s souls were revealed they were not ashamed. The word for *ashamed* is the *hithpolel* future of *buwsh*, which means to be ashamed, embarrassed, disappointed, or dissatisfied with the soul as well as the body. In other words, God originally designed the man and the woman to be intimate with each other. There was to be, and still is to be the coalescence of body and soul. God designed the original relationship between the man and the woman where they would not be ashamed to share things with one another. There are some things that a man desires to talk about with

a woman, things that he would never share with a man. If the woman tells others what was said to her in confidence, the relationship can be destroyed, and the man tempted to become bitter.

Solomon became bitter because he disarmed himself with many women in his search for the right one for his life, but many of the women that he confided in tried to trap him. They lied to him and some of them used destructive allurements. They tried to attract him with something desirable; some of them enticed him by making promises that they didn't keep; and therefore, he became bitter toward them. Perhaps they shared things with others in the harem, things that he asked them to keep confidential. Lesbianism was common in the harems of the ancient world, and this too could have contributed to Solomon's bitterness. Promiscuity simply complicated the matter and destroyed Solomon's ability to recognize his right woman.

Finding your right man or right woman is one of the gifts God has made available to mankind. Because of this, Satan has tried to destroy the principle of right man, right woman. The right woman is actually the oldest of the many grace gifts to man. There are three prominent grace gifts from Christ to man delineated in scripture and these are the order in which they occur in the human race: first, his right woman, He built her (Pro 18:22, 19:13-14). Second, Salvation, He accomplished it (John 19:30). Third, Doctrine, He thought it (1 Co 2:16).

In all of human history, right woman is the oldest human gift, for Christ brought the woman to the man before the fall in Genesis 2:18. The fall of man did not change their relationship. Ever since that time, Satan has not ceased to try to destroy the gift. The kingdom of darkness sponsors many attacks on the right man, right woman relationship. Reversionism, especially phallic reversionism, is an attack on the concept of right man-right woman. Life in the cosmic system is an attack on right man-right woman. All mental attitude sins serve to attack right man-right woman (SOS 8:6, 8; Pro 27:4, 6:34). Negative volition to doctrine becomes an attack on right man-right woman (Jer 15:8-9, 15-21, 16:1-2, 17:9-11, 12:7-9). Negative volition to doctrine will destroy the right man-right woman relationship.

Abstaining from fornication protects the soul, so that it can have a soul climax and the fantastic happiness Christ wants every member of the human race to have. God isn't trying to keep you from having fun, but from missing out on the greater fun that Satan and his cosmic system cannot provide.

Solomon was a man who through sexual experiences destroyed his capacity for a good relationship and his capacity for a good marriage. Having departed from Bible doctrine, he became a great experimenter in sex. In verse 26, Solomon said that he discovered that women were snares, and that their minds were filled with little nets that they use to trap their prey, and their hands are chains. With their tactical ability, once they get their hands on an unwary man, he has had it. Solomon is not necessarily insulting the ladies with that statement; he is merely telling us from unprecedented experience (having had more sex than anyone in history) that sex with the wrong partner is frustrating. What's worse, fornication destroyed his ability to recognize the one woman the Lord had designed just for him. By the way, if this has happened to you, there is a healing process that can take place in your soul through rebound and recovery inside the plan of God. You can recover the ability to recognize the man or woman God has designed for you.

Solomon goes on to say in verse 26, "One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her."

Solomon is the sinner and Solomon seems to be blaming the ladies for his condition, as though he was merely a spectator, but Solomon is the one who is in the wrong; he has no one to blame but himself.

Bitterness is a very serious sin that can destroy a person's life. According to the original language of the Bible, bitterness refers to animosity, hostility, and jealousy, and is a part of anger and harshness. Bitterness results in the fragmented life of hatred, cruelty, antagonism, self-pity, implacability, vindictiveness, revenge, inordinate ambition, and inordinate competition. Bitter people are inconsistent and irrational. Bitterness is a major cause of marital problems as well as problems in every kind of human relationship. A rational relationship is impossible with a bitter person. Bitterness also destroys a person's spiritual life. For example, it is quite apparent that in the administration of divine discipline to Israel, especially to the southern kingdom of Judah, God was dealing with bitter people (Lam 1:4; Amo 8:10; Eze 27:30; Isa 33:7; 2 Ki 14:26). The Jews brought on self-destruction by their own bitterness, which demonstrated the weakness and the failure of the people. Because of bitterness, their spiritual lives were destroyed and the nation was brought into captivity. Bitter people cannot have peace. Second

Kings 14:26 says, “For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel.”

Bitter people are self-destructive; they are walking time bombs ready to explode. Suffering causes bitterness to people who do not understand the ten problem-solving devices, and who do not give number one priority to their relationship with God (Deu 32:24). Ridicule results from bitterness. The people ridiculed Jeremiah because of their bitterness toward him in Lamentations 3:14. Bitterness is also an offshoot of arrogance (Acts 8:23); in fact, these are two sides of the same coin. If you’re arrogant, you’re bitter. Arrogance is preoccupation with self, and people who are preoccupied with themselves inevitably become bitter and jealous. Degeneracy is another source of bitterness, as written in Romans 3:14, “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” Cosmic involvement is a source of bitterness, Ephesians 4:31, “All bitterness, both anger and wrath and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” The bitter soul is incompatible with the pre-designed plan of God; and therefore, bitterness must be removed from the life of the believer.

Another sin that is part of bitterness is the sin of anger. You do not get angry unless you have bitterness in your soul. In anger, you react to someone you love. Wrath is a stronger resentment; in wrath, you react to someone you hate. Bitterness produces the sin of slandering others; a bitter person is also a malicious person. Bitter people amplify the flaws of others; in our context, bitterness also destroys marriage (Col 3:19). Bitter people are usually antisocial people, selfish, inconsiderate of others, withdrawn from society, and indifferent or adverse to conformity with conventional standards of social behavior. In Proverbs 14:10, Solomon tells us that bitterness lives and resides in the heart, in the right lobe of the soul.

It is very important to note the causes of bitterness as they are given throughout the Word of God, so that we can avoid them. Losing some form of blessing or prosperity can cause bitterness to some, as with Esau in Genesis 27:34. Slavery causes bitterness (Exo 1:14); in fact, as a nation we are still dealing with bitterness over the slavery that occurred in our country. There is the bitterness of barrenness in 1 Samuel 1:6; some women are bitter because they do not or cannot have children. Then again some are bitter because they have children

and their children became fools (Pro 17:25). Death is a source of bitterness to the reversionistic believer in 2 Kings 20:3. Guilt and failure can be a source of bitterness, as in Matthew 26:75, “And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, “Before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Bitterness is a sign of the fragmented life and it results in backsliding and disrespect toward God. This is stated in Jeremiah 2:19, “Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God, and the dread of Me is not in you,” declares the Lord God of hosts.”

In Jeremiah 4:18, bitterness reaches into the frame of reference, the memory center, the conscience, and all the compartments of the heart, “Your ways and your deeds have brought these things to you. This is your evil. How bitter! How it has touched your heart!”

Bitter people reject doctrine, James 3:14, “But if you have bitter jealousy and strife in your right lobe, stop being arrogant and lie against the truth.” When you are bitter, you actually tell yourself lies that are totally against the reality of doctrine. Bitterness is a blasphemy in the sense of total lack of grace-orientation. In Job 9:17-18, Job voiced his complaint against God with the bitter question, “Why does God let this happen to me?” Job was bitter and he was complaining during his evidence testing. Bitter people love to complain, as in Job 9:17, “For He bruises me with a tempest, And multiplies my wounds without cause.”

That was blasphemy. God wasn't multiplying his wounds without a cause or for no reason. There was a great purpose in Job's wounds, as he was glorifying God in the angelic conflict under evidence testing. Job 9:18 says, “He will not allow me to get my breath, But saturates me with bitterness.”

Bitterness eventually develops this attitude. When a person asks *why did God let this happen to me*, that person is bitter. Bitterness is irrational, and it will lead a person to the sin unto death as is revealed in Job 21:23-25. For the unbeliever and carnal believer, death is a bitter experience.

Job 21:23-25, “One dies in his full strength, Being wholly at ease and satisfied; His sides are filled out with fat, And the marrow of his bones is moist, While another dies with a bitter soul, Never even tasting anything good.”

Bitterness results in stress, Job 7:11, “Therefore, I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish [stress] of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.” The word “anguish” is the Hebrew noun *tsar*, which means “stress.” Job had converted adversity into stress in the soul by falling into bitterness. As a result, he complains. Bitterness motivates complaining and is self-destructive. All people who habitually complain are bitter people who have no self-esteem. Most people think they have a right to complain, but in fact, complaining is the bad habit of those who habitually think only of themselves. If this attitude continues long enough, the result is expressed in Job 10:1, “I loathe my own life; I will give full vent to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”

Bitterness also motivates gossip: Psalm 64:1-3 (For the choir director. A psalm of David.), “Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; Preserve my life from dread of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers, From the tumult of those who do iniquity, Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow.”

Bitter people gossip, malign, judge, and run down other people, never taking responsibility for their own decisions. In this way, bitterness destroys relationships, courtships, marriages, friendships, and even entire local assemblies.

Bitterness also fragments other people’s lives, Hebrews 12:15, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; and that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled [contaminated].” This verse shows us that grace-orientation and bitterness cannot coexist. One bitter soul contaminates many other souls in his or her periphery. The contamination occurs when we react to the bitterness of another person. Therefore, if we are in the presence of a bitter person, we must not *react*, but rather *respond* with grace-orientation and impersonal unconditional love. However, when we react to the bitter soul of someone else, we lose spiritual strength and we have failed just as much as they have. The more things in life to which we react, the more things in life will cause us to react. Bitterness assumes that you are right and someone else is wrong; therefore, bitterness is divorced from reality. Beware of always thinking that you are right and others are wrong. Bitterness refuses to take the responsibility for one’s own sins or failures and attaches the blame to others. Therefore, bitterness motivates revenge,

which is a vindictive cop out, an evasion of one's responsibility, and a compromise with doctrinal principles related to God's grace. The result of bitterness plus vindictiveness is an arrogant, malicious resentment, an unforgiving mental attitude of resentment, and irreconcilable enmity that makes a person hard, unbending, and locked in self-righteousness. This is the antithesis of forgiving as Christ has forgiven.

Ephesians 4:32. "And become kind to one another, compassionate, and forgiving each other, just as God also by means of Christ has forgiven you." This is gracious action toward one another—the interaction of impersonal love among members of the body of Christ as the royal family of God. This is the capacity for impersonal love for all mankind based on maximum metabolized doctrine circulating in the soul. When you forgive someone, you forget it, and move on, and you are never motivated by bitterness, implacability, vindictiveness, hatred, or any other reaction to seek revenge.

Solomon became very bitter toward women who, although they were overtly beautiful to him, were ugly in their soul. The real beauty in a woman resides in the woman's soul, not in her overt appearance, and inner beauty results from divine viewpoint,

First Timothy 2:9-10. "Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather [adorn themselves] by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness." The more Bible doctrine that a woman has in her soul, the more beautiful she becomes from the divine viewpoint. In fact, there is no such thing as true beauty in the woman apart from her having Bible doctrine in the soul. The spiritually mature woman always possesses inner beauty, and that compensates for any lack of physical beauty. Overt grooming only complements the inner beauty. However, overt beauty without Bible doctrine becomes a facade for ugliness in the soul. Therefore, overt beauty is meaningless without inner beauty. The women in Solomon's harem did not have the inner beauty created by Bible doctrine, and because of this, they influenced his soul to turn away from doctrine.

First Kings 11:4. "For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods."

Solomon had a lot of sex with women who did not have divine viewpoint or doctrine resident in the soul. By the way, if a man or a

woman says that they believe in God, does not mean that they have doctrine in their soul. Even if a man or a woman goes to church habitually, that does not mean that they have doctrine in the soul. Solomon found out the hard way that women without divine viewpoint are petty, implacable, vindictive, and vicious with their tongues. In contrast, a woman with divine viewpoint has great inner beauty.

In 1 Timothy 2:9, the word *adorn* is the present-active-infinitive of the verb *kosmeo*, which is where we get the English word cosmetics. It means to decorate, to adorn, to make beautiful, and to make attractive. But it is the woman with divine viewpoint who knows how to properly adorn herself with the use of cosmetics. You may have gone around looking like old Raggedy Ann before you were saved, or like a permanent resident of the hippie generation, but your days of sloppiness are over, once you accept The Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. The female should be dressed as tastefully as possible. The active voice of the verb *kosmeo* implies that when you wake up in the morning you are not naturally beautiful, so you must make yourself beautiful. The infinitive of purpose means that the purpose of adorning yourself is to make yourself beautiful and attractive and to reflect the divine viewpoint you have within. *Kosmeo* means that if you have a feature that is not very attractive, cover it, and if you have a feature that is attractive, emphasize it. This verse tells us that all Christian women have the potential to be beautiful; however, because of carnality and wickedness, the modern emphasis is placed on overt beauty gimmicks and so-called sex appeal. Any man with half a brain would not be a sucker for that, yet that is what Solomon sought. Clothes do not make the woman; the woman's inner beauty makes the clothes. You'll never see a woman with divine viewpoint who doesn't know how to clothe her body in the proper way. In fact, there is a relationship between a sloppy spiritual life and a sloppy-appearing woman. Since the woman is commanded to make herself beautiful, it immediately dismisses the fact that women are born beautiful. No one is born beautiful because no one is born with doctrine resident in the soul. Parents might be wild about their baby, but that is just emotional appreciation. A beautiful woman must think divine viewpoint to be beautiful. There are always some who think that they are ugly and that there is no hope; however, with divine viewpoint there is always hope. If a woman reaches spiritual maturity, she will radiate with beauty. The only women who are ugly are those

who have mental-attitude hang-ups. Just make sure that your beauty improvements on the outside are not the result of a lustful soul that wants to see how many men will be interested in you, but rather are the result of doctrine in the soul.

From time to time advertisements on television and in magazines will propagandize you, ladies, telling you what men like. But you must remember, it is not what men like that counts, it's what the right man likes that counts. And if you don't have a right man now, when the right one that God has for you comes around, he's going to like the way that you are. So be careful how you try to improve the situation; be sure that your beauty improvements are from divine viewpoint and not cosmic opinion. Peter says that same thing in 1 Peter 3:3-6, "And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear."

Overt charm and beauty are meaningless without inner beauty. It is the inner beauty of the royal priesthood and the soul clothed with divine viewpoint that makes the woman attractive. These passages teach that the exterior is useless without the interior of divine viewpoint.

Even if Solomon did have his right woman in his harem that still means that he had 999 wrong women in his life. In fact, even if he did have his right woman right in front of him, he wouldn't have had the ability to recognize her. Remember that this is a man who is writing under the ministry of the Holy Spirit near the end of his life. Ecclesiastes was written when Solomon was old and disillusioned about life. He was very miserable and very bitter.

Anyone who reads the great prayer of Solomon when he was dedicating the temple, or some of the great statements he made in his youth when he first became king, would have to recognize that he was a spiritual giant at that time. Solomon was a man with an edification complex of the soul, and in the early days of his reign, he had the potential to go on to further greatness even as his father, David. Unfortunately, prosperity was too much for him. Solomon was apparently so attractive as a male that women were constantly falling

all over him. They became infatuated and enchanted with him. He was handsome, wealthy, powerful, and wise. The problem is that he followed his father's negative footsteps of having more than one wife. Before Bathsheba, David had many wives and concubines and his love life was categorized as ritual without reality: sex without love. David only became free from his sexual arrogance and polygamy once he married his right woman, Bathsheba. Once he and Bathsheba finally got married, he remained faithful to her the rest of his life, and it made a great deal of difference with regard to their children. In fact, David was a lousy father until he married Bathsheba, and he finally settled down and took care of his children.

The Bible also teaches that women are stupid about men. The fact that so many women fell for Solomon illustrates female stupidity when it comes to the male. They liked him because he was handsome, rich, he had power, he had a stunning wardrobe, he was very intelligent, and because his celebrity status as king could advance them in life. They were attracted to him for all the wrong reasons. On Solomon's side he liked women for their overt attraction rather than the beauty of their soul. For this reason, Solomon was plagued by women. Let's continue to look closely at the more of the original language of Ecclesiastes 7:26: "And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her." The word *heart* is out of place and this throws everything off. The original word order is "*haa'ishaah* [the woman] *asher-hiy'* [who is] *matsowdiym* [a trap]" so it should be translated "the woman who is a trap."

Keep in mind that Solomon is speaking from bitterness. Many of you, men, would never regard a woman as a trap. In fact, a few of you would love for a woman to track you down and trap you. However, that's not what we have here. When a man finds his right woman, he realizes that she is a grace gift from God and not a trap, as in Proverbs 18:22, "He who finds *ishaah* finds a good thing, And obtains grace from the Lord."

Notice that this verse doesn't say he who finds a wife finds a good thing, it says he who finds his *ishaah* or his right woman, finds a good thing and obtains grace from the Lord. The corrected translation of Ecclesiastes 7:26 so far should read, "And I kept on discovering more bitter than death the woman who is a trap."

Next we have the phrase *wacharaamiym libaah*, which is correctly translated “*her heart [or right lobe] is snares or nets.*” All these women wanted to be number one with Solomon, and so you can imagine the tremendous plots and schemes that must have developed. A thousand women in his household and they all wanted first place, and that’s natural and normal. However, when you have a thousand women under one roof and they’re all battling for first place; well, there isn’t going to be any peace at home.

Ecclesiastes 7:26. “And I kept on discovering more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, and whose heart [right lobe] has snares and nets” [corrected translation].

This doesn’t mean that all women are crafty; it just means that when a thousand women are under one roof and they all want to be number one, they start to do a little manipulating which is called here, snares and nets. When it says that her heart is snares or nets it refers to the many hunting nets of the woman, which include her physical beauty. Remember that the body of the woman was originally constructed or built by The Lord Jesus Christ as a grace gift to the man; and therefore, it is legitimate beauty. However, when the woman uses her body to trap a man, then it is out of the realm of its original design. Add to this a smart woman who doesn’t depend upon her beauty alone, but has enough brains to use her personality as a trap as well. Others are simply clever, and know how to make a man feel important or wanted by appealing to his ego. All these things, and many more, that were designed by God to make a woman beautiful, become evil when they are used by the woman to trap a man. However (and never forget this men!), the more nets that are thrown over you, the more helpless you become. The more affairs a man has with women, the more he is entangled and ensnared in a trap from the female species. According to Proverbs 5:22, “A man’s own perversions will trap him, And he will be bound with chains to the feminine idol” (corrected translation).

Each wrong act of sex becomes another link on the chain or thread on the rope binding the man to the idol called sex, which is an idol that can never satisfy. Eventually, this idol worship destroys the possibility of a wonderful relationship between a right man and a right woman. However, if this has happened to you, there is a healing process that can take place in your soul, so that you can recover the ability to recognize the man or woman God has designed for you. But

that healing process is going to take lots and lots of positive volition toward doctrine, which corrects your thinking.

- Psalm 107:20. “He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions.”
- Jeremiah 30:17. “For I will restore you to health And I will heal you of your wounds,’ declares the Lord.”
- Proverbs 3:8. “Doctrine will be healing to your body, And refreshment to your bones” (corrected translation).

So one woman is not a trap, but women in general who are promiscuous and who fornicate with a man, become a trap to him. A lot of women become man-crazy and throw their nets over the one they are hunting. Although women generally lack discernment about men, they do know how to ensnare a man when they want to. This is what happened to Solomon *after* he had heard the proper doctrines that would have saved him from these traps. This is a very serious warning to all of us. You can hear the doctrine, and believe that it is true, but if you don’t apply it, it is absolutely useless. David taught this to his son Solomon in Proverbs chapter 2 and chapter 6.

- Proverbs 2:10-19. “For wisdom [metabolized doctrine] will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, Understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, From the man who speaks perverted things; From those who leave the paths of uprightness [the plan of God], To walk in the ways of darkness [ways of the cosmic system]; Who delight in doing evil, And rejoice in the perversity of evil; Whose paths are crooked, And who are devious in their ways; To deliver you from the strange woman, From the adulteress who flatters with her words [she uses flattery as a net]; The one who leaves the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God; For her house sinks down to death, And her tracks lead to the dead; None who go to her return again, Nor do they reach the paths of life.”
- Proverbs 6:20-26. “My son [David is speaking to Solomon], observe the commandment of your father, And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they

will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life, To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her catch you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life.”

The wrong woman can fake a man right into the grave. He will go away thinking that she is absolutely wild about him when actually she thinks he's a nuisance. She'll use words to actually make a man feel that he's the greatest thing in the world when she can't stand him and can't wait to get rid of him. This describes the wrong woman who is male oriented but not grace oriented. All men have the potential of falling into her trap.

The Hebrew word for *snares* in Ecclesiastes 7:26 is *matsowdiym*, which means to be under a curse or to have destructive allurements. Every wrong woman in your life has destructive allurements. They may be beautiful, attractive, and scintillating, but these allurements are destructive and not constructive, and the man who falls for them will become a prisoner.

The next phrase, *whose hands are chains*, is the phrase *acuwriym jaadeyhaa*, which means her hands are used for the art of caressing. That's about the nicest way that this phrase can be defined. In Solomon's case, they all wanted to hang on to him and not let go of him. Each woman probably wanted Solomon to get rid of the rest of the harem so she could have him to herself. The right lobe or the heart has snares or destructive allurements, which is the soulish way that the woman traps a man into bed. The hands are used here for the art of caressing, which aids in tempting the man. In other words, she knows how to use her hands on the man to arouse him. She has mastered the fine art of stimulating males, any male. And therefore, her hands have become chains. One thing that will destroy a man's wisdom or the ability to look at life from the divine viewpoint is when in arrogance and stupidity he succumbs to the flattery of a woman who is using him for her own advancement or pleasure.

Proverbs 7:24-27. “Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside

to her ways, Do not stray into her paths. For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.”

Solomon could never say that no one ever told him that’s the way women are.

The next phrase in Ecclesiastes 7:26, which says, “One who is pleasing to God will escape from her,” is translated correctly. The only word which needs correction is the word *escape*, which is the Hebrew verb *jimaaleet*, which means to be delivered, or to be released or rescued. This is an awesome thought for the men. No matter how smart you are, there is always one who can hook you or trap you, and only God can deliver you. How does God deliver? He does so through Bible doctrine in the right lobe of the soul. Bible doctrine in the soul counters the destructive allurements in the right lobe of the wrong woman. And none of us should think that we’re beyond being a villain or a victim here. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:12, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

The average man is easily carried away with his own brilliance, his own intelligence, and his so-called irresistibility. He is especially vulnerable if he’s rich, or a pretty boy, and too many females have given him attention. All men at some time are just blind and stupid about women. This blindness and stupidity can only be rectified by Bible doctrine and the resultant humility. It is Bible doctrine in the soul that protects both the man and the woman when they’re frustrated and about to stop waiting for the right one that God has designed.

The word for *sinner* in Ecclesiastes 7:26 is the qal active participle of *chata* meaning one who misses the mark, one who stumbles, one who falls, one who is seduced, or one who suffers loss of something. Here it is used to describe the reversionistic believer. Solomon was such a reversionistic believer; and therefore, taken in by inconsequential women. The phrase “will be captured” is the *niphil* imperfect of *lakadh* meaning to be captured, to be caught, or to be trapped. So the entire verse looks like this: Ecclesiastes 7:26, “And I kept on discovering more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, and whose right lobe has destructive allurements and her hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will be delivered from her, but the reversionistic carnal believer will be captured by her.”

In moving on to verse 27 we see what Solomon discovered after having more sex than anyone else.

Ecclesiastes 7:27. “Behold, I have discovered this,” says the Preacher [or the man with the message], adding one thing to another to find an explanation,”

What is he adding up? All the girls with whom he has had sex! Now, before we look at this verse, let’s look at a quick profile of Solomon. Solomon was the recipient of fantastic doctrine from his father in Proverbs 2, 5, 6, and 7. David spent a lot of time teaching Solomon all of those proverbs that dealt with finding his right woman and protecting him from the wrong woman. Solomon accepted these things in his youth. They were a part of his soul structure, but he ended up rejecting these truths after a period of time, and then he went negative toward doctrine. He went back to the way that the world thinks. This can happen to any one of us. You can sit in Bible class night after night and take in the Word of God consistently, and in about two or three months you can revert right back to the way you used to think and the way things used to be. We are warned of this throughout the scriptures.

- Isaiah 29:24. “And those who err in mind will know the truth, And those who criticize will accept instruction.”
- Isaiah 30:1-3. “Woe to the rebellious children,” declares the Lord, “Who execute a plan, but not Mine, And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, In order to add sin to sin; Who proceed down to Egypt [which represents the world system and the ways of the world], Without consulting Me, To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh [the things of the world], And to seek shelter [protection] in the shadow of Egypt [the ways of the world]! Therefore the safety of Pharaoh [strength of the world] will be your shame, And the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation.”
- Second Peter 2:22. “It has happened to them according to the true proverb, A dog returns to its own vomit,” and, “A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.”

In Ecclesiastes 7, in his recovery from reversionism, Solomon recalls doctrines, restoring to his soul the truths that he had previously rejected. His life was almost over, but there are countless generations of people after him who might profit by these things. Solomon’s father, David, also failed in the field of right man, right woman.

His failures were numerous. He married many wrong women, and also had affairs with many others, until finally he married his right woman, Bathsheba. David should have just waited for the timing of God, rather than having her seized and then forcing himself upon her. But even though he tried to do it on his own, God still gave Bathsheba to David. David finally wound up with his right woman. He recovered from his own reversionism, and became a fantastic believer. Solomon and Nathan were born to David and Bathsheba, as right man and right woman. Both Solomon and Nathan received the proper doctrine of right man, right woman. Unfortunately, Solomon rejected it. First Kings 11:1 says, “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women.”

The *loved* is the Hebrew verb *ahab* and it is used here in the sense of affairs. When *ahab* is used for the right woman, it is the perfect soul and body coalescence of right man with his right woman. When *ahab* is used with *zarah* (foreign women), it is describing an affair. The Moabites and the Ammonites were known for performing sexually at early ages. The Sidonians were the wildest women in the world. They were the original Canaanites, and were known for having group sex. The Hittites were very athletic women. The point is, Solomon had tried all different kinds of women, and God had warned Solomon about making this mistake: 1 Kings 11:2, “From the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel [in Deu 17:17], ‘You shall not associate with them [have sex with them], neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away [reversionism] after their gods.’ Solomon held fast to these in love.”

The phrase *held fast* is *davoc*, which means to cling or cleave in the sphere of love and sex. It has to do with his many sex acts with these women. First Kings 11:3 says, “And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away [this is the second time reversionism is referred to by the phrase ‘turn your heart away’].”

Reversionism is not turning your body away from the plan of God and Bible doctrine but turning your heart or right lobe away. Every Sunday, churches are filled with individuals who have fallen away from the Lord in their heart, although they are in attendance physically, but it is the heart that God is after! It is written in Proverbs

23:26, “Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.”

Solomon married princesses and therefore aristocracy. On the other hand, his concubines were those who were beautiful, but not aristocrats of their countries; and therefore, he did not marry them. Since he married seven hundred of them, he apparently courted more in palaces than at the local pubs and taverns.

First Kings 11:4. “For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods [notice that this is the third time reversionism is mentioned, when he was young verse 3, when he was old verse 4]; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.”

Having a heart devoted to God does not mean sinless perfection. It simply means that in spite of any failures or sins, you continue to go forward in the plan of God and not let these things stop you. This passage says that Solomon’s heart *was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been*. The scriptures testify to David’s devotion to the Lord.

- First Kings 14:7-8. “Go, say to Jeroboam, Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Because I exalted you from among the people and made you leader over My people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you—yet you have not been like My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only that which was right in My sight.”
- First Kings 15:5. “Because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.”
- Acts 13:22. “And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.’”

Let’s note quickly some of the failings of this man who the Bible says *kept all of God’s commands and followed God with all his heart to do only that which was right in God’s sight*;

In 1 Samuel 21:1-10, David willfully sinned and lied. The result of his lie was that an entire city was wiped out (city of Nob). Then he faked madness and made the enemy believe he was crazy, and as a result hundreds died (1 Sa 21:1-15). In Deuteronomy 17:17, the Bible says, “A king shall not multiply wives for himself,” yet we read in 2 Samuel 5:13, “David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem.”

Then David failed in his responsibility as the King in 2 Samuel 11:1. He should have led his troops in battle, but he stayed home in Jerusalem instead, and as a result, there was disaster on the battlefield. There was also disaster on the home front in Jerusalem. While he was in Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 11:2-27, he ended up in certain shocking sins. He committed adultery, he got a man drunk, he committed murder, and he willfully lied. In 2 Samuel 6:1-13, he did not honor the Word of God. He purposely disobeyed God’s command about the ark. He ignored the Word of God and men were killed as a result. In 1 Chronicles 21, David rejected the promises of God and even questioned the faithfulness of God by numbering the people. Joab, his chief of staff, warned him about this unbelief, but he did it anyway. As a result seventy thousand people died. He also failed to completely forgive his son Absalom. David, who was oriented to grace better than almost anyone in life, failed to use grace with regard to one he loved dearly.

This, my friends, is the story of the man who the Bible says “kept all of God’s commands and followed God with all his heart to do only that which was right in God’s sight, who never turned aside from anything that God commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite, and did all of God’s will.” What does this reveal to all of us? God did not expect Solomon to be perfect; however, he did expect him to have a heart devoted to God. The same principle applies to all of us as believers. Sadly, Solomon pursued other gods, as do many Christians today.

First Kings 11:5-7. “For Solomon went after Ashtoreth [who by the way is Venus to you and me, the love god] the goddess of the Sidonians [the wild women] and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites [this was their Venus and a sex god]. And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place

for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab [this was a fire god where they would take children—especially orphans—off the streets and then just dump them into the fire at the temple], on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech [another fire god] the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon.” In fact, the valley where this was located was called Gehenna, which later on became one of the words for hell.

First Kings 11:8-9. “Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away [or reverted, the fourth time reversionism is mentioned in this passage] from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,” The Lord appeared to him twice to warn him of his reversionism. This gives us some idea as to how Solomon ended up being bitter toward the opposite sex.

Ecclesiastes 7:28. “Which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.” There is a word that is not translated correctly in the NAS, so we must look at some other translations of this verse.

- Ecclesiastes 7:28. “Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: one man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found” (NKJ).
- Ecclesiastes 7:28. “Which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found” (RSV).
- Ecclesiastes 7:28. “Which my soul still seeketh, but I have not found: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found” (ASV).

The word soul or mind, which is missing in the NAS, is the Hebrew word *napshiy* correctly translated soul in these other translations. It wasn't his body that needed something, for he didn't have a libido problem. It was his soul that was seeking for something. His physical or biological urge for sex was satisfied, but his soul was not. There is great wisdom here for women: your body may be very gratifying to some male as you freely give it away, but it will never satisfy his soul. You have to be the right woman to satisfy his soul. You'll never

be able to do that with your body. Therefore, a woman should not be careless with what God has given her to fulfill and complete one man only.

Solomon was a sex athlete, but his soul was never satisfied. Most people are so deceived in this area because they think that the purpose of sex is to gratify a biological urge. But it's more than that. Sex has been designed by the Lord Jesus Christ to be a part of soul satisfaction. Jesus Christ used all of the wisdom of His omniscience coupled with His limitless grace to manufacture for you, a right man or woman. When you were born, Jesus Christ had already put that whole gene package together so that you were designed for one person only. You can fulfill him or her as no one else in the world could. The right woman is insatiable because only one man is designed to satisfy her. No man can come along and try to make a woman into his right woman by the use of his phallus. You cannot make or program someone to be your right man or woman. In reality, when you try to find the right one yourself, it is works and human works; and the plan of God cannot coexist. Reserve yourself for the one designed for you by the Lord because outside of spiritual things, your right man or right woman is the greatest happiness you can know. Remember that this happiness was the first gift God ever gave man and woman.

Therefore, right man—right woman contains a happiness that is phenomenal. By giving your body to anyone else, you are destroying your ability to recognize the right man for your life. So God isn't unfair when he says, "do not commit adultery," God is just trying to give you maximum happiness in life. Many people have missed that happiness because of promiscuity.

Let's look closer at the original language of Ecclesiastes 7:28. The word "seeking" is the piel imperfect of *baqash* meaning to seek intensively, to desire, or to strive after. The more you fornicate, the further you get from your right woman when Jesus Christ brings her to you. The more you multiply fornication, the greater becomes your unhappiness because you are moving away from the only possibility of happiness in category two love, which is love between the right man and the right woman. Therefore, *baqash* means an intense search for happiness in a woman. The piel stem says that Solomon was extremely diligent in seeking for his right woman. In fact, he was so diligent that he ended up with one thousand wrong women. Solomon must

have thought each time he would round the corner of the harem, “this time it will be the right woman,” and it never was. And the more frantic he became, the more he pushed the panic button, trying this one or that one, getting further and further from his right woman. It got worse and worse until finally he just became bitter toward all women. His right woman may have actually been in Solomon’s harem all that time, and he never knew it. In fact, it may have been the dancing queen in the book of Song of Solomon chapter 7.

In Ecclesiastes 7:28, “found” comes from the Hebrew verb *matsa* in the qal stem meaning he was always looking for the right one and even at the time of writing this, he hadn’t found her. Every time Solomon had a date he was always looking and thinking that maybe this woman was the right one, but she never was. Why? Because he had destroyed his ability to recognize the one that God had for him. Single people should be warned here. You’re going to have the same thoughts that Solomon had. You’ll think, “this is the date that’s going to be it; this is my right man; I’m going to bed with this one.” The more you have sex outside of marriage, the further you get from the great happiness God provided for you. Genesis 2:22 confirms that the woman is caused by God to be brought to the man. Therefore, it is women that are in fellowship with God that are able to hear God’s instructions in this matter. The woman was brought to one man, Adam, her right man. If people will wait and keep their life on target with God, God will provide.

Therefore, our corrected translation of Ecclesiastes 7:28 is “what my soul is still seeking I have not found. I have found one man [the insinuation is an honorable man and here it refers to category three love, friendship] among a thousand [I have discovered], but I have not found a woman [one honorable woman] among all these.”

The relationship with the man was not based upon sex, but upon integrity within the other man. And since the other man had integrity, Solomon found a great friend even at a low time in his life. And when he said, “I did not find one honorable woman among them,” it was because he was seeking happiness through sex. He was obviously not a good lover because the Bible teaches that experience in sex destroys a person’s sexual performance. The perversion of the cosmic system says the opposite. Solomon did not love these women personally, he simply used sex as a means of self-gratification; and consequently, no woman really cared for him.

Solomon could never get past the attraction stage of romance. Consequently, people who never get out of the attraction stage can never make it in relationships, romance, or marriage. They are always losers.

The only time that Solomon ever had a bona fide relationship with a human being was in category three, a total nontouching soul friendship. He found a soul compatibility with one man who was a true friend to him. But this is nothing compared to the intimacy between right man and right woman.

Ecclesiastes 7:29. “Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

The word for “found” again is the qal perfect of *matsa*, and it means that we are about to see the doctrine which Solomon learned in reversion recovery. Solomon never found his right woman because he was too long in reversionism, but in reversion recovery he did discover some principles of doctrine that are important for us to understand.

The phrase “God made” is the qal perfect of *asah* with *haa-’Elohiym*, which has to do with man’s soul related to his personality. When God creates the soul, the Hebrew verb *barah* is used. However, when God makes something out of the soul, *asah* is used. *Barah* speaks of the essence of the soul, meaning the mentality, the self-consciousness, the emotion, the norms and standards, and the volition. *Asah* points to the personality related to the soul. In love, it’s the personality related to the soul that becomes important. Here, Solomon refers to the personality that comes from the soul, which is the subject of category two love. How do you think you’re going to find your right woman or your right man? Not by having the honeymoon first, but by the identification of the soul first. The identification is made through the soul, and *asah* means that you’re going to love the personality of the one God has designed just for you. No one can see the essence of another soul. You can’t even see your own essence. But what you can see in another is their personality, which is a manifestation of the essence of their soul.

In Ecclesiastes 7:29, the word for “men” is *haa-aadaam* which means mankind, both male and female. “Upright” comes from the Hebrew word *jashar*, which has the following meanings: upright, just, righteous, and right. Only one of these definitions can accurately fit into our translation. God did not make man upright, just, or

righteous, for we were all born in sin. However, the translation “right” fits the context of this passage.

Ecclesiastes 7:29. “Behold, I have found only this, that God has made man and woman right” (corrected translation).

Now, the context for this passage is Solomon’s experiment with the opposite sex. Doctrinally, we know that man and woman have not been made upright, or just, or righteous. Exegetically, the best definition for *jashar* in this passage is “right.” God has made man and woman right for each other. In context, the passage refers to the doctrine of right man, right woman.

Ecclesiastes 7:29. “Behold, I have found only this, that God has made man and woman right for each other [right man, right woman], but they have sought out many perversions” (corrected translation).

Solomon would tell us, “Look, I was in reversionism too long. I sought my right woman, but never found her. I went about it the wrong way. I found a friend, but I never found my right woman. But I do know this [he says, in closing this chapter and this subject], *God has made man and woman right for each other.*”

By the way, this means that sex with the right man and right woman is perfect. Why? It was created and designed by a perfect God. Sex is a grace gift from God. Grace and sex are connected in the building of the right woman. It is only human distortion and human perversion that is no good. There is absolutely nothing wrong with sex, provided it is enjoyed in marriage. Sex existed in the Garden of Eden from the beginning. Sex existed after the fall. And the purpose of sex has never changed. It was designed to be a part of man’s perfect happiness. Having children is incidental. The purpose of sex is not to have children. The purpose of sex, in the right-man—right-woman relationship, is the expression of perfect happiness. It is the human race doing what the believer priest does in worship, recognizing, and enjoying God’s grace.

In conclusion, sex with the wrong man or wrong woman is wrong. Homosexuality or lesbianism is trying to find happiness in having sex with a member of the same sex, and that is a distortion. Masturbation is self responding to self, and that is also a distortion. Bestiality is forbidden by God, and that is a tremendous distortion. These are all perversions of God’s design. In fact, all of these were practiced by

the Canaanites who were destroyed and completely removed from all the earth.

Only God can make a person truly happy, by means of His plan and His doctrine. And when man goes on a search, as Solomon did, looking for happiness in the cosmic system, he never finds it. All that he can find are the distortions of life. Is wisdom keeping you stable? As you live your life in the palm of God's hand, you have the ability and the opportunity to have the insight and the strength and the stability that the Spirit of God can give. The final analysis is that real truth comes when you "put yourself together" in the person of Christ. When the person comes together, the world comes together. When the man sees himself in Christ: complete, satisfying to the Father, and ready to take in His wisdom, that man's world comes together.

CHAPTER 17

Leadership and Authority

(Ecclesiastes 8:1-9)

Being a good boss or a good leader is not easy, and it does not happen by accident. Leaders who are a joy to follow are rare. Chances are good that many of you who are reading these words do not look forward to facing your boss the next time you see him. A very good boss, leader, or superior is rare. It is unusual to find people who look forward to being with the skipper of the ship, their boss, or the one in charge, and who truly find the leadership motivational, and inspiring to be around. Unfortunately, many people in authority have leadership styles that fall into one of two extremes. First, there is the incompetent superior. This type is not qualified to do what he or she is doing, but has the amazing ability to make it look as though his mistakes are someone else's fault. People who are incompetent or who are poor models are tough to work for. They are frequently negative and discouraging, rather than being positive and encouraging. They are often terribly insecure, but they cover it up by abusing their authority, which again is a part of their incompetence in the leadership role that they are trying to fill. Secondly, there is the intolerant superior. This person is qualified for the position, but, if the truth were known, he is simply a workaholic, a perfectionist, and an overly demanding boss. This person's entire life revolves around the job, and he expects yours to, also. This type of leader is implacable; he is hard charging, high achieving, and tough-minded. Often, he is overly qualified, and in his mind, no one can do the job quite as well as he can. In a cartoon that was out some time ago, there was a little fourth-grade boy standing nose to nose with the teacher at the chalkboard, where there were several unsolved math problems. The little boy was glaring back at the teacher, and the caption reads what

he was saying, “I’m not an underachiever, you’re an overexpecter!” Overexpecters, or intolerant people with authority, are found in different categories. Some of them are fathers or mothers, some of them are husbands, some of them are teachers, some of them are coaches, and unfortunately, some of them are pastors. In fact, many congregations today are not being led, they are being beaten. They are led by pastors who, rather than serve, seek to be served. They do not feed the flock, but rather, they fleece the flock. They do not gather the flock, but rather, they scatter the flock. Under this type of leadership, the average Christian today is being discouraged rather than encouraged. They are not being equipped, but are being whipped, and put down, and battered. These intolerant shepherds are often well meaning, but they wrongly expect their congregation to reach perfection, instead of recognizing that all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

All of us are affected by someone in authority. In our home, our school, our job, our team, or our church, we are either in authority or under authority, and in some cases both. In fact, some of you may be moving rapidly toward being in greater authority over more people than ever before in your lifetime. Therefore, what follows in this chapter is very important to absorb because you are on the verge of making either a magnificent or a miserable impact on the lives of others. Ecclesiastes chapter 8 gives excellent guidelines to remember for those who are in authority or under authority.

In the first half of the book Ecclesiastes, the first six chapters, Solomon was struggling. He was flat on his face, fists were clenched, and he was cursing God by cursing life. He evaluated and calculated, but the only thing his answers could give him was pain and misery. He saw everything as empty and futile. At times, he screamed against God and recorded it in this journal. For the first six chapters in Ecclesiastes, everything is seen under the sun, on this earth, and horizontally or from human viewpoint, and he was miserable. In his miserable musings, he nearly came to an end of himself. When Solomon got to the second half of the book, he began to see life more from the vertical dimension, and he started to let wisdom or divine viewpoint back into his soul. Wisdom means that a person views life from objectivity and handles life with stability. Over thirty times, in the last six chapters of the book, Solomon refers to wisdom. He seemed to be taking a turn toward living his life more wisely.

In the Bible, when a great truth is given, God frequently gives a real life application so that we can identify with that truth. For instance, He just doesn't teach us about the importance of faith, He tells us about Abraham and Sarah who staggered at the promises of God through unbelief. He doesn't just talk about perseverance, having a heart after God, and not quitting, He tells us about David. Many times we have a difficult time identifying with an abstract truth, but we can identify with people. God doesn't just say you ought to forgive; He records for us the story of Joseph who forgave his brothers for their mistreatment of him.

God also reveals the warts, blemishes, scars, and dark sides of biblical heroes. We are not shielded from the dark sides exhibited by the Jonahs, the Samsons, and the King Sauls. We see the truth about people in the Bible, in true living color. Many of these men and women whose flaws and failures are revealed for all eternity in the scripture turned out to be winners who glorified God. Therefore, if you can't see God in fallen man, you will not see Him at all. In the Bible, we have case after case of great men and women who failed, but afterward succeeded, who fell, but rose up again, who seemed to be losing but won in the end. Proverbs 24:16 says, "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again."

The *righteous man* refers to the believer who is a winner. He is the one who fell, but he picked himself back up. For instance, in Genesis 12:13-19, Abraham willfully lied to deceive the pharaoh and to protect his own life. His wife, Sarah, was very beautiful and Abraham was afraid that the king would kill him in order to take Sarah as his wife, and so Abraham willfully lied and put Sarah's life in danger. Then there was Isaac, who in Genesis 26:7, committed the same sin as his father Abraham. He lived in fear of losing his life; and therefore, he willfully lied, telling the men of Gerah that Rebekah was not his wife, but his sister. In Genesis 25:31-33, Jacob was naturally crafty and sly and stole the birthright from his brother, Esau. In Genesis 27:18-29, we have a record of his master deception over his father, Isaac. It is interesting that the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means a prince with God, but when the lord appears in the OT. He says, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Jacob reaped the result of his own negative decisions and was disciplined by affliction, yet in the New Testament he is called a man of doctrine (Heb 11:21). We also have Moses, in Exodus 2:12,

he willfully killed a man with his bare hands! He also made excuses to the Lord, saying in Exodus 3:11, that he was not fit to be used by the Lord. In Exodus 4:10, he gave more excuses, saying that he was not eloquent, and he could not speak. In Exodus 4:13, he asked the Lord to send someone else. We have Samson, he was separated for the Lord as a Nazarite, and yet in Judges 14:1-3, he kept associating with evil people, basically, depraved women. He was very spiritual at times, according to Judges 13:25 and Judges 15:14, yet he was under the power of carnal lust. He had a deep desire for prostitutes; and then finally, for Delilah. According to Judges 15:4, he was childish in his plans, yet courageous in battle (Jud 15:11-14). He was mighty in physical strength, yet weak in resisting temptation. The point is, if you cannot see God in fallen people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, or Samson, then you cannot see God at all. One of the many fantastic things about the Bible is that when great truth is given, God frequently gives a living illustration, so that we can identify with that truth. In chapter 7, Solomon gave a series of truths about wisdom. Chapter 8 starts out with some for instances. In the beginning of this chapter, we are going to note some principles concerning the importance of understanding leadership and those in authority in your life.

Luke 6:40 says, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."

It is important that you recognize leadership and authority in your life. Wherever there is authority, there is a need for leadership. In fact, the very existence of authority demands the function of leadership, and the possession of authority carries the responsibility of leadership. Therefore, the existence of any organized group demands the existence of leadership. For example, authority in the family demands parental leadership. Authority in marriage demands the leadership of the husband. Authority in the military, business, government, church, and other organizations demands the exercise of leadership. The principle of authority demands more than management; it demands the existence of leadership for the proper function of that authority.

What is leadership? Leadership is the authority, ability, and capacity to direct, to guide, to lead, to motivate, and to control in any organization where legitimate authority exists. The purpose of leadership is to enforce, to execute, and to motivate policy, purpose,

and the objectives of any legitimate organization. Leadership then, is the responsibility of authority; however, being in a position of authority does not mean that the person is a leader. There have been many individuals placed in positions of authority who were not qualified to handle that authority and responsibility. For example, Diotrephes was an individual who was placed in a position of authority in a local assembly, but he used his position to attack the apostle John.

- Third John 1:9. “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.”

Diotrephes rejected the doctrine taught by the apostle John and attacked his teachings.

- Third John 1:10. “For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words [sins of the tongue]; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.”

Diotrephes abused his authority by kicking people out of the church. He had authority, but he was not a leader. Many individuals have authority in life, but they are simply not leaders; rather, oftentimes they are bullies and intimidators who coerce and harass others. Ecclesiastes chapter 8 deals with the subject of leadership and authority. For example, Ecclesiastes 8:2 says, “Keep the command of the king,” he’s an authority. Verse 4, “the word of the king is authoritative,” that’s a superior. Verse 5, “He who keeps a royal command.” Verse 9, “a man has exercised authority over another man.”

Whether you are in authority or under authority, you need to understand the principles behind wise and good leadership. There are at least five characteristics of a good leader given in verses 1 to 9.

Ecclesiastes 8:1. “Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man’s wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam”

The first half of this verse gives us the first characteristic that makes a person in authority a good leader; and that is, that he has a

clear mind. It presents a rhetorical question that is not meant to be answered. The key word is *interpretation*, which is the Hebrew word *peesher*, and it means a solution or someone who sees through the mystery of something. Keil and Delitzsch say that this word does not mean one who has the knowledge of all things, but rather, one who knows how to explain the difficult things. It means to unfold mysterious things; it refers to an individual who knows why things are as they are. A good leader is one who knows philosophically where the ship is going and why. He doesn't have to know how to do everything, but he does need to know the why's. The person who knows how will usually have a job, but that individual will usually work for the one who knows why. The person at the top of an organization, whether it consists of two or two million doesn't have to know all of the inner workings within that organization, but he needs to know where those things are going and why. In the spiritual realm, the interpreter here refers to one who can expound the mind, the word, the ways, and the works of God. He is said to be *one among a thousand* according to Job 33:23. Many individuals may see clearly through their own eyes, but they do not have the ability, the gift, or the talent to remove the cloud that obstructs the vision of others. Some people will look at an organization and it will be a big mystery, but this should not be true of the person at the top, or else that organization is going to be in big trouble. The interpretation of a matter is the basic assignment of the leader. When there's confusion at the top, there is greater confusion down the line. Or, as one person put it, "a mist in the pulpit puts a fog in the pew."

Churches headed by pastors who don't know the way become churches that don't know where they are going. By the way, I know where I'm headed, and I know where I am trying to lead you. My goal is to lead every single one of you to spiritual maturity; for your sake and for mine! For the pastor-teacher, his goal, and even his happiness, is derived from seeing members of his congregation reach spiritual maturity and then receive their escrow blessings: the highest awards believers can receive in time and in eternity. The pastor's job is given in 1 Peter 5:1-2, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, Feed the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion [or being driven and forced from pressure], but voluntarily, according to the will of God;

and not for sordid gain [from self-motivation and selfish ambition], but with eagerness; [which means with a ready mind].” This refers to one of the things that you must look for in the pastor. A ready mind is a prepared man.

First Peter 5:3 says, “Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” Lording it over those allotted to your charge refers to the pastors—or those who think that they are pastors!—who violate the royal priesthood of the believer. These are the bullies behind the pulpits, who are legalists and manipulators. The word for “examples” is the nominative masculine plural of *tupos*, which means a mark, an impression, or a pattern. It does not mean a clone, but it means to be a pattern or example of that which you teach. The pastor’s pattern is what he leaves behind as a legacy of Bible doctrine. Remember the simple principle; it is always the message that counts, never the man. It is the doctrine that comes from the pulpit that counts, not the personality or the charisma of the pastor.

First Peter 5:4 says, “And when the Chief Shepherd [Christ] appears [rapture], you [faithful pastors] will receive the unfading crown of glory.” The goal of every communicator of Bible doctrine should be to receive the crown of glory. Every pastor must present his congregation to the Lord in the eternal state. This is why Paul said in Colossians 1:28, “And we proclaim Him [it is the responsibility of every pastor to proclaim the entire ministry of Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, in order that we may present every man complete [or mature] in Christ.”

Notice that the pastor’s goal is to present everyone in his congregation complete or mature in Christ. Then, in verse 29, we have a very interesting purpose as far as the ministry is concerned. Colossians 1:29 says, “And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works in me.”

The purpose behind all the pastor’s efforts is to proclaim Christ by inculcating and teaching doctrine, so that the believers would reach spiritual maturity. There is nothing that fulfills the communicator of doctrine more, than to see his congregation growing spiritually. That is his responsibility, and outside of his personal relationship with TLJC, it is to be his number one priority. Finally, the power in verse 29 refers to the power of God the Holy Spirit, which is given for the believer to live the Christian life.

First Thessalonians 2:17-20. “But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan thwarted us. For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation [or crown of glory]? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”

At the judgment seat of Christ, those who have attained spiritual maturity make up the crown of glory for the pastor. This means that no pastor’s ministry can truly be evaluated until the judgment seat of Christ. And the basis for this reward is his faithfulness in studying and teaching Bible doctrine.

There’s another characteristic of a wise man in Ecclesiastes 8:1, “A man’s wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.” The phrase “stern face” refers to what comes naturally, but a man’s wisdom will cause a stern face to beam. When a person is in fellowship with God and is receiving doctrinal viewpoint, it will affect his or her countenance.

For example, when Stephen faced the Council in Jerusalem to preach the Gospel we read in Acts 6:15, “And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the council saw his face like the face of an angel.” He was representing TLJC to the council and his face was radiating like an angel.

The same thing is found in Exodus 34:29, “And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses’s hand) as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him” [TLJC].

Proverbs 4:8-9. “Prize doctrine, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.”

On the other hand, when a person is out of fellowship and under a divine curse or discipline, Isaiah 3:9 says, “The expression of their faces bears witness against them.”

So a second quality of a good leader is a cheerful disposition. There are few things more contagious than cheerfulness in a boss. Unfortunately, a stern boss can also infect an organization. This is the picture of someone in authority being stiff and tough and determined, with a face that looks like a withered grace, full of

discouraging frowns, and negative brows. If you are a leader in any area and you have to deal with people, take a look at yourself about two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Don't change your complexion; just run in the washroom and turn the light on, and look. You'll see what everybody else has to look at all day long.

One writer said, "Should we not see that lines of laughter above the eyes are just as much marks of faith as our lines of care and seriousness. Is it only earnestness that is baptized? Is laughter pagan? We have already allowed too much that is good to be lost to the church and cast many pearls before swine. A church is in a bad way when it banishes laughter from the sanctuary and leaves it to the cabaret, the nightclub and the toastmasters."

Verse 1 of Ecclesiastes chapter 8 is teaching that if your face is stern and filled with pressure, you're not acting in wisdom. This interpretation is confirmed by other translations of this verse.

- Ecclesiastes 8:1. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed" (KJV).
- Ecclesiastes 8:1. "Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance" (NIV).
- Ecclesiastes 8:1. "Wisdom lights up a man's face, softening its hardness" (TLB).
- In Ecclesiastes 8:2-4. Solomon shows us the wisdom of having a discreet mouth.

So here is the third characteristic of a good leader:

1. A clear mind
2. A cheerful disposition
3. A discreet mouth

Ecclesiastes 8:2. "I say, 'Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.'"

Stay loyal to those over you in authority such as your boss. Do what he asks you to do and be faithful. Obey his commands, not just to avoid discipline, but because of your relationship with God.

Ecclesiastes 8:3. "Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter [or insurrections or conspiracies against the leader or the boss], for he will do whatever he pleases."

Don't leave when the pressure gets put on those in positions of leadership. Arrogance causes people to react against any form of correction done by someone in authority. The person in charge may have a temper outburst or may have to become harsh in order to correct something in the organization. This verse says, "don't jump ship by reacting in arrogance." Receive the correction, remain in your position, and relax. Respond with humility and do what you're supposed to do.

- Ecclesiastes 10:4. "If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses."

Ecclesiastes 8:4. "Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, "What are you doing?"

There are some questions that you don't walk into your bosses' office and ask. He has the authority, and when he tells you to do something, you shouldn't question it. So the employee is to be faithful, loyal, trustworthy, and supportive.

What about the leader, those in positions of authority? Notice the references to the command of the king in verse 2 and the word of the king in verse 4. The major tool of leadership is the tongue. Verses 2 and 4 show us that leaders have a great responsibility with the use of their tongue. How a leader handles his speech is very important to his success.

- Proverbs 18:21. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit."
- Proverbs 12:18. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- Proverbs 15:2. "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly." A wise leader not only knows what to say, but he also knows how to say it.
- Proverbs 15:4. "A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit."

You can actually destroy a person with your tongue, especially, if you have authority over them. The tongue is a powerful weapon for those in authority. What they say and how they say it can encourage

those under their authority and keep them loyal. When they are loyal, they will stick with you and remain fair-minded and supportive. A leader who knows how to use his tongue properly will also be able to put down any conspiracy that may be developing under his authority.

Most of us need to develop tact and discretion in dealing with those under our authority. Tact is the ability to avoid needless offense and awareness of the other person's feelings in a situation. Tact is also the ability to reconcile opposing viewpoints without giving offense or compromising principle. Then again, tact is the art of making guests feel at home when that's really where you wish they were!

Ecclesiastes 8:5. "He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure." If you are in a position of authority, God has given you a royal command. Romans 13:1, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

God has given you that authority and that royal command. Promotion comes from God alone. Even if it seems as if someone has manipulated their way to the top, or has pushed and politicked for it, remember that they were successful because God promoted them. If someone has talent and charisma and a seemingly natural ability to lead, it was God who gave them those things and they are promoted through the grace of God. All authority comes from God alone.

Ecclesiastes 8:6. "For there is a proper time and procedure for every delight, when a man's trouble is heavy upon him." This is stability under pressure and a lack of panic. A good leader is calm, steady, and has keen judgment when trouble is all around. He or she can think clearly under pressure because he knows the proper time and the proper procedure. A good leader is also able to make tough decisions knowing he or she will not be popular at the time.

Ecclesiastes 8:7. "If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?" In context, this verse is saying that since no one under your authority knows what will happen, how can they advise you? This implies that a leader must rely on his own intuition. Intuition is the act of knowing or sensing without the use of rational processes. It is a sense of something not evident or deducible. And you can't learn intuition from a book, or pick it up from simply watching

someone else. You either have it, or you don't. Good leaders have a sensitive heart toward what's happening around them. There are opponents of this trait such as insensitivity, preoccupation, panic, indecisiveness, impatience, and most of all, insecurity.

Therefore, we have five characteristics of a good leader:

1. A clear mind.
2. A cheerful disposition.
3. A discreet mouth.
4. A keen judgment.

And lastly, we have:

5. A humble spirit.

Ecclesiastes 8:8a. "No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death." Regardless of how wide-ranging the authority, how great the king, or how important the position, no person has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, nor does any person have authority over the day of death. The implication is that those in authority can only do so much; they are finite.

Ecclesiastes 8:8. "No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it." This means that the leader must have a humble spirit. He must be aware of his own limitations. Some translators translate the word wind as spirit, but the principle remains the same because your spirit can't change another person's spirit. No one has that power. Therefore, verse 8 has to do with awareness of one's finite limitation. No matter how powerful you are, you are finite. No matter what authority you have, even if it's over millions of people, you cannot do all things. And you must never forget that a humble spirit is a teachable spirit. A wise superior or leader will allow the Lord to have control over the things that he cannot control.

The phrase "evil will not deliver those who practice it" is a reference to the fact that no one in a position of leadership will accomplish anything by manipulating others, or by being evil toward those under their authority. The practice of evil might gain a leader his objectives, but will always come back to haunt him.

Ecclesiastes 8:9. “All this I have seen and applied my mind to every deed that has been done under the sun wherein a man has exercised authority over another man to his [own] hurt.” A leader who misuses and abuses his authority ends up hurting himself more than others. Solomon is saying, in these first nine verses, that one of the vital things that he learned in his experiments is the importance of respecting authority on each end of the spectrum. If you have authority, don’t abuse it, and if you’re under authority, submit to it. Authority is your friend. However, it is inevitable that arrogance will challenge any legitimate system of authority.

This is satanic in nature. For Satan, as the ruler of this world, constantly seeks to do everything possible to overthrow the divinely delegated authority. Divinely delegated authority brings freedom and blessing to individuals and nations. Authority has been at issue since the beginning of the human race. The fall was caused by rejection of authority. The woman rejected the authority of God and Bible doctrine, and accepted the authority of Satan. She also rejected the authority of her right man, 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Unfortunately, Adam discarded the authority he had from God and took orders from the woman.

Weak people resent authority. Arrogant people resent authority because they are weak. Your attitude toward authority is an index of your character, and all of us live under some system of authority. We must all learn to live under authority, whether we like the authority or not. This is especially true in the spiritual realm. In the church, the only issue between you and your pastor should be your inculcation of Bible doctrine. His personality is not an issue. The pastor must have total assertion of authority in the local assembly.

First Peter 2:13-3:1. “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but

also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,”

You will never ever make it in life without recognition of the fact that all of us live under a system of authority. Authority is necessary in every realm. Think of what sports would be without authority, i.e., no referee, no umpire, etc. Even enjoyable things would no longer be enjoyable if there were no system of authority. Divine authority has delegated human authority in various realms of life. Therefore, rejection of authority is rejection of God.

CHAPTER 18

Life's Mysteries

(Ecclesiastes 8:10-17)

Sir Winston Churchill was often at a loss to explain the actions of Russia. He could always predict the action of the Nazis, but frequently had trouble understanding Russia. Churchill once said in frustration concerning Russia, "It's a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Many things in life and in the physical world around us are mysterious. Every thing is composed of mysterious little things called atoms. These atoms sometimes group together in such way that they become diseases or cancers that can kill human beings. The cure for many of these diseases still eludes us, and is a riddle. Time itself can be a mystery, when we consider the theory of relativity, which proposes that time, will actually stop, if you're moving fast enough. The vast expanse of space, with its billions of galaxies, becomes a mystery to us when we consider how small a space our planet actually occupies. Then there are traffic lanes and grocery lines; the mystery here is that every one we get in seems to slow down! There are murders that have not been solved, and death itself is a mystery; at times, life is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. But of all the mysteries there are in life, there is no greater mystery than God Himself as written in Daniel 2:47, "God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries." Or, as Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever." The last half of Ecclesiastes 8 deals with some of life's mysteries.

Let's jump ahead for a moment to verses 16 and 17, to see how Solomon described his quest to solve some of the mysteries of life.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17. "When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one

should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, 'I know,' he cannot discover."

Solomon says, in effect, I stayed up night after night, and worked laboriously to know God's mind in all His plan, so let me save you some time: you cannot explain God's mysteries. So the first principle is that there are mysteries of life that defy human explanation. There are a lot of things that happen in life that we simply cannot explain. These mysteries defy human explanation. Secondly, let's keep in mind that these mysteries go beyond human intellect and wisdom. Verse 17 says that even the wise man who says I know, in fact does not know. Our most educated men and women cannot see the full picture of God's plan and design. Every one of us has had mysteries invade our lives. Something happened that shook you up a bit. If time passed and things didn't change, you got shook up even more. The longer you are in it, the less understandable it seems. You may feel at times like you're in the midst of a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma in some area of your life. This chapter is about to deal with something that is extremely relevant to human beings. It's marvelous how amazingly relevant God's truth is to all of us. We don't have to try some gimmick to make the Bible relevant; it is relevant all by itself! This part of chapter 8 deals with several mysteries that cause us to struggle. Verse 10 begins with the mystery of *unjust triumph*.

Ecclesiastes 8:10. "So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place [in other words, they went to church but they were simply hypocrites], and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus [or where they practiced their wickedness]. This too is futility."

Solomon touches upon a common experience that we have all witnessed. A wicked individual is buried, and given such a graceful funeral that the wickedness of that person's life is glossed over. The Living Bible paraphrases verses 9 and 10, "I have thought deeply about all that goes on here in the world, where people have the power of injuring each other. I have seen wicked men buried, and as their friends returned from the cemetery, having forgotten all the dead man's evil deeds, these men were praised in the very city where they had committed their many crimes! How odd!"

Sound familiar? It's remarkable what an honorable burial will do for a dishonorable life. Not only that, but verse 10 also tells us the wicked are soon forgotten. Therefore, Solomon concludes that the honorable funeral is simply futility or nothing.

Verse 11 tells us why the wicked continue to be wicked. The wicked use God's patience and forgiveness as an excuse to continue in their ways, rather than exploiting the grace of God to change their thinking to His.

Ecclesiastes 8:11. "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil."

We have all seen this happen, in our own lives and in the lives of others. Someone does something terrible and is warned that judgment is going to fall on them, but it doesn't. They are warned that they're going to get what they deserve, but they never do. The person may then do something even worse, and the judgment still doesn't come upon them. God is patient as they intensify their evil; that is a dilemma and a mystery to us at times. The poet James Russell Lowell put it in these words, "Truth forever on the scaffold, / wrong forever on the throne." None of us like those rules; we like truth to be on the throne and the wrong on the scaffold. Seeing someone treating another person unjustly gets us angry, especially when we see him prosper in spite of his evil. We wonder where the justice is. It's amazing how some individuals can get away with cheating, deception, and dishonor, and go on to lives filled with greater cheating, deception, and dishonor, seemingly untouched by the God of justice.

Jeremiah expressed his frustration to God this way in chapter 12:1, "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?"

Job asks why this happens to evil people in Job 21:7-13, "Why do the wicked still live, why do they continue on and become very powerful? Their descendants are established with them in their sight, And their offspring before their eyes, Their houses are safe from fear, Neither is the rod of God on them. His ox mates without fail; His cow calves and does not abort [or miscarry]. They send forth their little ones like the flock, And their children skip about.

They sing to the tambourine and the harp and rejoice at the sound of the flute. They spend their days in prosperity and suddenly they go down to Sheol.”

The psalmist described his reaction to this mystery in Psalm 73:3: “For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

Solomon says that this is a part of life; it’s a truth that he discovered but can’t explain. There is another mystery that is very similar to the first one. It is the mystery of unfair consequences, and it is more personal to each of us than the prosperity of the wicked. This mystery of unfair consequences is addressed in verse 14 of Ecclesiastes 8. “There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.”

Providence seems to treat some good men as though they were wicked, and some wicked men as though they were good; this is an age-old puzzle. Why is it that missionaries are martyred and murderers set free? Why is it that a loving Christian family traveling down a highway is hit head on and killed by an irresponsible drunk driver, who walks away without a scratch? Why is it that criminals get rich on threats, by selling pornography, drugs, prostitution, and gambling, while some of us can barely makes ends meet, as we walk with God? In essence the question is: *why do bad things happen to good people?* Virtually every meaningful conversation I have had with people on the subject of God either started with this question, or got around to it before long. The misfortunes of good people are not only a problem to the people who suffer, but are also, many times, a problem to everyone who wants to believe in a just and fair and livable world. The real question we need to ask is: *Does God ever ask more of us than we can endure?* Some people are made noble and strong through suffering while many more grow cynical and bitter. We see people crack under the strain and pain of unbearable tragedy. We see marriages break up after the death of a child because parents blamed each other for not taking proper care of the child. It is the mystery of unfair consequences, and who hasn’t wrestled with that at some time or another? Who among us hasn’t asked the age-old question, at some point, *if there’s a God, why does He allow these things*

to happen? There are many things that happen to people, and many things that people do, that will simply baffle you.

A third mystery is mentioned in verse 15 of Ecclesiastes chapter 8: “So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.”

At first, this sounds like a playboy’s hedonistic philosophy. But notice the presence of God in the second half of the verse. When we read the second half of the verse, we see that pleasure is being commended as that which will stand by a man throughout the days of a life filled with unjust triumph and unfair circumstances. This toiling man personifies the mystery of having pleasure even though life is filled with injustices. And while certainly some can fake it for a while, as an enduring reality, this can only be true of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. This verse is the description of a believer that is going through something terrible, perhaps a broken relationship, a bad marriage, a huge financial loss, or a dying child. Yet, in spite of it all, this person has tremendous peace from God. Paul stated this same principle in his letter to the Philippians in chapter 4 verses 6 to 7, “Stop worrying about a thing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Notice that there is a peace that surpasses comprehension or understanding. To maintain the peace of God, despite tough circumstances, is another mystery of life. The believer who has that kind of peace is a mystery to every onlooker. The Lord told us that it was possible to have such a peace, and it is a peace that the world cannot give. John 14:27 says, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

What happens if you don’t operate in this mystery of what appears on the surface to be untimely pleasure? What happens if you take all the injustices of life, the unjust triumphs and the unfair consequences, upon your shoulders? The alternative is simply to do what the majority of the people in this world do—become bitter, cynical, questioning, never at peace, neurotic in one’s pursuit of answers to why? Why? Why? You try to solve the mysteries of heaven

and God's wisdom on this earth, with your own power and intellect, and you simply cannot do it. Paul even called it the mystery of lawlessness in his second letter to the Thessalonians.

Second Thessalonians 2:7. "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work."

Solomon suggests a simple solution to all of this mystery, all this unjust triumph, and unfair consequences. He says eat, drink, and happily trust God.

As we return to verse 12, we notice the perspective that a godly mental attitude will give you. **Ecclesiastes 8:12** reads, "Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly."

We have already noted that in the last part of Solomon's journal, he is waking up to the truth. This verse is a challenge to anyone who is trying to find happiness in life apart from God. Solomon does not deny the reality of sin. No, he tells us here that sin goes on a hundred times over, but in spite of that, regardless of all the unjust triumph and unfair consequences of this world, it is best to simply trust God. Job was clear about this, despite all of his intense suffering. In chapter 13 verse 15, he says, "Though He slay me, I will trust in Him."

When Job's wife told him to curse God and die because of his awful suffering, notice his reply to her: "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity" (Job 2:10)? Job accepted the terrible news that he had lost all of his children and all of his wealth, and he dropped to his knees and worshipped his God!

Ecclesiastes 8:13. "But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God." Solomon is saying, I may not see it yet, Lord, and I don't know when it will happen, but I know You, God, and I know Your plan. Right now it's cloudy and thick with fog, but I see the sunshine of your truth breaking through. I believe that God will keep His word, and until then, I eat, I drink, and I am happy!" Though evil may seem to triumph, and there are unfair consequences in our life, we must trust God to see us through. God is always working things out. If you miss that kind of eternal perspective, you'll spend your life wringing your hands and waving your fists heavenward, asking why, and whining how dare you do this to me?" One writer puts it like this: "Lord, I'm drowning in a sea of perplexity. Waves of confusion

crash over me! I'm too weak to shop for help. Either quiet the waves or lift me above them, it's too late to learn to swim." We all have days when we are seemingly drowning in a sea of mysteries, and we realize that if God doesn't hold us up, we'll sink.

How do we handle the mysteries of life? What do we do with those unanswered questions and unsolved problems? What do we do with unjust triumphs and unfair consequences? How can we enjoy untimely pleasure? First, we need to remind ourselves that we are all human, we are only human. God knows that we're only human and He doesn't ask us to figure everything out. He simply asks us to trust Him. Psalm 103:10-14 says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who respect Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."

When you are going through a tough time, and things are not going right, remind yourself that you're only human, and that you don't have all the answers. Even if you are having a problem with sin, you're not going to solve it until you realize what God has done about it. In Psalm 103:10, it says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

How do we handle the mysteries of life? The second thing is to admit that we don't know why certain things happen, and that we may never understand the reasons why. In some cases, you need to admit that you cannot bring about the change you want. Although you've certainly tried, and you've done your best to change the situation, it still hasn't changed. You don't know why, but you can't change it; you have no power to change it. The only solution is to believe that God knows what is best, and become willing to wait on His timing for answers and solutions. And while you're waiting for your Father's divine timing, you are told by Solomon to eat, drink, find your joy with God throughout the days of your life in midst of all this toil. This is the secret as to how a believer can be happy in the midst of wild and crazy circumstances. If you respond to life's mysteries in this manner, and no longer struggle with unfair treatment, or unjust triumph, and unfair consequences, you also will become a mystery. Your untimely

pleasure will create all kinds of interest in the mystery of how you think. You will have doors open that have never opened before. People will observe your happiness, and your life, and will be wondering what it is that makes you so happy in an evil world. People will ask you why you are so happy. Why do you seem to be enjoying life so much? You will then have a greater ability to be an ambassador for Christ. There is a song sung at Grace Bible Church that goes like this:

I've had many tears and sorrow,
 I've had questions for tomorrow,
 There've been times I didn't know right from wrong,
 But in every situation, God gave blessed consolation,
 That my trials come to only make me strong,
 I've been to lots of places and I've seen lots of faces,
 There've been times I felt so all alone,
 But in my lonely hours,
 Yes those precious lonely Hours,
 The Lord let me know that I was His own.
 I thank God for the mountains,
 And I thank Him for the valleys,
 And I thank Him for the storms,
 He's brought me through,
 For if I'd never had a problem,
 I wouldn't know that he could solve them,
 I'd never know what faith in God could do!
 Through it all
 Through it all
 I've learned to trust in Jesus Christ,
 I've learned to trust in God,
 Through it all,
 Through it all,
 I've learned to depend upon His word!

That is the way to live! I challenge you to add one more mystery to this old world, and that is you! I challenge you to become a mystery! Live in untimely pleasure in the midst of unjust triumph and unfair circumstance.

Ecclesiastes 8:14-17. "There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to

the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility. So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun. When I gave my heart to know wisdom and to see the task which has been done on the earth (even though one should never sleep day or night), and I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun. Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, I know, he cannot discover.”

Men are very slow to believe that they have wasted their time and strength, that they have completely mistaken their destiny. They are reluctant to believe that they have simply wasted their lives away on the wrong path of life, and so God brings people face to face with life’s mysteries. He allows unjust triumph and unfair circumstances. In the midst of this anguish, He offers the escape of untimely pleasure. It comes to the believer who will admit that he or she is only human, and then humbly trusts in God’s ways. Those who do this—who have faith in God’s plan, and stop demanding to know why things are the way they are—these eventually become mysteries themselves, secure in the knowledge that God Himself is the ultimate mystery.

CHAPTER 19

Four Facts of Life and God's Response

(Ecclesiastes 9:1-10)

Sometimes it's necessary to blast before we build. Not only is this true in construction work, but it is also sometimes true in life. If you have ever tried to form a new habit, you know how hard it is at times to break free from the old habit. When young Jeremiah, the prophet, first began his ministry, the Lord instructed him about this principle:

“Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.” Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth” (Jer 1:4-9).

Notice verse 10 carefully: “See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow [there is blasting], To build and to plan [there is building]” (Jer 1:10).

God has allotted a certain amount of time for us to be destructive and a certain amount of time to be constructive. Many times, we need to blast before we can build. For the first eight chapters in Ecclesiastes, King Solomon has been blasting, destroying, attacking, and assaulting the philosophies of life. All of them are familiar to us, but none of them have withstood scrutiny because none of them have provided any meaning or lasting satisfaction. Chapter by chapter, Solomon has

been dealing with one philosophy after another, hopefully blasting them away from our minds, so that in their place we might have the wisdom of God. As we begin Ecclesiastes chapter 9, we come to the climax of all that Solomon has been doing.

Before delving further into this chapter, let's note some of the familiar and popular philosophies of our day. First, there is the philosophy of materialism, which says that possessions can satisfy. Solomon has already told us that this is a lie and it won't deliver. Second, there is the playboy philosophy or hedonism. Here, life is a ball, so enjoy yourself, forget all the restraints and restrictions and borders of morality, and just let it all hang out. Hedonism's original name was Epicureanism. The Epicureans were Greek philosophers who belonged to a school founded by Epicurus in about 306 BC. The Epicureans were concerned with the practical results of philosophy in everyday life. Their chief aim in life was pleasure, they believed they could find happiness by seeking that which brought physical and mental pleasure, and by avoiding that which brought pain. In fact, there's a reference to the Epicureans in Acts 17:16-34, where Paul encountered certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at Athens. In contrast to these philosophers, Paul believed that true happiness was found in following the will of Jesus Christ. The Epicureans believed if it feels good, do it. It sounds extremely exciting and inviting, unless of course you are unfortunate enough to be married to somebody like that! The epicurean lifestyle doesn't satisfy, and it needs to be blasted out of our lives.

A third philosophy that needs to be blasted out of our life is humanism. Humanism says that humanity is glorious, so exalt yourself! Humanism denies the depravity of man, and says that there is some good in everyone. Humanism highlights the dignity, the worth, and the eternal good of the human heart. Humanism says:

*It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

Humanism says that there is glory in me, if I work hard, and strive, and educate myself, and fight, and push, and pull, I can become somebody and make myself happy. But it's just another lie, and it doesn't satisfy.

The fourth and final philosophy we will mention is fatalism. The philosophy of fatalism says that the game is fixed, and you had better resign yourself to it. It's a very popular philosophy in this century. Fatalism says you can't change things, including yourself, so why bother with anything. Fatalism says we are empty, blind, meaningless robots moving through life pulled by the strings of fate, and pushed into darkness and light that has no meaning before us.

Whether it is these four, or forty more just like them, man has no problem churning out false viewpoints. Not wanting the reader of his journal to get caught up in any of them, Solomon leads us back to the realities of life. Any philosophy that is not based on the thinking of God must be blasted from our lives before wisdom can be built in our minds. Solomon tells us the truth, as hard as it is sometimes to hear it.

Solomon admits in the first verse, **Ecclesiastes 9:1**, "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain." The Living Bible says in Ecclesiastes 9:1, "This, too, I carefully explored." The NIV says in Ecclesiastes 9:1, "So I reflected on all this and concluded."

He is bringing his story to a climax. He will tell us about one more experiment and then he will tell us what life is really all about. He is going to say, since none of these human philosophies can satisfy or give anyone meaning, purpose, and definition, look at the biblical philosophy. There are some realities that are inescapable.

First, there is the sovereign hand of God in life . . .

Ecclesiastes 9:1. "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him."

Please understand that this is not the same thing as fatalism. We are not victims of chance, blindly groping our way through a maze for sixty or seventy years called life. Our lives are in the hand of God, and that includes even love or hatred, anything that awaits us. God is with us! Try to deny it! It is an inescapable truth. God is sovereign; and therefore, nothing touches my life that hasn't passed through the hand of God. Whether the events of our life are directed or permitted (however you may wish to term it), nothing strikes us until God nods His approval. It's easy to forget that, especially when life becomes difficult.

Whether we are surrounded by love or hatred or something in between, the conditions in which we live come from the sovereign

hand of God. That is hard truth to swallow, and in fact, some people gag on that one! But that principle is found, time and time again, throughout the scripture. It's a foundational block upon which we build many biblical philosophies. If you don't think in those terms, you need to blast out the thoughts that are contrary to that: My work! My practice! My business! My loss of work! My misfortunes! The conditions in which I live! My circumstances! My health! My size! My appearance! Whatever it is, it is in the hands of God! Our birth was in the hands of God, and our death is also. Solomon says it . . . Let's believe it! God doesn't tell us all the details about or lives, so we must trust Him.

There is another inescapable fact of life, and that is the absolute certainty of death, which is addressed in **verse 2 of Ecclesiastes chapter 9**, "It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean, and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice [the very religious person] and for the one who does not sacrifice [the irreligious person]. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear."

Death awaits us all. Euripides, the Greek poet, said, "Death is a debt we all must pay, The rich and poor, the young and old, the king and pauper alike, are now in the grave, and so it will continue to be!"

Of course, there is one generation, the Rapture generation of believers, who will escape physical death, but that was not revealed to Solomon. Take a walk through the scriptures, and you will hear about the certainty of death over and over again. It began in the Garden of Eden at the fall of man.

- Genesis 3:19. "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
- Psalm 89:48. "What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of the grave?"
- For the unbeliever there are two deaths. Revelation 21:8, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral person and sorcerers and idolaters and all lairs, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Ecclesiastes 9:3. “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men.”

That may be hard for some of you to hear. In his book, *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville wrote about the book of Ecclesiastes, saying: “So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true—not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon’s and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe.”

You’re reading the fine hammered steel of a man telling you the truth. First, there is the fine hammered steel of the sovereign hand of God, followed by the absolute certainty of death, and in the last part of verse 3, there is a third reality that is inescapable. Lurking within the human heart, there is evil and insanity.

- Ecclesiastes 9:3. “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.”

Man’s evil heart is mentioned many times throughout the scripture, but this is the only place in scripture that the heart of man is described as insane. Lurking in the human heart is an unerasable mixture of evil and insanity. Think about all of the insanity in this world. How else do you explain the moral corruption, the sexual perversion, the homicidal lunacy, the insane rationalization, the materialistic frenzy, the intellectual chaos, and the judicial madness of our times? Mankind invents the most incredible answers to life. Within the human heart, there’s a private pool of insanity; you can drink from it, or you can swim in it. You can be polluted by it. It’s your own private pool, and everybody has one.

We see it in the prodigal son in Luke 15, who, the Bible tells us, finally came to his senses and went back home. Luke 15:17 reads, “But when he came to his senses, he said . . .” This means that he was out of his senses, wading in his own pool of insanity, and his suffering helped him to step back into sanity. We need to know about the insane part in all of us. It is the steel truth and we need to face it. Thankfully, there’s a *fourth* biblical philosophy that is also an inescapable reality, and it appears in verses 4-6.

Let's recap the first three and introduce the fourth:

- The sovereign hand of God
- The absolute certainty of death
- The human heart filled with evil and insanity
- Fourth, there is hope for the living.

This turns the tide, and brings light to the darkness.

Ecclesiastes 9:4. “For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.” Solomon quotes from an old Arabic proverb that is familiar to him, but not to us, when he says, “surely a live dog is better than a dead lion.” This doesn't have the same impact today as it did then because today dogs are pampered. Today people treat their dogs better than they treat some humans. However, in Solomon's day, dogs were mangy mongrels that, by the hundreds, swamped the streets of the city. They were fearful animals that ran wild. Today we would have to say, “surely a live rat is better than a dead lion” [or the king of the jungle who is dead]. Why? Because the king of the jungle, if he's dead, has no hope; it's over for him. But as long as there is life, there's hope for the possibility of change (not for the rat, but for any human being). As long as there's life, there are dreams, plans, love, purpose, and therefore hope.

Ecclesiastes 9:5. “For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten.”

Some people get irritated about the book of Ecclesiastes. It's really dark, they say, it doesn't seem to give the finished picture. Therefore, they just try to get through it as fast as they can. Every doctrine presented in this book is not tied together with a pretty ribbon. We have to remember that Solomon is looking at life under the sun. He writes the phrase six times in this chapter alone. When someone is looking at his life horizontally, and not vertically, he's only looking from birth to death, and after that, there is no reward. All is forgotten. Now, a believer in Jesus Christ who has faith in His Word knows that there is reward for the dying because he has studied the passages, and looks at life beyond the sun. But if you're looking at life under the sun, as this journal does, physical death is the end. Once you draw your last breath, hope is gone.

Ecclesiastes 9:6. “Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.”

The dead no longer share in the love of a family at Christmas, or a fine dinner with a friend, or a passionate embrace, nor any other love, or hate, or zeal. The point is this: if you are alive, you have hope. How are we, the living, to respond to these inescapable realities? It is wonderful how Solomon’s journal gives the answer. Verses 7-10 talk about another side that is bright and contagiously enthusiastic.

Look at what he says in **Ecclesiastes 9:7**, “Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.”

Solomon doesn’t want us to just sit in our study and read over the first six verses and close the book with a sigh and say, that’s life. Therefore, he says, “Go,” and then he gives us one of the first glimpses of the New Covenant in the Old Testament. For the believer living today, it is a great truth, an exciting reality: *God has already approved your works*. This means that you were not designed to live your life under guilt; God is not angry with you. For example, when you pray, what is your image of God? What picture do you have of Him in your mind? Do you see a smiling open-armed friend who assures you of your acceptance, or do you see some dreadful, raging holy figure wondering what a scumbag like you is doing, even asking? For the church-age believer, this passage is a reminder that God has already approved of their works because we are all *in Christ*. You don’t have to live under guilt. You don’t have to worry each morning that God is going to club you into eternity. You’re approved as John 5:24 states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has already passed out of death into life.”

This is why you can *eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works*. Most pastors don’t like to teach these things, but this is the truth. If you have a relationship with God and He has blessed you, the Bible says to enjoy yourself. What should be taught from the pulpits is not to give away all your prosperity from God, but to handle it properly and graciously as the Word of God teaches.

In Deuteronomy 14:22-27, it is written, “You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every

year. [Tithing was a system of taxation, ten percent above the board] And you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, in order that you may learn to respect or honor the Lord your God always. And if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the Lord your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the Lord your God blesses you, then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And [when you go to the place that the Lord your God chooses] you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household. [This is a picture of God blessing His people in the Old Testament through an agricultural economy] Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you.”

Blessings in time become twice as pleasurable when you realize that they come from God, Who has already approved of your works. What are the works that God approves? Are they the things that you do? No! One day, the disciples asked the Lord this same question in John 6:28-29, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

So when Ecclesiastes 9:7 says that God has already approved your works, it is not speaking of the good things that we do, but rather of our righteousness and spiritual growth, which come from our relationship with TLJC. Any divine good that we produce is a direct result of the righteousness of Christ within, along with the capacity developed from our doctrinal intake and the resultant spiritual growth. God is exalted when He is able to bestow blessings upon us. We are not only called heirs of heaven, but we are also said to be qualified to inherit the earth (Psa 37:11; Mat 5:5).

- Psalm 37:11 says, “But the humble will inherit the land, And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.”

All of us had no right to expect anything except eternal banishment from God’s presence and yet, through union with Christ, we are

now accepted by the beloved, TLJC. Our true means of happiness and enjoyment is to find this acceptance with God. The heart of God for you is a fatherly loving heart. Expect nothing from Him but good. Solomon already told us that there is a time to mourn; there is profit in undeserved suffering. But our obligation is revealed in John 10:10, the life more abundant that God has given to us. It states, "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." **Ecclesiastes 9:8 says**, "Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head."

We have to be careful here because these are symbolic references. White is a symbol of righteousness. Oil is a picture of the Spirit of God. Solomon is telling us to walk in purity, and in the power of the Spirit. Psalm 23:5b states, "Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows." Walk in white, walk in power, and walk free from guilt. We should remember our obligation to shine! We are to exhibit our white garments of righteousness and the fragrant oil of the Spirit of God.

Ecclesiastes 9:9. "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which [woman] He [God] has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and [enjoy life] in your toil [your job or occupation] in which you have labored under the sun." Ecclesiastes 9:9 is saying, throw yourself fully into all of life, life is to be fun. There should be a contagious enthusiasm about your life. The Lord said that He came to give you a more abundant life! With God, life is exciting, fun, and full of happiness. Because God has approved your works, you are right with Him, and He is with you; so live life, eating good food, and drinking good wine, and having a blast. Having a blast in life begins with blasting away all those humanistic philosophies, which we have noted. Life is to be fun, enjoyed with the woman you love or the man you love. Even your work is to be fun. There are so many grim prophets of doom, whose horizontal thinking can't see past the clouds; no wonder people aren't interested in Christianity. We've just seen that life is to be free of guilt, contagiously happy, committed to God, happy with the one God has given you, happy on your job, and whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might.

Ecclesiastes 9:10. "Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going." Whether it's a job, hobby,

thrill, challenge, pastime, the ministry, home life, travel, or even play, put your whole heart into it and enjoy yourself. But before you can build a life with this kind of philosophy, you have to blast all the others away. You can't have both. The false philosophies will tell you that you don't need white clothes, you don't need the oil of the Holy Spirit, you don't need your right man or right woman, and you should feel guilty about your relationship with God. Isaiah reminds us of the glorious work of TLJC in Isaiah 61:3, [Because of the Lord Jesus Christ, God gives us] "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

Because God wills the highest and the best for you as a believer, only when you receive that highest and best do you glorify God. People often ask what is God's will for my life? The answer is very simple: God's will is for you to glorify Him. How? God's will is for you to withdraw from your escrow account (God's highest and best that He designed for you in eternity past) as much as you can. He wants you to be contagiously happy, committed to God, free from guilt, happy with the one God has given you, and happy on the job. He has the greatest blessings in store for you, blessings that stagger the imagination. There is no excuse for any believer in all of the history of the church age not to receive phenomenal blessings. The only reason is just plain old negative volition toward doctrine. The Christian way of life takes perseverance and positive volition toward doctrine. You can't be positive if you submit to negative feelings and depression, or if you allow someone's personality to get in the way of your momentum.

So again, why are you here? Only the believer who stays with doctrine can really answer that question. You are here to glorify God. Glorifying God demands understanding. You will be kept alive by God long enough to have the opportunity to gain that understanding. You will be kept alive by God to fulfill His plan. But if you say no to God's plan, He will discipline His child, and you will lose out. God's will for your life as a member of the royal family of God is to bless you. It is to give you prosperity in the midst of all kinds of adverse situations. Therefore, in eternity past, God provided a fantastic plan, which included His highest and best designed especially for you. You glorify Him when you live in that plan and receive all the blessings

he has designed for you. God had a reason for all He has done for you, and this reason gives purpose to your life.

Anything God does results in His glorification. God does not depend on us for His pleasure or His glory. He enjoyed these things in eternity past when no one else existed. Rather, He expresses His pleasure and glory toward us. Because God is to be glorified, you and I are the beneficiaries of His blessings and divine provisions. God is not glorified by our system of human works, but is glorified by meeting our every need.

- Isaiah 26:15, “Thou hast increased the nation, O Lord, Thou hast increased the nation, Thou art glorified.”
- Isaiah 60:21, “Then all your people will be righteous; They will possess the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.”
- Psalm 50:15, “And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will glorify Me.”

God is glorified when He rescues us. This is why Elihu said in Job 36:11 that if we obey God and serve Him, we will spend our days in prosperity and our years in pleasures. “If they hear and serve Him, They shall end their days in prosperity, And their years in pleasures” (Job 36:11).

CHAPTER 20

The Eighth Experiment: The Hero Image

(Ecclesiastes 9:11-18)

The human race can be easily seduced into believing philosophies that are not directly in line with God's thinking. Optimism is one of those philosophies. Here, people choose to see life through rose-colored glasses, denying life's dark side. Optimism can be a world of fantasy divorced from reality. It is the belief that the universe is improving, and that good will ultimately triumph over evil. The optimist believes that all one needs to do is wait for the best possible outcome to any situation and it will come. However, that light at the end of the tunnel could be a speeding train coming your way!

For every optimist there is usually a pessimist. Pessimism is the opposite of optimism. Pessimism is the tendency to stress the negative or the unfavorable, and to take the gloomiest view possible. It is humorless and colorless. Though it may appear to be the more realistic outlook in dealing with life's tragedies, pessimism is not the answer either. Not all things will ultimately end in the triumph of evil.

Then there is the life of suspicion. Where the pessimist has a lack of joy, the suspicious person has a lack of trust. Suspicion is the act of suspecting something, especially something wrong, on little evidence or without proof. The suspicious person lacks trust; and therefore, can never build any true relationships in life. C. S. Lewis wrote, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be broken, even if it's a dog." Not everyone is out to cheat on you or take advantage of you, and so suspicion leads to a life of paranoia.

Another popular philosophy is fatalism. Fatalism is the doctrine that says all events are predetermined by fate and are; therefore, unalterable. You must simply grin and bear all things because the game is fixed, so things would be better if you would just resign

yourself to that fact. Fatalism says that you cannot change yourself or your circumstances by means of positive decisions, so why bother? In truth, you are not a meaningless, empty, blind robot moving through life pulled by the strings of fate; on the contrary, your decisions matter greatly.

It is interesting that all four of these philosophies focus our attention back on ourselves. The optimist lives in his own fantasy world, while the pessimist lives in his own colorless, humorless, dark existence marked by fear and dread; the suspicious person trusts no one but himself, and the fatalist stares at his own inability to change anything. But occupation with self is never the answer to any problem that confronts the believer.

Ecclesiastes is a book that will not let us live in any of these false systems of thinking. There are many opinions given by scholars and theologians about this book, but one thing is certain: Solomon's journal portrays life realistically. Solomon, in his great wisdom, serves up life on a platter and says, deal with it, and, if possible, to the best of your ability, enjoy it! Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might. God has approved of your works, but don't for a second think that the results of your labor are going to work out the way that you planned. All results are in the hands of God. This is the theme of Ecclesiastes 9:11-18. This is the necessary flip side of living life enthusiastically, contagiously, and delightfully. Live in the moment with all your might, but leave the results to the infinite working of God.

Ecclesiastes 9:11. "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors [or the strong], and neither is bread to the wise [meaning the clever], nor wealth to the discerning [or wealth doesn't come to those who are simply sharp and discerning], nor favor to men of ability [those who are highly skilled]; for time and chance overtake them all."

We are all surrounded by people who will tell us that the way to make it in this world is to increase your speed, get stronger, be more competitive, think more cleverly, plan better, get wiser, and hone your skills. It all makes sense according to the ways of the world. But we should be reminded that Solomon had all these things in abundance, and yet he has revealed that it is vanity, meaningless, and chasing after the wind. However, since we live in this world, this foreign land, it is easy to be seduced into this type of thinking. Our Lord described individuals like this in Mark 4:19, "And the worries of the world, and

the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Luke 8:14 echoes the sentiments, saying, “And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”

And again in Luke 21:34 with, “Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life.”

Solomon put it like this in Psalm 127:1-2 (A Song of Ascents, of Solomon), “Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, To retire late, To eat the bread of painful labors; For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”

Any of us who live in this fast-paced, modern world can get sucked into the busy details of life, but the kingdom of God is not in these things. Solomon makes this clear in verse 11 of Ecclesiastes chapter 9 with his Word order in the original Hebrew. There are five negative phrases in verse 11, and in each phrase, the negative is pushed to the front. The original literally says; *not* to the swift is the race, *not* to the warriors is the winning of the battle, *not* to the clever is the getting of bread, *not* to the discerning is true wealth, *not* to the skillful comes favor and power. Solomon’s use of his Hebrew language emphasizes greatly what is *not* important.

Take heed, all you businessmen and women. Pay particular attention, those of you who may be seeking to get rich. Listen to that, young people. The philosophy of our day will suck you in; it will try to convince you that if you’re going to make it, you’ve got to be faster, cleverer, stronger, and gain better skills. All the while you will be wasting your energy and time, because God is the one who promotes, and He does so in His timing, and not yours. Unless God promotes you, you are not promoted! Why is it that Solomon tells us this immediately following verses 9 and 10? He just finished telling us to enjoy our life, our job, our marriage, and whatever our hand finds to do; to do it with all our might. Now in verse 11, it seems as though he is discouraging us. The last part of the verse explains why: *because time and chance overtake them all*. We are reminded that our lives are in God’s hand. We should enjoy life and do all things with all of our might, but Solomon is reminding us that the results are always in the hand of God. James reiterated this in chapter 1 verses 16-17, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.”

We are easily deceived into thinking that good things happen to us because of the good decisions we have made. But life does not follow that kind of logic. The race is not always to the swift, the battle is not always to the warrior, the bread is not always to the clever, wealth is not always to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability. Why? For time and chance overtake them all. Things don't always work out well when we make good decisions. The hand of God has a way of bringing perplexing results, rather than our expected results. That's part of the mystery of life. It really is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Who was stronger physically, David or Goliath? We know that Goliath was, but the outcome of that battle was neither logical nor expected. First Samuel 17:4 introduces the story of Goliath: “A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. But as 1 Samuel 17:50 says, “David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him.”

The battle was not *to the warrior* or the strong. David wrote in his Psalms about this principle he had learned from his great battle with Goliath.

- Psalm 33:16-18. “The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who respect and honor Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness.”
- Psalm 147:10-11. “He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord favors those who respect and honor Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.”

Jeremiah stated this fact: Jeremiah 9:23-24, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.”

Solomon said it like this in Proverbs 21:31, “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the Lord.”

Ecclesiastes 9:12. “Man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.”

Do you think that you’re powerful, and that you have everything under control? Think again. The truth is that we are like fish that get caught in a net, or birds that become trapped in a snare. When everything seems to be moving along smoothly, in a predictable fashion, and it seems that success is on the horizon, suddenly God has a way of bringing in the unexpected. If it’s from God, it’s for your benefit, even if it is adversity. But the average person is ensnared or trapped by sudden evil or sudden disaster. Why? First of all, adversity, suffering, and disaster have the ability to destroy concentration. The suddenness or intensity of a disaster hinders the believer from concentrating on the doctrine he has already learned. Believers in all stages of spiritual growth can find themselves suddenly in fear and panic from sudden disaster. Every believer must be prepared for this in Psalm 56:3, “When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee.”

Even the mature believer can fall into fear, panic, or worry through a sudden disaster, and it doesn’t even have to be a real disaster; it can be an imaginary one. Imagination can be very wonderful, but it can also be very horrible. All it takes is a little imagination and you can develop some serious spiritual problems. Many times fear, worry, and anxiety simply amount to punishing yourself about things that haven’t happened. Fear and panic hinder the concentration needed to apply doctrine to sudden evil or to sudden disaster. It is possible to learn a great many doctrines, and yet fall apart in an emergency, or a sudden, pressurized situation. In a sudden disaster, what you think and how you think will determine how you handle the test. No matter what the situation, the soul is the place where the real battle rages. This is why David said in Psalm 23:3 says, “He restores my soul.” God is ready to restore us to sanity when we look to Him. It is the suddenness of the problem which causes us to fail.

- Proverbs 3:25-26. “Do not be afraid of sudden fear, Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught.”

Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, this brilliant writer Solomon addresses this whole issue with his eighth and final experiment. Verses 13-15 of Ecclesiastes chapter 9 present Solomon's eighth experiment: looking for happiness in the hero image.

Ecclesiastes 9:13. "Also this I came to see as wisdom under the sun, and it impressed me."

There was something that impressed Solomon, the king, a man of untold wealth and wisdom. The heroes throughout history impressed Solomon. Heroes impress us all. Many of us think it would be great to be famous, to be a celebrity, to be a hero, every facet of life has its own heroes. Politics, the military, sports, music, art, literature—all have their heroes. However, as Solomon discovered, being a hero does not make a person happy.

Ecclesiastes 9:14-15 "There was a small city with few men in it and a great king came to it, surrounded it, and constructed large siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a poor wise man and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man."

This one man delivered the city. He was a great hero for a brief hour, but when the great king was driven away and his armies were gone, and there was peace again, everyone in the small city forgot about that hero. There is no lasting happiness from being a hero. You might be a hero today, but you will be forgotten tomorrow. This is Solomon's last experiment, and not one of them brought him any lasting happiness.

Set these eight things in your mind, and remember that happiness is not found in any of them:

1. Academics
2. Pleasure
3. Family
4. Philosophy
5. Money
6. Reputation
7. Sex
8. Hero image

Picture the scene in verses 14 and 15. There is a small wall around a small city. Suddenly, there is the sound of perhaps thousands of

marching troops, and movement of large siegeworks can be heard in the distance. The people inside the small city know that their time is short. They are severely outnumbered and there is nothing they can do to prevent total annihilation; the end is upon them. The great attacking king finally arrives at the wall and he begins to build the siege engines that will destroy the wall, and allow his army to climb the wall, and destroy the city. The people face certain death, and suddenly, within the village, there is a poor wise man who speaks. The poor wise man has an idea, and having no other recourse, the city implements his idea. His idea works, and the city is saved completely. The poor wise man is a hero. However, when peace is restored, and it's back to life as usual, the poor man is not remembered at all. This story is not an honorable account to show us that we should all be heroes. Rather, it is a cautionary account to show what people are like. Amongst people, you may be a hero today, but a scoundrel tomorrow. This story is a mirror to show us what we humans are really like. We are fickle and ever changing. What humans honor one day will be the object of scorn the next. Get used to that fact, and never put your faith in the approbation of mankind. The only opinion that counts in your life is God's opinion.

But there is a deeper principle that we must take from this passage. Solomon doesn't want us to focus in on a city under siege, but rather on the pressure that comes against our own souls. A better way to apply this story to our lives is to see that the small city is our very own soul, and the great king laying siege against us is the god of this world, Satan. If you really believe the Bible, and really believe that there is an angelic conflict and spiritual warfare, then you should realize that, throughout this life, barking at your heels is a very loud and powerful king. A great and powerful king is surrounding you and doing his best to construct a siege or a fortress against your soul, to stop you from going forward in the plan of God and to hinder your spiritual growth. He is called your adversary, the devil, in the first epistle of Peter chapter 5 verses 6-10, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, by being firm in your doctrine, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in

the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

Satan is a very powerful king on earth whose desire is first to seduce us, and then ultimately to defeat us. Many believers are being seduced today and are well on their way to being defeated. This is the ultimate tragedy because God has created the believer in the church age as a new creature in Christ (2 Co 5:17). The seduction of Satan fools believers into thinking that they are something far less than this. An old Indian story illustrates this tragedy well.

An Indian brave found an egg that laid by an eagle. Not being able to reach an eagle’s nest in which he could place the egg, he decided to put it in the nest of a prairie chicken. The hen sat on this eagle’s egg along with her own eggs, caring nothing and knowing nothing of the change, until by and by, the little eaglet was hatched alongside the prairie chickens. All his life, the eagle, thinking he was a prairie chicken, did just what the prairie chickens did. He scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. He clucked and cackled. He flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers, reaching no more than a few feet off the ground, and never flying very far at one time. After all, that’s how prairie chickens are supposed to fly. Years passed, and the eagle grew very old. One day he looked up in a cloudless sky and he saw a magnificent bird soaring on the currents of the wind up high. He looked to his neighbor and he said, “What a beautiful bird, what is it?” His neighbor, a prairie chicken, responded, “Why that’s an eagle, the chief of the birds!” But he continued to cluck, “Don’t give it a second thought; you could never be like him.” So the eagle never gave it another thought, and he died convinced he was a prairie chicken.

Just like this eagle that was built to soar into the heavens yet lived in a lie, so it is for many Christians. In a world of fools who settle for mediocrity, who follow the drumbeat of a secular and humanistic mentality, it is easy for eagles to live like prairie chickens. It is easy for believers to settle for so much less than what God has to offer and to opt for the wrong way of life. The seduction of the king of this world, Satan, makes it possible for the child of God to live like a child of the world. The seduced believer never lives above the sun, but instead trudges along under the sun. For nine chapters in this ancient book of wisdom called Ecclesiastes, Solomon has been talking

about a prairie-chicken lifestyle. That's a life that's lived strictly under the sun, settling for so much less than God has offered. It's a life of endless and meaningless futility, and it doesn't satisfy. It is a tragic life with no substance, and no significance, and all around us we hear people tell us, don't bother; you're just a prairie chicken, but we are told in God's Word that we are capable of so much more.

First Corinthians 2:9 says, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'"

It seems as though the majority of God's people are too busy striving and struggling to be the best prairie chickens they can be, rather than receiving God's highest and best, and soaring like eagles. Perhaps Isaiah had something like this in mind when he wrote in chapter 40 verse 31, "Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary." In Ephesians 3:20, it says, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

How would you like to have God do for you exceeding abundantly beyond what you could even think of asking, or for that matter, even beyond what you can imagine? Or, would you rather remain a prairie chicken, scratching in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat? You should realize from your perception of doctrine how insignificant and unimportant human success and achievement are, compared with what God has given you as prosperity. The prosperity and blessing that God has for you extend far beyond the dreams of mankind. God has given to you a spiritual life in which you can succeed no matter what your station in life. True prosperity and success can only be related to your spiritual life, and your spiritual life is found in the metabolized doctrine circulating in the right lobe of the soul.

However, be prepared; like this poor wise man in our passage who was a hero for a short time, you will not be recognized for your spiritual greatness either. In God's plan, whether or not you are recognized is totally inconsequential. Approbation from man means absolutely nothing compared to what God has provided for us in the spiritual life. In eternity past, God prepared for you fantastic blessings for time and eternity.

- Mark 10:30. “but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.”
- Psalm 84:11. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”

You can strive to achieve all of your dreams, but without God at the very center of every area of your life, you will live like a prairie chicken rather than a soaring eagle. The king of this world will continue to throw his many philosophies at your soul until he finally sees one hit. He will not stop or rest, and you will daily be faced with projections from the kingdom of darkness, which are designed to distract you, and to keep you down, living under the sun when you could be soaring in the heavens with a life beyond the sun. Believers are in union with Christ; and therefore, our lives are not centered on this earth. Our Lord said to the religious Jews in John 8:23, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”

If you live the life that TLJC has called you to live, you will live a life that is from above. If not, you will end up being defeated by the kingdom of darkness surrounding your soul, who has been constructing large siegeworks against it. This great and powerful king, Satan, uses thoughts and projections to do so. In Ephesians 6:16 they are called flaming missiles, “in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.”

Those flaming missiles are the philosophies of life, the weapons of the king surrounding the small city of your soul. Satan’s flaming missiles are designed to produce stress, pressure, adversity, and inner or overt catastrophe. Satan’s flaming missiles are far more subtle and effective than any weapon system of history. They are invisible missiles that attack the soul of the believer, spreading human viewpoint, which neutralizes them and draws them away from the pre-designed plan of God. The kingdom of darkness throws thoughts and ideas at us through the media, friends, family members, believers, unbelievers, enemies, and sometimes even from our own presumptuous ideas. Every day you are going to encounter things that disturb you. Every

day you are going to have ideas projected at you that motivate mental attitude sins like jealousy, bitterness, and vindictiveness, and sins of the tongue like gossip, slander, and maligning. All of these things have to be dealt with by the shield of faith. Otherwise, you are going to be so weak that Satan will attack the city of your soul and you will not be able to deliver your soul through wisdom like the wise man that delivers the city. Since the believer's only defense against the missiles of the evil one is Bible doctrine in the soul, it is the objective of Satan's flaming missiles to distract the believer from any consistent function of perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the king who attacks your soul is to do whatever he can to take you away from the PPOG and the teaching of Bible doctrine.

Mark 4:15 says, "And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them."

Some of his missiles are sent to distract the believer from the *perception* of doctrine. You'll be too busy or too tired for doctrine, or something else will always come up. Some of his missiles are targeted to distract the believer from the *metabolization* of doctrine. You'll hear the doctrine but you are not filled with the Spirit, or you listen but do not concentrate. Concentration on doctrine is the highest form of worship in the universe! Some of his missiles are designed to distract the believer from the *application* of doctrine, once that doctrine is located in the soul. Rather than applying doctrine to a situation, you get involved with the arrogance complex of sins or the emotional complex of sins. Remember that the ultimate goal of our adversary is to take the believer out of the historical phase of the angelic conflict. Second Corinthians 10:3-6 is a very important passage concerning this principle.

- Second Corinthians 10:3-5. "For though we walk in the flesh [we live in the world], we do not war according to the flesh. [There is a war, but it's not with people and it's not in the natural realm.] For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh [human attributes], but divinely powerful [Bible doctrine] for the destruction of fortresses [siegeworks from the cosmic system] Destroying speculations [Satan's flaming missiles] and every obstacle of pride, raised up against the knowledge

of God and taking every thought [human viewpoint system of thought] captive to the obedience [authority] of Christ,”

The Greek word for *speculations* is the accusative masculine plural from the noun *logismos*, which means thoughts and reasons. You will be presented with many thoughts and reasons about why you don't have to continue with doctrine and the PPOG.

- Second Corinthians 10:6. “And we [the Christian soldier] are ready [on the alert] to punish all disobedience [any deviation from obedience to the Word of God], whenever your obedience is complete [spiritual maturity].”

Ecclesiastes 9:16. “So I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength. But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded.’”

We have already seen that human ability cannot guarantee true success in verses 11-12. Now we see in verse 16 that strength is more impressive, but less effective than wisdom. You probably haven't heard that at the health club. Wise counsel is never popular, rarely obeyed, and seldom remembered. Wisdom is eventually despised and unheeded, but if we have metabolized doctrine circulating in our souls, our spiritual heart will be that still small voice that whispers the truth (1 Ki 19:12). The timeless sage called the Spirit of God will wait quietly to be obeyed. We must all value wisdom from doctrine as the gift of God. The more we recognize our need for that gift, the more stimulating will be our desire for doctrine. The poor wise man showed himself stronger than a large army that lacked wisdom. We must value wisdom more than anything else in life. We gain great encouragement from the results produced through such fragile means, a poor wise man. **Ecclesiastes 9:17** advises, “The words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.”

Human rulers will always shout out wise counselors and fools prefer the former. Loud and charismatic preachers may stimulate excitement within, but that is not what's going to carry you in difficult times. Wisdom is not always found in the loudest voice or the most eloquent speech. When it comes to doctrinal teaching, it is always the message that counts, and never the man. It's the message of

your pastor-teacher that is going to pull you through when you're struggling to make the right decisions in life. When you're struggling with your integrity, or with doing what's right according to the mind of Christ in any realm of life, it is the doctrinal message of truth that is going to give you victory. The pastor's eloquence or shouting will do you no good in these situations. Yet, the flaming missiles of the evil one will lie to you, saying that the race is to the swift, and that you can forget that other stuff you hear in doctrine class. They will tell you that God's solutions are too slow, and you are strong, so use your strength, since everybody else does. All of these projections at your soul are simply designed to get you to live in your human strength, rather than in the ultimate strength that is given by the grace of God, through His plan. If you succumb to the flaming missiles, and live like the rest of the unbelieving world, there will be many who will say that it's about time that you started to think normally. Our challenge as believers in the devil's world is to be the wise man that delivers our soul, and who doesn't fall for the lie.

Ecclesiastes 9:18. "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good."

Destructive weapons of war are no match for constructive words of wisdom. Our tendency is to choose the path of least resistance. We tend to look for reasons to rationalize our inherent tendency to rebel against God's system. The flaming missiles of the evil king will motivate us to think just as he does by tempting us to look to human logic, quick relief, and instant gratification rather than to truth. It is not always easy or pleasant to live in the truth of the Word of God, but that is the challenge of the wise. In C. S. Lewis's classic book, *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, a demon angel, instructs Wormwood, a lower-ranking demon angel assigned to a Christian, to keep his man confused. Screwtape says, "Keep his mind off of the plain antithesis between true and false."

There exists the truth of God's Word, and the falsehood of everything else. Human psychology will tell you that Christianity is just another form of psychology. After all, it is said, both are after the same things. Both say that you must love your neighbor, both have a promise of being made whole, and of accepting one another as we are. But like most counterfeits, popular psychology does not deliver on its promises, and instead leads both Christians and non-Christians away from their duty or proper conduct. Yet true Christianity is a

system of conduct and duty. Our Lord has given us His truth and we have a duty to follow that truth, regardless of how we feel about it. To mix the real battle of the Christian with human psychology will only lead to watered-down Christianity, with Christians not living in their God-given power.

Listen, the king is at the wall, and your village is about to crumble. There is a quiet voice deep within your spirit as a child of God, and the voice is the Spirit of God, using God's book as your guide. But it won't shout; it won't even threaten. It quietly waits to be heard and accepted. It is the wisdom of doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit. Listen carefully to its message. Its counsel might be painful, but it is the counsel of the wise man, and even if no one agrees with that counsel, realize Who is speaking. If God says something, you must do it.

CHAPTER 21

Fools

(Ecclesiastes 10:1-20)

In Ecclesiastes chapter 10, Solomon makes a transition. He is now done with describing his eight experiments, and now he begins a series of maxims and proverbs that seem to hang loosely together. This section of his journal looks very much like the book of Proverbs that he also wrote. We can look at chapter 10 as the beginning of the next act in the play that is Solomon's life. In fact, it is the second to the last act in the play that is the manifesto of his life. His eight experiments were designed to find the happiness that only God can give. His conclusion to all eight of them has been the same: *they are vanity and chasing after the wind*. However, like many experiences in life, Solomon's frantic search for happiness under the sun has given him more wisdom. The proverbs of chapter 10 demonstrate some of this wisdom. **Ecclesiastes 10:1** says, "Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor."

Verse 1 continues the theme of Ecclesiastes 9:18, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good." Verse 1 is symbolic, relating flies to foolishness. Think of what just a few flies can do to a large jug of very costly perfume. Those few small flies make the perfume stink, and all the work of the perfumer is ruined. Flies are one of the biggest disease carriers in existence. They carry bacteria that can cause typhoid, tuberculosis, and many other diseases. In fact, one fly can carry over thirty-three million disease-causing microorganisms on the inner and outer surfaces of its body. Flies feed and reproduce on filth and decaying matter, and are even known to lay eggs in live flesh. One successful hatch can produce well over two million flies. As many as twenty-five generations can be bred in a single season.

If even a little bit of foolishness is inserted into a life of honor, it will cast a shadow. Foolishness means lack of good sense and foresight in failing to realize the consequences of a stupid act before the act occurs. Though all of us have foolishness in some parts of our lives, we are not to let it continue to exist. We are to replace that foolishness with the wisdom of God. Sometimes just a little folly or foolishness can cause great harm in someone's relationship with God. It can come in an unguarded moment when you say things to others that you would never have said if Christ were present. It might be a careless word, an irritable temper, or poor manners. Foolish jesting has no redemptive value, and it only puts stupid thoughts in the minds of the hearers. Ephesians 5:4 reiterates this point, "There must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

There may get a quick laugh but it's amazing how filthy or silly talk can affect a soul. These are dead flies in the perfume of another's soul, and they become weightier than wisdom and honor. If you're hoping to drop the lifestyle of a prairie chicken and soar like an eagle, as a Christian is designed to soar, you must begin to live a life of wisdom. None of us can afford to live foolishly. We are commanded to live the life of wisdom that results in virtue.

- Philippians 4:8. "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

Ecclesiastes 10:2. "A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left."

Right is the direction that symbolizes that which is worthy of our effort and pursuit. A wise man goes in the direction of that which is worth his time and effort. A foolish person goes toward the left. Left, the opposite of right, and is the direction of wasted time and effort, pursuing foolish things. In scripture, the right hand is where God is. TLJC is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. David portrayed the right side as the direction where God is, and therefore where His protection and powers are.

- Psalm 16:8. “I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”
- Psalm 121:5. “The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade on your right hand.”

Solomon’s search for happiness ends with him realizing that the wise person goes God’s way and the foolish person does not. Therefore, the fool never learns, because his ear is never turned toward the direction where God is. In **Ecclesiastes 10:3**, he says, “Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.”

The fool cannot hide the fact that he is a fool. It is common knowledge to everyone who sees him. In an essay addressed to the young, Dr. Abercrombie gives a good description of a fool: “There is a humility which leaves the mind to the slave of authority without forming opinions and disagreeing without first investigating a matter. There is a rude and reckless pretense of mental independence, or liberty of thinking, which leads a man to despise authority, to aim at striking out for himself a system, distinguished from the received opinions of those around him. The fool has a need to appear different to others and is in bondage to the vanity of appearing wiser than others and is even willing to argue himself into the disbelief of what he wishes not to be true.”

A fool cannot be taught because he lacks the humility to learn from others. He fools himself into thinking that he’s an original thinker, but no one can think with wisdom unless he is taught by someone with wisdom and then he must possess the humility to accept that wisdom. The fool is more in bondage than those who humble themselves under divinely delegated authority. True humility causes us to be open-minded and to approach every subject with a sincere and humble desire for truth.

When the Bible talks about fools, it lists at least five categories: First of all, there is the stupid fool described for us by the Hebrew word *pethiy*, meaning a stupid mule or a fool who is easily persuaded by flattery, delusion, deception, and enticement. He is ready to believe almost anything and he exhibits great gullibility. He believes gossip, slander, and false teaching, and he hates academic discipline.

- Proverbs 1:22. “How long, O naive [pethiy] ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge?”
- Proverbs 14:15. “The naive [pethiy] believes everything, but the prudent man considers his steps.”
- Proverbs 22:3. “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive [pethiy] go on, and are punished for it.”

The second type of fool is described by the Hebrew word *eviyl*, this is the unreasonable fool. This word means to be perverse, or to be one who is without aim or counsel. The *eviyl* fool despises wisdom and instruction. He is full of arrogance and self-justification when confronted with truth. He is easy to spot because his brain has stopped thinking but his tongue is in high gear. In fact, the only way he can appear wise is to keep his mouth shut. As soon as it is opened, his foolishness is revealed.

- Proverbs 1:7. “The respect for the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools [eviyl] despise wisdom and instruction.”
- Proverbs 12:15. “The way of a fool [eviyl] is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”
- Proverbs 14:3. “In the mouth of the foolish [eviyl] is a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.”
- Proverbs 17:28. “Even a fool [eviyl], when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is counted prudent.”
- Proverbs 20:3. “Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool [eviyl] will quarrel.”

Thirdly, there is the *keciyl* fool; this is the stubborn fool. This Hebrew word literally means that the loins and flanks of a person are so crowded by fat that they are dull, inactive, and passive. The stubborn fool cannot cope effectively with authority in business or in a local church for any great length of time. In fact, he thinks he should be in authority himself, even though he has absolutely no capacity for it. His stupidity leads him to take on more than he can handle. The *keciyl* type fools hide their hatred with hypocritical lies, and then utter slander in the next breath. They are two-faced. If you keep company with them, you will suffer harm.

- Proverbs 1:22. “How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools [keciyl] hate knowledge?”
- Proverbs 10:18. “He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool [keciyl].”
- Proverbs 13:20. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools [keciyl] will suffer harm.”
- Proverbs 14:7. “Leave the presence of a fool [keciyl], Or you will not discern words of knowledge.”
- Proverbs 14:16. “A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, But a fool [keciyl] is arrogant and careless.”
- Proverbs 15:14. “The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge, But the mouth of fools [keciyl] feeds on folly.”
- Proverbs 17:10. “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool [keciyl].”
- Proverbs 17:12. “Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool [keciyl] in his folly.”
- Proverbs 18:2. “A fool [keciyl] does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.”

The fourth type of fool is described by the Hebrew word *luwts*. This is the scorning or the mocking fool. The scorning fool is flirting with a reprobate mind. This is the fool that uses his mouth to scoff, to mock, or to ridicule. He will even scoff at the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God. The mocking fool seeks for wisdom in vain because his motivation is wrong and he is blind and deaf to spiritual matters. The mocking fool is obnoxious and is an abomination to others. He delights in mocking spiritual Christians and their standards. In any group of people, if you get rid of the scoffer or the mocking fool, you will solve most of your problems within that group.

- Proverbs 1:22. “How long, o naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers [luwts] delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?”
- Proverbs 9:7-8. “He who corrects a scoffer [luwts] gets dishonor for himself, And he who reprove a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer [luwts], lest he hate you, Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”

- Proverbs 13:1. “A wise son accepts his father’s discipline, But a scoffer [luwts] does not listen to rebuke.”
- Proverbs 14:6. “A scoffer [luwts] seeks wisdom, and finds none, but knowledge is easy to him who has understanding.”
- Proverbs 22:10. “Drive out the scoffer [luwts], and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.”

The fifth type of fool is the committed fool. The committed fools have regressed to the point where they have entered into apostasy. The Hebrew word is *nabal*, which means stupid, wicked, and vile. It also means to fall away, to fail, to faint, to despise, to dishonor, to lightly esteem, or to abandon. It is the *nabal* fool who says in his heart that there is no God. He can even teach about God, yet deny Him in his thinking. This fool gives deep sorrow to his father.

- Psalm 14:1. “The fool [nabal] has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.”
- Job 2:10. “But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish [nabal] women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?”
- Ezekiel 13:3. “Thus says the Lord God, “Woe to the foolish [nabal] prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing.”
- Proverbs 17:21. “He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool [nabal] has no joy.”

Solomon writes about fools seven times in Ecclesiastes chapter 10. It is interesting that after the completion of his eight experiments, the first thing that he focuses on is the fool, as if to say to us, “How I’ve wasted my time!” Verses 1-3 zero in on the individual himself, but in verse 4, we see how foolishness touches other people’s lives.

Ecclesiastes 10:4. “If the ruler’s temper rises against you, do not abandon your position [don’t quit because of his fit of anger], because composure allays [or calms] great offenses.”

The prairie chicken wants to scream back at the ruler, but if you want to live like an eagle, you won’t fight back. Instead, your control and composure will disarm his offense.

- Proverbs 25:15. “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.”
- Proverbs 15:1. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Solomon tells us how to live wisely with someone in authority who may lose his temper. One writer comments on this verse: “How true this is! And yet, it is so easy for us to return heat with heat, insult with insult, sneer with sneer. What we really need to do is disarm his or her offense with a nondefensive and patient spirit.”

The Bible teaches that a victory over oneself (self-control) is a greater accomplishment than a victory over an entire city. But self-control does not come naturally to us; it is a system of thinking that we must willfully choose.

- Proverbs 16:32. “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.”
- Colossians 3:12-15. “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

A person with this kind of wisdom will also develop the virtue of loyalty.

- Proverbs 20:28. “Loyalty and truth preserve the king, And he upholds his throne by righteousness.”
- Proverbs 21:21. “He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.”
- Hosea 6:6. “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler, folly is set in many exalted

places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.”

The reason why he says it is an error, which goes forth from the ruler is simply because it is the responsibility of the ruler to appoint the right people in the right positions. Power should not be placed in unworthy hands. Great interests should not be entrusted to foolish men who have neither the will nor the wisdom to function in this trust. This is a picture of someone in authority who is incompetent and who places others in authority that are equally incompetent. The incompetent ones lord it over those who should really be in charge. Therefore, quite unfortunately for us all, fools are not limited to places of low esteem. Sometimes they become mayors, governors, congressmen, senators, and even presidents. They can be principals and pastors. Solomon’s wisdom tells us that this is reality and will continue to be a reality; so get used to it.

The foolish rule while the wise and well qualified sit in humble places. Therefore, we conclude that the devil’s world is not always in order. Divine order is heaven’s first law, but that order was upset by the rebellion of Satan. God restored order through His justice back then, and He will do the same to the present disorder of this earth when Jesus Christ returns at His second advent.

There are many individuals in positions of leadership who do not have the qualifications or knowledge to be there. This is true in government and in business, as well as in churches that have unqualified pastor-teachers (or even men who don’t have the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher). True promotion comes from the Lord, so, unless the Lord promotes you, you are not really promoted. Jeremiah 45:5a says, “But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them.”

Solomon is not suggesting that everyone who rises to political prominence is foolish and incompetent. Rather, he is confronting us with the fact that one’s level of skill and discernment does not automatically guarantee a position of comparable authority. Instead, other factors such as popularity, wealth, and friendships, often win jobs for people that they are unqualified to perform. Recognizing this helps us to become more realistic about human government and its limitations. In **Ecclesiastes 10:8**, we find, “He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.”

The Bible must be interpreted in the time in which it was written. In Solomon’s time this saying referred to the Eastern practice of

trapping wild animals. The huntsman would dig a pit and then cover it with twigs and grass and dirt, then he would spread the surface with bait to try and trick the animal into the trap. However after he dug these pits (and some of them were vacant for a long time), he might inadvertently fall into one of them himself. This proverb supports at least two interpretations. If we stick with the context, it can refer to the fact that the foolish leader might abuse his authority and then fall into the very traps that he has set for others. Or, secondly, it may refer to the servant that seeks to undermine authority, but only falls into the trap he has set for that authority. Either way, it has to do with someone setting traps for others and falling victim to their own deceitful schemes. This is a biblical principle; evil shall fall upon the heads of its own authors. If you plan to do evil, it will only be a matter of time before that evil comes right back on you.

- Psalm 36:4. “He plans wickedness upon his bed; He sets himself on a path that is not good; He does not despise evil.”
- Psalm 7:14-16. “Behold, he travails with wickedness, And he conceives mischief, and brings forth falsehood. He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made. His mischief will return upon his own head, And his violence will descend upon his own pate.”
- Matthew 7:1-2. “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”
- Psalm 57:6. “They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They dug a pit before me; They themselves have fallen into the midst of it. Selah.”
- Proverbs 26:27. “He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.”
- Proverbs 28:10. “He who leads the upright astray in an evil way Will himself fall into his own pit, But the blameless will inherit good.”

In the book of Esther, Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, who had plotted to destroy Mordecai and his family, as well as all of the Jews in the Persian empire. Esther intervened and saved her people. In the end, Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai. Therefore, throughout the scriptures we

are warned over and over again that, “He who digs a pit may fall into it.” God is always in control of events, even when wickedness and evil seem to be winning.

The second proverb in Ecclesiastes 10:8, “and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall,” must also be interpreted in its historical context. In the ancient world, snakes infected the crannies and cracks of old walls. Therefore, you would have to be very careful if you broke through a wall. In context, if a person set about to dethrone a fool who is in a position of authority, it’s like pulling down a wall, and the result is getting bit by a serpent. We have no right to attack authority even if authority is wrong. You may be breaking up a nest of serpents and find that you get stung deeply for all your pains. These proverbial illustrations point to one and the same end. Evil shall fall upon the heads of its own authors. Wisdom understands that when you try to break through a wall that you have no business breaking through, in order to get something from someone or to take advantage of someone, the serpent bites you. Today we call it poetic justice, also illustrated in **Ecclesiastes 10:9**, “He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them.”

In pulling out the stones from a quarry, you might drop one on your foot. Stones removed from a quarry are large and potentially dangerous, unless you have the wisdom to know how to do it. This proverb could be a reference to the digging up of things in someone’s past in order to hurt them. In so doing, you only hurt yourself. But the fool does not understand that. He digs up things about others for the purpose of hurting them, but in the end he is the one who inevitably gets hurt.

The fool will dig up the past failures and sins of another even though the Bible says that our sins have already been cast far away. Micah 7:19 says, “He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea.”

The deepest part of the Pacific Ocean is 36,200 feet deep, and yet these individuals will scuba dive to those depths in order to bring up someone else’s sin. If you happen to be the victim of this, there is no need to worry or panic because this evil will eventually swallow them up. Wisdom understands the doctrine of privacy and teaches us to mind our own business.

The second part of Ecclesiastes 10:9, “and he who splits logs may be endangered by them,” refers to the fact that if you wield an axe, sooner or later, you will be cut by it. If your conspiracy against authority does not destroy you, eventually it will produce a very serious and lasting injury. Solomon is saying, “Let there be neither a secret conspiracy against the established order of things nor a violent conspiracy, or else there will be a payment to the conspirators themselves.” In Proverbs 17:13, it is written, “He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house.”

Just as those who destroy buildings and pull down material things are in danger of getting hurt, so it will be to those whose mission it is to destroy others. Yet that is the power of the self-delusion and self-deception. Even if the mysterious finger of God could show the handwriting upon the wall, as in the book of Daniel, fools would still go forward destroying that which God tells them not to destroy.

Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, “If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.” The axe refers to the tools that are used by persons in positions of authority. When working with a dull axe, the person must exert more strength to complete the job. He will hit the tree with heavy but ineffectual blows. And in the same way, if a person in authority has dull tools, which refer to methods without wisdom, then he must also exert much more strength to complete his objective properly. Unskilled and slothful workmen often increase their difficulties by over exertion with the wrong tools or power. On the contrary, wisdom teaches the individual to keep his tools sharp. You can sharpen your spiritual tools (doctrine in the soul, the spiritual mechanics) so that you do not have to exert all that human strength to try to solve your problems!

Another spiritual application is this: Do not attempt great undertakings until you have counted the cost, and have obtained the proper tools or the suitable instruments to carry out the work. The fool, however, forges ahead with dull tools, does not consider the cost of accomplishing great undertaking, and ultimately fails. The greatest example of this is Satan; he has become the ruler of this world and his throne is on this earth (Rev 2:13). Even with his incredible angelic strength, far greater than any human’s, he has been unable to rule planet Earth well. As a fool, Satan has attempted to undertake the rulership of this world, and the world has been

nothing but a mess. Only the Lord Jesus Christ will be able to rule this world properly, and He will reveal His wisdom and ability to do so during His thousand-year millennial reign.

Spiritual tools must be sharp to be effective. If your spiritual tools are dull, you will have to exert a lot of human strength and you will not be strong enough to resist the enemy. The way to sharpen spiritual skills is stated in the second half of this verse, “wisdom has the advantage of giving success.” Wisdom accumulated from the daily intake of Bible doctrine is the stone that sharpens the axe. Wisdom prepares the way for success. Outside of the Bible and Bible-based literature, you don’t hear a lot about wisdom these days.

If you want to traffic in success and soar like an eagle, you must go the way of wisdom. Wisdom may not result in popularity, and it may not mean that you are the most respected by the crowd, but ultimately, as God gauges it, you will be the most successful. You will know ahead of time when you’re trafficking in the wrong and you won’t do the stupid things that those among your peers will do, only to discover later how wrong it really was.

In working for God, our tools must be from Him. We may put a lot of effort into something, but without the right tools it’s like a dull axe fighting with knotty wood. The stubborn fool will resist God’s tools; and therefore, will have no lasting results. Someone works so hard to make ends meet or to become prosperous, but excludes God from their life. All that they’re doing is wasting human energy, as well as their very life, on that which will give no results. For the believer, the dull tool may be his prayer life. The dull tool may be his insufficient understanding of doctrine. The dull tool may be his lack of the filling of the Spirit. Most believers have been ignoring the spiritual exercise needed to sharpen their spiritual tools of prayer, perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine, and the filling of the Spirit.

- First Timothy 4:7. “Don’t waste time arguing over foolish ideas and silly myths and legends. Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit” (TLB).
- Hebrews 5:14. “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”

For many believers, they have indulged the lust of the world, and the things of God have become clouded. Yet the weapons or

the tools that they need are still available even though they may be unsharpened and dull because of lack of use. They need to replace their life of complaining and striving with the sustained energy from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that we are fighting for a kingdom that suffers violence. And, *the violent* are those who have sharpened their tools and with their weapons take it by force, i.e., they take what God has given them by remaining sharp and in touch with His plan.

- Matthew 11:12. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.”
- Isaiah 40:28-31. “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.”

We have the privilege of doing God’s work on earth, as it cannot be done in heaven, and that thought should supply energy and motivation for every effort that we make. We should love the Lord with all of heart, mind, soul, and strength. To hold on and to advance even only a single step, is victory.

- Mark 12:30. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

Ecclesiastes 10:11. “If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.”

Here’s another principle concerning wisdom: wisdom thinks ahead. The illustration that Solomon uses is a serpent biting before being charmed. In the ancient near East, there were snake charmers. Here, the charmer is about to play the flute for the snake while would-be customers are about to shell out a few shekels to watch, and the

snake slithers out of the basket and bites the charmer. No one will pay him now; his profit is gone. Charming snakes is a dangerous profession and a foolish charmer suffers dire consequences. Likewise, the foolish Christian suffers the consequences of being a loser in time and in eternity. The wise believer thinks ahead. He has learned the procedures of the Christian way of life before they are needed. Wisdom says don't think about seeking counsel after you're in the ditch; seek counsel before you fall! We all fall, we all fail, and those who recover from those failures are those who have learned the Word of God before it is needed. In that way, the wise believer defuses the snake. The snakes of this life need not bite us. The Bible teaches that we all must deal with serpents, not literal serpents, but figurative serpents. These refer to people in our lives who are just as devious as serpents. David even warned us about this in Psalm 58:3-6, which says, "The wicked are estranged [or go astray] from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth. They have venom like the venom of a serpent; Like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear, So that it does not hear the voice of charmers, Or a skillful caster of spells. O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord."

In Ecclesiastes 10:11, the serpent can represent a foolish ruler. The wise charmer is to extract the venom of his foolishness and anger. So the serpent stands for fools who are wicked rulers. Our Lord referred to the spiritual rulers of His day in the same way, in a perfect description of their false teaching and the influence it has on others. "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell" (Mat 23:33)?

The Word of God teaches us that prayer is effective in protecting us against the dangerous venom of the serpents of life. Prayer gives us an advantage and renders their venom ineffective. This prayer should not just be for general protection, but rather prayer that is specific, asking God the Father to safeguard us against the wicked devices of evil people who are trying to sting us. In fact, the very word translated *charmed* (lachash) is used for prayer in Isaiah 26:16, "O Lord, they sought Thee in distress; They could only whisper a prayer [lachash]."

The serpent can also refer to the babbler. A biting serpent can refer to the babbler who says things that he shouldn't say. In other words, the serpent is the believer, or unbeliever, who operates in the

sins of the tongue. This is why the tongue is described as a restless evil that is full of deadly poison.

James 3:8. “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”

Martin Luther said, “A babbler is nothing better than a serpent who stings without provocation or being provoked.” One of the signs of apostasy in a nation is the presence and the acceptance of the sins of the tongue, like gossip, maligning, judging, the breaking of confidences, and so on. This is exactly what happened to the nation of Israel during the time of the prophet Micah, and she was disciplined for it. Micah 7:2-6 says, “The godly person [the spiritual person] has perished from the land, And there is no upright person among men. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed [they kill each other even with their tongue].”

Each of them hunts the other with a net. Concerning evil, both hands do it well. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, and a great man [those in positions of leadership and authority] speaks the desire of his soul; so they weave it together. The best of them is like a briar, the most upright like a thorn hedge. The day when you post a watchman, your punishment will come, then their confusion will occur. Do not trust in a neighbor; do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom, guard your lips. For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own household.

Notice that the sins of the tongue are so painful that it is hardly safe to trust in a friend or to put confidence in someone who is close to you. This passage says in verse 5, that it’s wise to even *guard your lips* from the one you embrace. To entrust a secret to someone, and then to have him or her violate that trust by repeating it to someone else is like being bitten by a serpent. God’s Word teaches us that we must grow up spiritually to a point where we can control our tongues. James 3:2 expounds, “For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man, able to restrain the whole body as well.”

Unfortunately, many Christians in our day do not have this wisdom. We are all prairie chickens at the start of our Christian lives, and it is the wisdom from God’s Word that transforms us into soaring eagles. Therein lies the problem. Most believers are not willing to do what it

takes to get that wisdom into their souls. You can't just pray for it, or have faith that it will someday appear like the morning newspaper. The attainment of wisdom in the Christian way of life requires the positive volition of the believer. The attainment of wisdom is a partnership between you and God. You can't attain it without God, but neither will God violate your free will and simply cram it into your head. You must buy the truth. Yet you do not buy the truth with your money, or by the sweat of your brow; you buy it with your time. How? Time spent under the ministry of your right pastor-teacher under the filling of the Holy Spirit is the mechanics designed by God to transfer His wisdom into your soul. This is why your daily intake of sound Bible doctrine under your prepared pastor-teacher is the most important thing you do in life. Sadly, many Christians are not willing to pay this price, the price of their time. We live in a society that tells us to get what we can today and pay later. Our culture is one of satisfying the moment rather than learning now to prepare for the future. If the wisdom of God doesn't come in a day or a week, then the price is too high, and the mind moves on to the superficial substances that the world offers for instant gratification. With this attitude, you miss out on the tremendous benefits that come with the wisdom of God. Do not forsake God's wisdom; her (wisdom's) worth is more than gold and jewels. Buy her and do not forsake her. This is the greatest attitude in life.

Proverbs 2:1-4 shows us our part in the attainment of wisdom, "My son, if you will receive my sayings, And [if you] treasure my commandments within you, [If you will] Make your ear attentive to wisdom, [if you will] Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment [there is prayer involved, you ask for discernment], [if you] Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver, And [if you] search for her as for hidden treasures."

Digging for silver is hard work. The "ifs" in verses 1 through 4 describe our part of the arrangement. If you have been listening, and digging, and respecting God's Word, and tenaciously seeking out answers from Bible doctrine, then something fantastic will happen. Proverbs 2:5-10 shows us the results of our diligence in fulfilling the conditions of verses 1 through 4.

- Proverbs 2:5-10. "Then you will discern the fear [or the respect] of the Lord, And [then you will] discover the knowledge

of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart, And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”

When you have honored God’s Word, verse 5 says that you will gain His mind and knowledge. The conditions are stated in verses 1 to 4, and the result is stated in verse 5. Then in verses 6 to 10, we see the tremendous promises from God. He has a whole storehouse of things He is going to give you. You will walk in integrity, and He will shield you from harm. When you break with the prairie-chicken mentality and you pursue God’s ways with diligence, God honors that kind of determination. So make no mistake, wisdom is something that you have to dig for! You have to find wisdom.

- Proverbs 3:13. “How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding.”
- Proverbs 3:21. “My son, let them not depart from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion,”
- Proverbs 4:5-9. “Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; She will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; She will present you with a crown of beauty.”
- Proverbs 23:23. “Buy truth [with your time], and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding.”
- Proverbs 24:14. “Know that wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find it, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.”

No one suddenly becomes wise. God is not going to magically make you virtuous. These wonderful things are promised to the believers who attain His wisdom through the consistent daily intake

of the Word of God. If you are the type that wants things absolutely free, God offers you eternal life by means of one act of faith in Christ. This is the greatest decision anyone can make, and it's free because Christ paid its price in full at the cross. Eternal life through faith in Christ can never be taken away from you, even if you do choose to be a fool. But if you desire to be wise and bring maximum glory to God in this life, after eternal salvation it's time to get busy in God's Word. According to **Ecclesiastes 10:12**, "Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him."

In order to understand what we observe about the fool, we need to first examine the fool on the inside. This will tell us why fools behave and live as they do. Psalm 14 presents the fool in verse 1, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

Notice that the fool says this in his heart. With his mouth, he may say that he believes in God and he may even say he thinks doctrine is important and that he wants to get back to church. However, deep down, inside his heart, he says, there is no God. As the late Vernon McGee said, "your actions speak so loud, I don't hear a word you say." The Lord spoke of this as well.

- Mark 7:6. "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.'"
- Psalm 14:1-3. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."

Normally, when we think of a fool we have in mind someone who is sort of superficial and maybe not too smart. It might even be someone whose personality simply rubs us the wrong way. However, that's not the fool of the scripture. The fool of the scripture is one who says to himself, deep down in his heart, that there really is no God to worry about. We're not necessarily talking about an atheist, although he is certainly in view. But, more broadly we're talking about someone who says in his heart that there is no answering to

God. The fool says, “I don’t have to learn about Him. I don’t have to serve Him. I don’t have to support His work. I don’t have to learn what my spiritual gift is and use it. There is no divine accountability. I am free to live as my own god.” That’s the Bible’s description of a fool. Titus 1:16 speaks of it this way, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.”

No wonder that the fool is corrupt and commits abominable deeds. He has turned aside from God, and anyone who has no desire to know God will invariably live lower than the standards God establishes.

The Word of God teaches that the fool only learns to stop being foolish when he is dealt with in a stern and severe manner. Why does the fool have to learn the hard way? Why can’t he learn the easy, from the Word of God? Here’s why.

- Proverbs 1:7. “Fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
- Proverbs 1:22. “Fools hate knowledge.”
- Proverbs 10:21. “Fools die for lack of understanding.”
- Proverbs 12:15. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.”
- Proverbs 14:9. “Fools mock at sin.”
- Jeremiah 4:22. “For My people are foolish, They know Me not; They are stupid children, And they have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, But to produce divine good they do not know.”

God also warns us not to be the companion of fools and to leave their presence. If we do not heed this warning, we will be affected by their foolishness.

- Proverbs 13:20. “The companion of fools will suffer harm.”
- Proverbs 14:7. “Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.”
- Ecclesiastes 10:12. “Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him.”

The fool becomes a fool in his heart, but first demonstrates it by his words. The word *consume*, in Ecclesiastes 10:12 is *bala`*, which means to swallow him up. His own words swallow him up, and this

shows that the one who is hurt the most by foolishness is the fool himself. He is the one who ends up the most damaged, though others are caught in his wake. The things that the fool says lead to his own suffering and demise.

- Proverbs 10:10. “A babbling fool will be thrown down.”
- Proverbs 10:14. “With the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand.”
- Proverbs 10:18. “He who spreads slander is a fool.”
- Proverbs 17:7. “Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool.”
- Proverbs 18:6-7. “A fool’s lips bring strife, And his mouth calls for blows. A fool’s mouth is his ruin, And his lips are the snare of his soul.”

Ecclesiastes 10:13. “the beginning of his talking is folly, and the end of it is wicked madness.”

The fool begins with foolish talk and in the end his speech is borderline insanity. Whenever you start with foolishness you’re never going to end up anywhere productive. Don’t waste your time trying to give advice to a fool.

- Proverbs 23:9 says. “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.”

Ecclesiastes 10:14. “Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?”

You would think that such a person would start to see how off base he is, but he doesn’t. That is his nature. He is a fool. It is clear; therefore, that none of us should seek the counsel of a fool, it is a waste of time. The fool multiplies words but it is all hot air. He has a lot to say, but none of it is useful. The multiplying of words refers to more excuses and more rationalizations.

- Proverbs 10:19. “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”
- Proverbs 12:15. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”

The fool’s lifestyle is marked by confusion and stupidity, and there is no telling where he will end up. His future is unpredictable, but it

is likely to involve painful consequences. **Ecclesiastes** elaborates in **chapter 10 verse 15**, “The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.” The fool exhausts himself by his inefficient and unproductive lifestyle. He gets downright confused. He doesn’t even know how to go to a city. In other words, the most obvious thing in the world is difficult for them to recognize. This has nothing to do with mental capacity. Fools can be very intellectual, but what they lack is the spiritual common sense that comes from humility. It has nothing to do with IQ, and it has everything to do with stupidity. To quote MacBeth—“A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” The fool is the heartbreak of the pastor and is a major cause of difficulty in the church. So in our passage, the picture begins to emerge of a man who makes things needlessly difficult for himself and for others by his stupidity. We all must be alert to this tragedy because none of us are immune to it. We can be affected by fools and, more seriously, we can become fools ourselves if we ever forsake the wisdom of God. To be always learning and never growing wise is the tragic formula employed by the fool as stated in 2 Timothy 3:7, “Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” While **Ecclesiastes 10:16** says, “Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning.”

Notice first that there is a change in the pronoun used in verse 16. Much of Ecclesiastes is written in poetic symbolism, as we have seen many times. The land is in trouble when a fool sits on the throne. Woe to you when the fool is sitting in authority over you! Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s had a fool on the throne, and they almost met their entire demise as a nation. Cuba in the 1960s saw a fool take the throne of their country, and as of the writing of this book he’s still on it. Uganda in the 1970s saw Idi Amin, a fool, take the throne of their country and it almost meant their ruin. These fools of history are examples of a lad on the throne of a country.

Isaiah 3 describes a time when Israel went negative toward doctrine and was under discipline from God. The Jews found themselves living with a fool on the throne as written in verses 1-5, “For behold, the Lord God of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah Both supply and support, the whole supply of bread, And the whole supply of water [economic collapse, famine, and drought]; The mighty man and the warrior [no military defense], The judge and the prophet

[no one will be telling the truth in the judicial system and among the believers], The diviner and the elder [no representative for God in your midst], The captain of fifty and the honorable man, The counselor and the expert artisan, And the skillful enchanter. And I will make mere lads their princes And capricious children will rule over them, And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; The youth will storm against the elder, And the inferior against the honorable.”

Then in Isaiah 3:12, “O My people! Their oppressors are children, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray, And confuse the direction of your paths.” Tragically, this warning went unheeded. It is now a matter of history. Isaiah told God’s people that this was coming and Judah closed its ears. What he warned them about is precisely what occurred: immaturity ruled the throne. Let’s make sure we do not close our ears to the warnings of God’s teachers. When we fall into foolishness, we must honor the doctrine, and rebound and recover.

Ecclesiastes 10:17. “Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength, and not for drunkenness.” Wise rulers do things at the appropriate time. The foolish king in verse 16 ate in the morning, and in fact, he ate all day. Wisdom tells us that things must be done at their appointed time. Solomon already showed us this wisdom in chapter 3 verse 1, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.” There’s a right time to make certain decisions in life and there’s a wrong time, but fools don’t care what time it is.

Now in verse 18, without any transition, Solomon goes back to another characteristic of a fool: procrastination and poor judgment. You will hear fools make all kinds of promises, but you won’t see them follow through.

Ecclesiastes 10:18-19 “Through laziness the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.” In context, by the way, verse 19 is *not* a statement of wisdom! The house is falling apart because of neglect, and yet inside there is eating and drinking and conversations about money. Above the gathering, the rafters are sagging and the roof is leaking, but the fool doesn’t care. He is satisfied with simply eating meal after meal and gulping cup

of wine after cup of wine while he chats with other fools about his wealth, and all the while his home is crumbling all around him. Fools say to themselves, “money is the answer to everything,” and yet the list of unfinished business in their lives screams otherwise.

Ecclesiastes 10:20. “Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound, and the winged creature will make the matter known.” This is the final verse in chapter 10, and it is a warning against the tendency to talk about the fool and how bad he is. Gossip and slander about anyone, fool or not, will only make matters worse. Solomon warns us that, in some way, shape, or form, what you say about the foolish ruler is going to get back to him. If you think that it’s already hard enough to deal with a fool, wait until the fool finds out that you’ve been talking about him. The fool will retaliate in his foolish way and come at you with both barrels blazing.

- Proverbs 17:10. “A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.”
- Proverbs 27:22. “Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, Yet his folly will not depart from him.”

There are questions we need to answer: How do I deal with fools who are a part of my life? What if the fool is married to me or is my child? Should I be encouraging and loving? The Bible doesn’t sugarcoat its answers to life’s problems, and so neither should we here. First, if there’s continued folly or foolishness (notice the word continued), the Bible supports isolation as the treatment. We are not told to change the fool or to get into verbal battles with the fool; we are told to isolate the fool.

- Proverbs 14:7. “Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.”
- Proverbs 13:20. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

If you really want to help a fool, do not honor him; if you do, will not help him, and it will backfire on you.

- Proverbs 26:1. “Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool.”
- Proverbs 26:8. “Like one who binds a stone in a sling [the implication is that it backfires], So is he who gives honor to a fool.”
- Proverbs 29:9. “When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, The foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest.”

Our tendency, at times, is to extend encouragement, to be gracious, to go the extra mile, and turn the other cheek. There is a time to do that, but if the fool’s folly continues, isolation is the treatment for they will not listen to your wise counsel. It is not always pleasant to do this, but it is best for the fool.

- Proverbs 1:7. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.”
- Proverbs 12:15. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”
- Proverbs 13:19. “Desire realized is sweet to the soul, But it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil.”
- Proverbs 17:7. “Excellent speech is not fitting for a fool; Much less are lying lips to a prince.”
- Proverbs 18:2. “A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.”
- Proverbs 23:9. “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.”
- Matthew 7:6. “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

Someone might say, well, it can’t hurt to give them a job, but even here the Bible warns us that it’s a bad idea. Proverbs 26:10 says, “Like an archer who wounds everyone, So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.”

Be careful about buying into a particular kind of teaching that doesn’t have a foundation in the Bible. Be careful about letting your emotions take you away from the doctrine in your heart. When the fool is left to himself, it is amazing how God can get his attention.

The terror of isolation could be what is needed for the fool to wake up to his folly. As a believer priest, it is your business how you treat a fool, but your graciousness may be hurting that fool rather than helping him. The correct decision comes from your own wisdom developed by your intake of Bible doctrine. Sometimes leaving them to be dealt with by God is the best recourse.

- Proverbs 19:29. “Judgments are prepared for scoffers, And blows for the back of fools.”
- Proverbs 26:3. “A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, And a rod for the back of fools.”

If the fool is a child, discipline is needed, and overlooking his foolishness is a mistake.

- Proverbs 10:1. “The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish son is a grief to his mother.”
- Proverbs 15:5. “A fool rejects his father’s discipline, But he who regards reproof is prudent.”
- Proverbs 15:20. “A wise son makes a father glad, But a foolish man despises his mother.”
- Proverbs 17:21. “He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy.”
- Proverbs 17:25. “A foolish son is a grief to his father, And bitterness to her who bore him.”
- Proverbs 22:15. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”

Secondly, if there is repentance, there should be restoration.

- Psalm 107:1-2. “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.”
- Psalm 107:4-6. “They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited city. They were hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses.”

- Psalm 107:10-13; 17-19. “There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, Because they had rebelled against the words of God, And spurned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; They stumbled and there was none to help. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses . . . Fools, because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food; And they drew near to the gates of death [seriousness of God’s discipline]. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses.”

Notice that these were lonely, broken, and empty people who were destitute of any affection or warmth. Then they cry out to God in repentance (a change of thinking), and He saves them and delivers them. The repentance didn’t happen until they came to an end of themselves. Sometimes love has to be tough, God never gives up on the fool. He is simply putting the fool in a position where the only one to turn to will be God. God will accomplish this; there is no need for us to be vicious and cruel to the fool. We are only told to isolate the fool and even that should be motivated by genuine compassion. Our purpose is never to hurt or punish anyone; vengeance is the prerogative of the Lord.

So as we close this chapter in Solomon’s journal, the differences between the wise man and the fool should be quite clear. With that clarity, it should be easy enough for you to make a decision to the right or to the left. The life of wisdom is glory to God as well as happiness and strength to the believer. The life of foolishness is misery, as we have seen. The choice is easy, yet so few make the right one and walk through that narrow gate that leads to life, the life of wisdom.

CHAPTER 22

Be Bold

(Ecclesiastes 11:1-10)

What are you doing to keep your life exciting and meaningful? What are you waiting for? Or, perhaps for whom are you waiting? What or who have you allowed to take fun and challenge out of life? When was the last time you did something unusual, or out of the routine?

There's a sign on an Alaskan highway that reads, "Choose your rut carefully; you'll be in it for the next 200 miles." Unfortunately, that describes how many people live. A lot of people are in a rut and have fallen for the routine. To live on the dull edge is really to become a slave to life.

There is an excerpt from Alex Haley's *Roots* which says, "Through his sorrow, Kunta was surprised to hear that the old gardener had been called Josephus. He wondered what the gardener's true name had been, the name of his African forefathers. And to what tribe they had belonged. He wondered if the gardener himself had known. Most likely he had died as he had lived, without ever learning who he really was." Are you doing that? Are you allowing someone or something to enslave you so that you will live and die without knowing who you really are? Sadly, many people do. This is the attitude displayed in a little piece that one man wrote:

I get up each morning, dust off my wits,
Pick up the paper and read the Obits.
If my name is missing, I know I'm not dead,
So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed!

That's not living; that's existing. It's easy to slip into a rocker, as it were. As you get older, you hear people say, "Slow down, don't exert

yourself, but the scriptures do not teach this way of life, or rather, way of existing.”

- Hebrews 12:1. “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,”
- First Corinthians 9:24-27. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

James Fixx, in his book called *The Complete Book of Running*, writes: “After the Boston Marathon a year or two ago, I went to a party given by some participants in their hotel suite. Eventually, I fell into conversation with a white haired man named Norman Bright. Bright was nearly 65 years old, yet had run the race that day in an astonishing 2 hours, 59 minutes, 59 seconds, and had finished 615th, thereby defeating two thirds of the field. Many of the younger runners at the party, exhausted by the race and feeling creaky, were sitting down or lay sprawled on the rug. But Bright stood and talked exuberantly. He was planning to go abroad soon and he was to run in some races in Europe. He told me he was looking forward to the change of scenery. Opening an orange knapsack he had stowed in a corner of the room, he began showing me the maps, the brochures and the entry blanks he had gathered in preparation for his trip. He was as enthusiastic as a teenager.”

Taking risks in life is closely related to faith. However, people strive for security as they get older, and often tightly hold on to what they have. The enthusiasm of their youth is turned into a life of pessimism and fear. The carefree life of childhood is turned into a life of suspicion. The last two chapters of Ecclesiastes are going to warn us against falling into such a rut as we get older. They could be outlined in three commands: be bold, be joyful, be godly. They all fit

together into a lifestyle that is extremely contagious and extremely rare, and there's no age limit. In **Ecclesiastes 11:1**, we find, "Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days."

This verse indicates that instead of protecting yourself you should release yourself. Bread cast into the water represents a life that is released to others. This verse is similar to an ancient Arabic proverb that Solomon might have heard from his father, David, which reads, "Do good, cast your bread into the water, you will be repaid someday." God is faithful to bring back the benefits and blessings that we have released to others. This type of thinking is a far cry from hoarding what you have so that you may have security in life.

- Luke 6:38. "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they [blessings] will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
- Psalm 37:25-26. "I have been young, and now I am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Or his descendants begging bread. All day long he is gracious and lends; And his descendants are a blessing."

Releasing yourself is God's way, and God honors that release. Letting go of certain things will make you vulnerable at times, but that's where faith comes in. God expects us to lose our life, and He promises that we will gain it back in abundance. The kingdom of darkness knows that God wants to detach us from ourselves, and they have tried to deceive us from this vital truth. They will attempt to get us to think that it's OK to defend ourselves and be worried that someone is going to get the best of us. But in the normal Christian life, there will be times when someone will get the best of you. Leave the results in God's hands and think with the mind of Christ who gave Himself for all.

- Philippians 2:3-5. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests

of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,”

Rarely are the same phrases repeated in all four Gospels, but this next one is, and it is God’s way of telling us that this attitude is of extreme importance.

- Matthew 16:25. “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”
- Mark 8:35. “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s shall save it.”
- Luke 9:24. “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”
- John 12:25. “He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.”

God sets value on the uniqueness of every one of us. When He asks us to lose our lives, He only means abandoning the demanding self-will that we all have. Once we have done so, God gives us back our real personality. When we are really His, we will be more ourselves than ever before. Therefore, while He is delighted to see us sacrificing ourselves to Him and our will to His, He hates to see us drifting away from our own identity. God wants to reveal to us who we really are in Him, and for that to happen we must lose that demanding self-will. The kingdom of darkness wishes for us to lose our identity completely. There is nothing wrong with many of the desires we have within, for God has placed them there. Even though sports, hobbies, or culture have no real virtue in themselves, they are not sin. There is a sort of innocence and self-forgetfulness in our fondness of certain things, and these things help to identify who we really are. The kingdom of darkness would like to substitute things that we should like or should do for the things we really like to do, so that our identity is lost and we become another sheep in the herd.

God doesn’t want that for us. God has created each of us individually and He knows that we will discover that true individual when we lose our selfish self-will. The kingdom of darkness substitutes a false process whose end is for us to lose the identity that God wants us to find. The man who truly enjoys any one thing in the world for

its own sake, is not in bondage to it, and is unconcerned with other's thoughts about it; he is armed against some of the subtlest modes of attack by the kingdom of darkness. Our enemy will always try to make us abandon the people or the food or the books we really like in favor of the best people, the right food, and the important books so that we will lose our identity, but not to God. Don't be afraid to lose your life to God, for when you cast it on the waters you will find it again.

Remember that in **Ecclesiastes 11:2**, Solomon says, "Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth." This verse instructs us to give and invest rather than to hoard. Be bullish in the investment of yourself and the giving of yourself. This principle is found throughout both testaments. This is a manifestation of casting your bread upon the waters.

- First John 3:16-17. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"
- Second Corinthians 8:3-5. "For I testify that according to their [the Philippians] ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."

As we have said, casting your bread on the water and dividing your portion to many will involve risk and vulnerability. What you invest in others may not yield an immediate return. But God's Word instructs us to be unconcerned with that possibility and to keep investing and sowing. In the parable of the sower, most of his seed yielded no crops, but he kept on sowing. That should be the attitude of every believer; and just like the sower, we will reap a great harvest when we wait on the timing of God. When you cast your bread upon the waters, remember that it is God who determines the currents, and therefore the timing of its return is in His hands.

Matthew 13:3-8. "And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some

seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.” This principle is also true of the communicators of doctrine. Pastors must be prepared to teach and teach and teach. One pastor may not see the results of his sound doctrinal teaching immediately, but he must continue to teach no matter what, in season and out of season. A communicator may not know when the fruit will be realized, but he must have faith that the fruit will manifest, for it is God that causes the growth.

First Corinthians 3:6-8. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” Much of our labor and work with individuals seems to be in vain. There’s a lot of disappointment that comes from trying to help people in the world and even more disappointment when we try to help God’s people. The words of the prophet Isaiah should give us great comfort. Know that your labor is not in vain; God’s Word and work will accomplish what it was designed to. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

Therefore, continue to be gracious. Even if the giving of your time, talent, and treasure does not seem to benefit the receiver, gracious giving is always a benefit to you. Don’t become discouraged by outward circumstances. Cast your bread upon the waters and divide your portion with many. One man put it like this, “I possess nothing so completely as that which I have given away. Whatever I have imparted I still possess; these riches remain with me through all the hardships of life.”

- Acts 20:35. “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”
- Psalm 41:1-2. “How blessed is he who considers the helpless; The Lord will deliver him in a day of trouble. The Lord will protect him, and keep him alive, And he shall be called blessed upon the earth; And do not give him over to the desire of his enemies.”
- 1 Timothy 6:18-19. “Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”
- Proverbs 11:24-25. “There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, but [it results] only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.”

What you do to others in the body of Christ, you do to Christ. Those who have that attitude in time will see the reality of Matthew 25:40 when they stand before God. “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me’” (Mat 25:40). **Ecclesiastes 11:3** also says, “If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.”

Many people become preoccupied with things they cannot change. Things like weather, taxes, time, death, and so on are things that many become worried about, and yet all the worrying in the world isn’t going to change them one bit. This is the message behind verse 3. When you worry about life’s constants, you never really live. God has planned every day of your Christian life, and today is a day that God has a task for you to do. That plan doesn’t stop because you get old. So why is it that you are sitting around watching the wind and the clouds, rather than working at the tasks that God has given you? **Ecclesiastes 11:4**, “He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.”

Who cares whether the clouds bring rain or whether the day will be sunny? Who cares whether it’s hot or cold? If you can’t change it,

face it. Who wants to listen to the run down of the weather report? All of your looking and talking won't change a thing. Rather, be courageous in your pursuit of the things in life that you can change. In God's plan for your life you have the privilege of impacting those around you and glorifying God. That's a heck of a lot more exciting than the weather! Of course, you will not gain riches and honor from this world for having such an attitude, as we have already seen, but who cares! Live the plan of God with vigor. God gave His best and many rejected His gift, yet He gave anyway. Let us also have this attitude rather than worrying about certain details in life that we cannot change. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Clouds refer to many things in scripture. For example, clouds symbolize a time of catastrophe, or divine judgment (Lam 2:1; Eze 30:3; 34:12). In light of this, there are times that we may find these catastrophes or judgments to be the *misfortune* referred to at the close of Ecclesiastes 11:2. Rain is also referred to in the scriptures in connection with God's judgments upon earth (Isa 4:6; Mat 7:25; Ecc 12:2). Therefore, just as the wise man who is gracious in the first two verses of chapter 11 will continue to give despite the unworthiness of the recipient or the immediate rewards of giving, so also will the wise person not withdraw his hand from the labor that God has appointed for him, even though problems and difficulties may accompany it's execution. The Living Bible gives this interpretation as well. Ecclesiastes 11:4 reads, "If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done" (TLB).

Don't wait for things to be perfect. Don't wait for freedom from all risks. Circumstances are never going to be absolutely perfect or safe. If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never commit to anything and you will never get anything done. So instead, release yourself and invest in the plan of God. There will always be some reasons why you should procrastinate and put things off until tomorrow, but if you do, you will miss out on God's plan for today. Christians are afraid to commit to the plan of God today because they have a problem that exists within them. It is the evil heart of unbelief and the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:12-13 warns, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after

day, as long as it is still called Today, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

The faithless, sluggish heart is under the power of the kingdom of darkness, clouding the believer’s path, weakening his strength, and raising mountains of doubt. There are many excuses. Excuses are simply a desire not to do something, and they actually make God angry. In Luke 14:16-21, we read, “But He said to him, ‘A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, “Come; for everything is ready now.” But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, “I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.” And another one said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.” And another one said, “I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.” And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry.’”

It is a great accomplishment when you can rise above the discouragements of life, and not magnify every trivial difficulty that comes your way and causes objections to the execution of God’s plan for your life. The slothful person plants a hedge of thorns around his life and he uses that for his list of excuses.

- Proverbs 15:19. “The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns, But the path of the upright is a highway.”
- Proverbs 26:13-16. “The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!’ As the door turns on its hinges, So does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; He is weary of bringing it to his mouth again. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.”

Ecclesiastes 11:5. “Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.”

As an alternative to doubting, courageously trust the living God. If we cannot determine all the workings of the everyday things we see around us, how can we ever say that we fully understand the workings of God? God doesn’t seek to explain everything to us, but

He asks us to courageously trust Him. When we cast our bread upon the waters, divide our portion to the many through gracious giving, and work at the task that God has given us today without excuses, God promises that we will not have given or worked in vain. Will you trust Him today? Or will you sit on your hands because you don't understand everything He does? **Ecclesiastes 11:6**, "Sow your seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good."

Whether it's the morning of your life or the evening of your life, don't put a "Do not disturb" sign on your door and sit idle. God has works for us to accomplish in accordance with His plan for each of us as individuals. If we wait for perfect conditions, we won't accomplish a thing. God's plan is a life of offense and action, but if we simply sit idle, wishing for the world to leave us alone as we sit in front of our televisions, our tremendous calling will have been wasted, and that is a tragedy. We do not know if morning or evening sowing will succeed; that is in the hands of God. Therefore, we are told to sow in both, and leave the results to the character and nature of God. When we realize that we are not even able to anticipate or understand how the little things in life take care of themselves, we will realize that the higher things will also turn out right under God's direction, quite apart from our failure to fully comprehend them. Our part consists in merely doing our duty and letting God take care of the outcome. John 3:8 says, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Don't wait to get all the things you want before you get serious about the plan of God. Don't wait for that significant other in romance or for the attainment of certain goals before you begin to live the plan of God. These are simply excuses to put off until tomorrow what you should be doing today. God will take care of all those details and God will bless us as only He knows how. Your job is to follow His plan as it is revealed in His word. In doing this you will discover the true happiness of God. God's happiness for you doesn't reside in the realization of materialism, romance, or goals. In fact, true happiness as it is from God will remain with you when you have none of those things and even when your life is a difficult struggle.

Ecclesiastes 11:7. “The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.” As we turn to Ecclesiastes 11:7 there are a few principles that are important to note when we probe the scriptures concerning happiness. First, happiness is for today and joy is available now. You are not on probation with God, such that He would withhold His happiness from you until you earn it. It isn’t something that will secretly open up to you when you turn a certain age. Happiness is available for the believer now; and it is inseparably linked with the person of Jesus Christ and a relationship with Him.

The Scottish Presbyterians put together their catechism years ago, and its first question asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer, “The chief end of man is to love God and enjoy him forever.” That is true; God’s plan for your life is not just serving, obeying, and sacrificing for Him, but also loving and enjoying Him. Laugh with Him, smile at His presence, and enjoy Him forever. The Jews served and obeyed God, but they were still cursed because they served Him grudgingly rather than with a joyful heart. Deuteronomy 28:45-47 says, “So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the Lord your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. And they shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things.” The Living Bible paraphrases Ecclesiastes 11:7, “It is a wonderful thing to be alive!” (TLB).

Frequently in the scriptures, light is used to describe the warmth of God’s love. When we are enveloped in the warmth of our Father’s love, we will fear no one.

- Psalm 27:1. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?”
- Romans 8:31. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”

How many of God’s people really believe that God is for them? He promises over and over again in His Word that He is just that; unfortunately, too many Christians have a heart of unbelief. Things should not be this way. God’s love, God’s warmth and God’s protection

are pleasant and it is good for your eyes to focus on the hand of God as it works in all parts of your life, He is pleased with that insight.

- Psalm 119:105. “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.”
- Psalm 119:130. “The unfolding of Thy words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.”

Ecclesiastes 11:8. “Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. Everything that is to come will be futility.”

Though life may seem long and filled with many days of darkness, verse 8 tells us that happiness is to pervade all the years of life. Rejoice in them all, all the years of your youth, and your old age. The happiness of God is never hindered by circumstances. Tradition says that happiness is only for the young and healthy; that is not true. **Ecclesiastes 11:9** says, “Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know [don’t forget, there will be a day of accountability] that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.”

Oftentimes, especially as young people, we are told we should get serious about life. Although for the fool this might be good advice, it is possible to become too serious about life. If someone ever gives you that advice, look at them and ask yourself if you want to be like them. Solomon tells us to enjoy our early years and to follow the impulses of our heart. As we’ve already seen, not all impulses are sin, especially when our pursuits of such things are in accordance with the will of God. Added to this is the perfect balance from Solomon: if you pursue the desires of your eyes in an unrighteous manner there will be a day of accountability. Wrongful pursuits are not worth it, but correct pursuits are to be enjoyed. Therefore, enjoy life while you are young and regard cautiously the advice of others who tell you to get more serious. We can find this advice in Ecclesiastes 11:9, “Young man, it’s wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it! Do all you want to; take in everything, but realize that you must account to God for everything you do” (TLB).

There’s another tradition that says to have your fun now because later on life’s a beast. That’s not in the scripture either and it’s

not true; life gets better with your years when you are growing in God's grace and knowledge. The news reports all the bad news and never the good, that's not reality. Solomon instructs us as he nears the end of his journal to enjoy every day that God has graciously given us. By the way, this is not a call to live recklessly and raise hell. Remember back in verse 8 that we are told to remember the many days of darkness. We must remember those days or else we will be disillusioned into thinking life is just a bowl of cherries. When we instruct children on how to live, let's be sure that they have lots of fun when it's the years for having fun, but let's be sure that we also do our very best to keep them from disillusionment. The days of darkness will be many, and God's happiness will take you through them, but don't be stupid and ignore them.

Our days of darkness are actually the compassion of God being revealed to us. Do you have any idea what insane lives we would live if there were no limitations placed upon us by God? Those tough days open our eyes to our need for God and they serve as continuous reminders of that need. Since many times they are a result of our own bad decisions, they serve to remind us that there is a God to answer to. Often, wickedness is the result of someone believing that there is no God to answer to. This turns into hedonism, which is the pursuit of pleasure without boundaries. God reveals our limitations through those days of darkness, and without them, we wouldn't be able to enjoy the pleasurable times. With that comes a warning in verse 10, not from a fire-breathing God of anger, but from a God of compassion who desires to see His people use their volition for divine good.

Ecclesiastes 11:10. "So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting."

- Ecclesiastes 11:10. "So banish grief and pain, but remember that youth, with a whole life before it, can make serious mistakes" (TLB).

The word vexation is a combination of anger and resentment, and when you mix those two things you get rebellion, which has no age limit. This warning is for anyone pursuing happiness in life, they have to put any rebellious spirit aside. Solomon has made it clear to

us that all authority is from God, whether it be a wise or foolish ruler. If anyone has taught you that it's all right to rebel against authority, that advice is not in accordance with God's will. Follow the plan of God and leave any wrongful authority in the hands of God.

Solomon also adds that this vexation will cause pain to your body and he advises us to do whatever we can to get rid of it. Therefore, guard yourself from running wild and obeying any appetite as God gives you the green light to pursue pleasure.

In eternity, you can never live life as you do on earth. You only have one childhood, one adolescence, one middle age, one old age, and one death. All these are a manifestation of God's grace. You can only have dark days while you live on earth, and this is an opportunity to glorify God as only you can now. What is preventing you from fully accepting this great plan of God for your life? What is stopping you from glorifying God to the maximum now? Solomon has warned us in this chapter to be alert to the things that can stop us, and he has made it clear that those things are nothing in comparison to the happiness that God has for you now.

CHAPTER 23

Remember Your Creator

(Ecclesiastes 12:1-14)

When in a person's life does he bow willingly before the Almighty God and say, "I need you?" All that we say and do will have no value until that moment. In 1900, the average life expectancy of an American was forty-seven years, by 1980 that number had risen to seventy-five. Aging furniture or automobiles become antiques and become extremely valuable; with human beings, however, age can be a very touchy subject.

Because we are living longer, there are some conventional feelings that are prevalent today for the elderly. There is the feeling of being in the way, over the hill, which is the feeling of uselessness. This type of thinking comes from those who were once very resourceful people. However, in old age, no one is seeking their opinion any longer. There is also the feeling of having fouled up our life, the feeling of guilt that often swamps the old person, regrets in old age are easy to come by. Then there is the feeling of bitterness and resentment as one looks back at all the seemingly raw deals he got in life. This is usually followed by statements like "If I had only made other decisions" and "If only my marriage or my family had turned out better." This turns out to be nothing but self-pity, which is a very subtle form of arrogance. Finally, there is the feeling of fear, fear of being alone, being sick, losing one's mind, and, naturally, fear of death.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 12, Solomon is writing about aging. He warns us all that it's never too late to get with the plan of God and thereby avoid all those bad feelings that will accompany old age if we neglect the plan of God. Solomon wishes he had used God's solutions earlier, and his life, as accounted in this book, is a cry to all of us to seek God now and avoid wasting time as Solomon did. It is God who created your life, and He is the One who holds the

pattern on successful aging. We can either respond to that pattern with positive volition, or we can reject it. If we reject it, we will end up with all those bad feelings, regrets, and fears in our old age.

Ecclesiastes 12:1. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’.”

At what age are we going to come to the conclusion that we need God? Solomon says to do this as early as possible: to remember your Creator in your youth. The longer it takes you to come to this conclusion, the more time you are wasting and the greater will be the possibility of having regrets and fears in your old age. Teachers of truth can scream this message to you, but the choice is yours to realize your need for God. Can't you picture a very old Solomon leaning over and stroking his beard as he looks into the eyes of some young man and says, “Now listen, young man, and don't you forget what I'm saying to you, remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.” Put yourself in the place of that young man, and listen to Solomon.

The Hebrew word for remember is the *qal* imperative of the verb *zakar*, which is a command to remember God, and it means to act decisively on behalf of someone. It means to drop your pretense of self-sufficiency and to commit yourself to Him. The question remains: when are you willing to do this? What are you waiting for? Are your personal desires really more important than a lifelong relationship with God, regardless of how much life you have left? This Hebrew word for “remember” is used somewhat frequently in the Old Testament and in a most insightful manner. For example, it is used in 1 Samuel 1 for Hannah when she was without child. She greatly desired a baby and she prayed for one. As she came to the steps of the tabernacle, she prayed audibly, in fact, the prayer had so much emotion that the priest thought she was drunk.

- First Samuel 1:11. “O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head.”
- First Samuel 1:19. “Then they arose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord, and returned again to their house in Ramah. And Elkanah had relations with Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.”

God remembered Hannah and gave her a son named Samuel, God acted decisively on her behalf. In Ecclesiastes 12:1, Solomon is commanding us to act decisively on behalf of God, and to do it while we're young. Don't wait until you're over the hill and you have made a royal mess of your life, and you're encased in the prison of your own makings and your own bad habits, wishing and pining for yesterday. Learn early to act decisively on behalf of your Creator by realizing that He is the one essential ingredient for you to have a truly happy life. When His Word speaks, take it as more significant than what you read in the morning paper or see on the news. When His counsel comes, listen to it more than you listen to any counselor on earth. God's Word and counsel is the air that your spiritual creature needs to breath.

There are a number of things that can hinder one's happiness. Excuses can keep us from enjoying happiness daily. If only things were different, if only I had more money, or lived somewhere else, or were married to someone else, then I would be happy. But it's just a lie, and it's an excuse not to enjoy the happiness that God has given us now, just the way we are, and in just the place we live. These are all excuses that keep us from enjoying life daily and from finding real happiness.

Another hindrance to happiness is a self-styled independence that keeps us from remembering our Creator. Thinking that we can make it on our own, that we don't need anyone, that our own efforts to achieve wealth and status in life will give us happiness, this all adds up to a life without God and without His people. Independent thinking ignores the fact that every breath and every heartbeat that keeps us alive come courtesy of the grace of God. The course of our life is every bit as dependent on the grace of God as is our breathing. Yet God will often allow a person to pursue his own way of happiness with grim determination, so that when they achieve what they want they will realize a principle that may save their lives, they're still unhappy. When you act decisively on behalf of God; when you drop your pretense of self-sufficiency and commit yourself to God, then you will start to have a memory center that becomes filled with God's viewpoint of life. The memory of a person is part of that person's capacity for life and above all, capacity for love. The ability to remember Jesus Christ, who is our Creator, is based upon the doctrine that we have circulating in our souls. The more doctrine you have, the more you can remember who Jesus Christ is, and if you don't have capacity for life and love for The Lord Jesus

Christ, then where you should have memories, you will have regrets instead. Regrets indicate a lack of capacity for life. God allots to each of us a certain amount of time, how we use that time is up to us. If we end up having regrets at the end of our life that means we didn't use our time correctly before the eyes of God. But when our time is used properly, the way that God desired in His grace, then you will have memories that are beautiful, and wonderful, and unstained with the human viewpoint of life. You will always have those memories, and no one will ever take them from you. God invented time, but Satan, the ruler of this world, tries to steal that time that God has allotted to you for His glory and your blessings. Unfortunately, Satan and the kingdom of darkness have robbed time from the majority of believers. Time spent in reversionism is time that has been stolen by the god of this world, Satan.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 tells us to remember our Creator, The Lord Jesus Christ, in the days of our youth. The Hebrew word for "your youth" is *bechurouth*, which means in the days of your youthful strength or vigor. This word does not necessarily mean to be young in years but to be young in strength and vigor. Through rotten mental attitudes, some that are young in years are not young in strength and vigor. Some people lose their vigor before they're twenty years old, while others who are sixty have great vigor in their lives. Therefore, youth is a mental attitude that is determined by positive or negative volition toward doctrine. When we possess that kind of youth, no matter what our age is, we are commanded to remember our Creator. We are never to look disrespectfully upon the older generation. In fact, in years past, when an older person walked into a room the younger rose up from their chairs in respect. Children often turn away from their parents when they are old. Some children are even ashamed of their parents, and that's sad. If you're ashamed of your parents, there is something wrong with you, not with them.

- Leviticus 19:32. "You shall rise up before the grayheaded, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord."
- Proverbs 23:22. "Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old."

There are certain problems that accompany old age, which is why Solomon is telling us to remember God when we are young.

For example, old age can be a time where you stop learning, as in Ecclesiastes 4:13, “A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.”

A second problem that comes with old age is that many old people become helpless in certain areas. The Lord told Peter when he was young and full of energy that a day would come when he would be helpless. John 21:18 says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself, and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

Old age is also a time when people are more vulnerable to disease according to 1 Kings 15:23, “Now the rest of all the acts of Asa and all his might and all that he did and the cities which he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? But in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet.”

Old people are also very security conscious due to failing strength, whereas young people could generally care less. In Psalm 71:9, it is written, “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.”

We are also taught in the scriptures that divine discipline makes people old before their time. David said that when he kept silent about his sin (which was failure to name and cite the sin), that his physical body wasted away, so often divine discipline is of such a nature, that it makes people old regardless of their physical age.

- Psalm 6:7. “My eye has wasted away with grief; It has become old because of all my adversaries.”
- Psalm 32:3. “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.”
- This is why doctrine learned in youth is profitable in old age. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.”
- Psalm 71:17-18. “O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; And I still declare Thy wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Thy strength to [this] generation, Thy power to all who are to come.”

The dynamics of doctrine resident in the soul of an older person does the most for the next generation. Each generation must stand

on its own, and the only helpful thing that you can pass on to the next generation is Bible doctrine. To experience vigor and blessing in old age, the believer must reach spiritual maturity and be occupied with Christ. Old age can be a marvelous and wonderful time of life when there is capacity to enjoy the Lord. In spiritual maturity, instead of insecurity and failing strength, there is security, blessing, and honor.

- Psalm 37:25. “I have been young, and now I am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Or his descendants begging bread.”
- Proverbs 17:6. “Grandchildren are the crown of old men, And the glory of sons is their fathers.”
- Proverbs 20:29. “The glory of young men is their strength, And the honor of old men is their gray hair.”

Old people who are spiritually mature receive blessing in dying. In Job’s life, Satan tried to rob his time, but failed because of Job’s spiritual maturity and occupation with Christ. The same was true of David, who despite many personal failures, remained faithful to the Lord and died full of days and honor as written in Job 42:17, “And Job died, an old man and full of days.”

- First Chronicles 29:28. “Then he [David] died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor; and his son Solomon reigned in his place.”
- Isaiah 46:4. “Even to your old age, I shall be the same, And even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; And I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.”

David rebounded and recovered from his mistakes while he was still young enough to do so, yet Solomon did not.

James Ball Naylor wrote:

King David and King Solomon, Led merry, merry, lives.
 With many, many lady friends, and many, many wives.
 But when old age crept over them, with many, many qualms,
 King Solomon wrote the Proverbs, and King David wrote
 the Psalms.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 tells us to remember our Creator in the days of our youthful vigor, “before the evil days draw near when you will say, I have no delight in them.” As we get on in life, all of us realize that life isn’t just fun and games. There are going to be evil days, especially, if we have neglected our relationship with God in our youth, and evil days always bring consequences. The wages of evil include scars and the formation of bad habits that affect us mentally and emotionally. Evil slows us and dulls us spiritually. When we look back on the evil days of our life, we will conclude with Solomon that we have no delight in them.

So this is a gracious warning by Solomon to get serious about our relationship with God and to stop wasting time in evil days that are filled with reversionism and discipline. First Corinthians 16:22 reminds us, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.”

God has designed a plan for each of us that will give us pleasure and happiness in our days on this earth, no matter what circumstances we face. As in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, we are to have pleasure in dying, planting, building up, laughing, dancing, embracing, in love, and so on. The reason why most people do not find the pleasure in these things is because they did not act decisively on God in their youth. They failed to live in the plan God designed for them. Solomon gave us the same lesson in Proverbs chapter 5.

- Proverbs 5:1., “My son, give attention to my wisdom, Incline your ear to my understanding.”
- Proverbs 5:9. “Lest you give your vigor to others, And your years to the cruel one.”
- Proverbs 5:11-13. “And you groan at your latter end, When your flesh and your body are consumed; And you say, ‘How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! And I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, Nor inclined my ear to my instructors!’”

Ecclesiastes 12:1-2. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youthful vigor, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them,’ before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain.”

Verse 2 presents a picture of gloom, and it has some interesting symbolism attached to it. The sun refers to the energy from light, and it represents the prosperity that a person has from God. The light represents the accumulation of doctrine in the soul through the consistent function of perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine. The moon is a satellite of the sun, reflecting its light, and it is analogous to a man possessing his right woman, someone who reflects perfectly what he is. The stars represent all the blessings that accompany the prosperity. Yet, here in verse 2, these things are darkened, this means that the prosperity, the right woman, the doctrine in your soul, and the blessings that accompany these things have faded into disaster, calamity, and great catastrophe. For them to have become darkened means that you must have possessed them at some point; and therefore, this is a perfect picture of reversionism. This is what happens to a believer who has rejected doctrine for a lifetime and does not love The Lord Jesus Christ. Reversionism darkens every wonderful thing that God has provided: the sun (prosperity), the light (Bible doctrine, the basis of capacity for life), the moon (right man or right woman), and the stars (the various types of prosperity that accompany super-grace). Notice what happens after these things are darkened because of the loss of light, loss of Bible doctrine circulating in the soul: *clouds return after the rain*. Solomon lived in an agricultural economy where a certain amount of rain is necessary for crops to grow, but here the clouds refer to too much rain that destroys the crops. The clouds that are returning are rain clouds that will make for disaster. The analogy here is that too much of a good thing, minus the capacity for that thing, equals disaster in the believer's life. Capacity for life comes from Bible doctrine metabolized in the soul. Therefore, no matter how much prosperity we may think we have, without Bible doctrine any good thing will become a disaster.

Disaster always occurs when we have an abundance of prosperity and we forget the source. Many believers get a measure of prosperity through their positive volition toward doctrine and then they focus on the prosperity and forget the Lord. Solomon is the greatest example of this that lives through the ages. Everything we have, including the air that we breathe, has its source in the Lord. Jesus Christ is the source of everything, and He has given us doctrine so we can appreciate what He gives. Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the Lord, O my

soul, And forget none of His benefits” while in Second Chronicles 32:25, we read, “But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.”

When verses one and two of Ecclesiastes 12 are put together, they emphasize that regardless of our circumstances at any given moment, we always have the source of all blessings, which is Jesus Christ. Do not forget Him and do not forget the doctrine that He has given you, which is the light, the source of all the blessings and prosperity of life. When we forget the source, whatever blessings come cannot be appreciated.

Let’s look at the corrected translation and interpretation of the entire chapter of Ecclesiastes 12. We will see where Solomon is going in the conclusion of this journal before we look at each verse more closely.

- Ecclesiastes 12:1. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth [while you’re still young and you still have a lot of energy], before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:2. “Before the sun [prosperity], the light [Bible doctrine], the moon [right man or right woman], and the stars [various blessings from God] are darkened [blotted out, disaster], and the rain clouds [too much of a good thing with no appreciation] return after the rain [too much prosperity losing track of the source].”
- Ecclesiastes 12:3. “In the day that the watchmen of the house [the hands] tremble, and mighty men [the legs or the knees] stoop, the grinding ones [the teeth] stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows [the eyes] grow dim.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:4. “And the doors on the street are shut [isolation from social life] as the sound of the grinding mill is low [digestive system fades], and one will arise at the sound of the bird [insomnia], and all the daughters of song will sing softly [loss of hearing].”
- Ecclesiastes 12:5. “Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place [different phobias in life] and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms [naats, meaning despised, no capacity for the enjoyment of life], the grasshopper drags himself along

[loss of strength], and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street [he's remembered for a short time]."

- Ecclesiastes 12:6. "Remember Him before the silver cord is broken [before there's a stroke] and the golden bowl is crushed [a negative EEG], the pitcher by the well is shattered [a negative EKG] and the wheel at the cistern is crushed [a cardiac arrest]."
- Ecclesiastes 12:7. "Then the dust [the human body] will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."
- Ecclesiastes 12:8. "Vanity of vanities,' says the man with the message, 'all is vanity!'"
- Ecclesiastes 12:9. "In addition to being a wise man, the man with the message also taught the people knowledge [doctrine as he recovered in his old age]; and he pondered [the reception of doctrine], and searched it out [the retention of doctrine] and arranged many proverbs [the recall of doctrine written in the book of Proverbs]."
- Ecclesiastes 12:10. "The Teacher sought to find delightful words [just the right words, doctrine of inspiration] and to write words of truth [doctrine] correctly."
- Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The doctrines of wise men are like goads [motivation from perception of doctrine], and masters of these collections [Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon] are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd [Jesus Christ, the true shepherd giving it to one undershepherd who teaches you]."
- Ecclesiastes 12:12. "But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless [cosmic viewpoint of life], and excessive devotion to books [academic speculation and studying cosmic viewpoint] is wearying to the body."
- Ecclesiastes 12:13. "The conclusion, when all has been heard [reception of doctrine], respect God and keep His commands [perception, metabolization and application of Bible doctrine], because this applies to every person [completes every person]."
- Ecclesiastes 12:14. "For God will bring every act to judgment [judgment seat of Christ], everything which is hidden, whether it is [absolute] good [the execution of the plan of God] or evil."

What really counts in life is fulfilling the plan of God through perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine. Sooner or later, everything else in life is a dead-end. Samuel Johnson said, "It is a man's own fault, it is from want of use, if his mind grows torpid in old age." It's not true that age brings wisdom. Wisdom is brought by doctrine in the human spirit.

- Job 32:7-8. "I thought age should speak, And increased years should teach wisdom. But it is a [human] spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding."

Ecclesiastes 12:3. "In the day that the watchmen of the house [the hands] tremble, and mighty men [the legs or the knees] stoop, the grinding ones [the teeth] stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows [the eyes] grow dim."

We have developed ways to cover up the effects of aging. We have wigs to put on our head, and teeth to put in our mouth. We have hearing aids for our ears, and contact lenses for our eyes. For some people it's like dismantling a house before they are ready for bed. But the fact is, not only are we getting older, we're getting worse. Solomon now mentions the trembling of the hands and legs that takes place as an individual gets older. Remember, old age has nothing to do with how old you are. No matter how many years we have been alive, we can have spiritual vigor and energy from doctrine in the soul. Capacity for life, love, and happiness from Bible doctrine will always keep us young at heart. The phrase "in the day" is the Hebrew noun *Bajowm* referring to the day when you lose these energies, and then you have your own personal energy crisis due to the different stages of reversionism. The Word of God teaches that doctrine affects us even in the physical realm.

- Proverbs 4:22. "For they [doctrines] are life to those who find them, And health to all their whole body."
- Proverbs 3:8. "Doctrine will be healing to your navel [nervous system], And refreshment to your bones."
- Proverbs 16:24. "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."
- Proverbs 15:30. "Bright eyes gladden the heart; Good news puts fat on the bones."

So the nervous system reflects the function of the soul. Now it is very interesting that we should have the hands mentioned first in verse 3 because the trembling of the hands indicates a loss of energy in the nervous system. The hands reflect the function of the nervous system, and the nervous system reflects the function of the soul. When people are neurotic and have problems with their nerves, it is a case of the soul having a direct effect upon the body. They have a nervous energy crisis and can no longer control their body, and it shows up in the hands. This does not mean that if you have doctrine in your soul that you will never have any physical problems! Nor does it mean that every time someone's hands shake that they're in trouble spiritually. This is an illustration to show how the soul can have a direct effect on the physical body, especially the nervous system. Doctrine in the soul through the function of perception and metabolization gives maximum spiritual energy. This is why Job could still operate in integrity when his nervous system was under intense attack.

- Job 2:7. "Satan smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head."
- John 6:63. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."
- Hebrews 4:12. "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword,"
- Psalm 119:50. "This is my comfort in my affliction, That Thy word has revived me."

You can be young at ninety because your body is controlled by your soul, or you can be old at twenty because the body controls the soul. If the soul controls the body, it produces the energies, or that vigor we saw in verse 1. But if the body controls the soul (and this always happens in reversionism), then the individual experiences a physical breakdown.

Pastor R. B. Thieme Jr. described this phenomenon in his book *Mental Attitude Dynamics*: "Medical science is becoming increasingly aware of the connection between physical health and the thought pattern. Many illnesses are a direct result of the psychoses of the mind. The word psychosomatics is made up of two Greek words: *psuche*, meaning soul, with emphasis on mentality and *soma*, meaning

body. Any mental attitude of fear, worry or anxiety or any continual mental tension will eventually overflow and affect the body. This frequently results in unusual behavior. It was discovered during the Korean War that many of our American boys died in prison camps from what we call give-up-itis. After this mental attitude was perpetuated over a few days, an individual would simply fold up, lie down on the ground and say, "Leave me alone." If he were left alone for two or three days, he would be dead! Our physicians in the prison camps reported a substantial number of these cases and diagnosed the cause of their deaths as due to a mental attitude of hopelessness and despair. It is also becoming increasingly common for people to suffer from such ailments as eczema, skin rashes, warts, allergies, asthma, hypertension, thyroid problems, ulcers and many other disorders, simply from the overflow of the pressures from the mind into the body. And, interestingly enough, a change of mental attitude or a stabilizing of the mentality results in the removal of the symptoms."

Medical science once again catches up with the wisdom of the Bible.

- Proverbs 17:22. "A joyful heart [happy right lobe] is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones."
- Proverbs 14:30. "A tranquil heart is life to the body, But jealousy is rotteness to the bones."

Pastor Thieme continues: "When the right lobe of the believer receives divine viewpoint through Bible doctrine, the result is inner peace, a relaxed mental attitude, stability, and inner happiness. But when the right lobe is crammed full of human viewpoint, or when mental attitude sins, such as pride, jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, implacability, guilt complex, hatred, etc., dominate the mentality of the soul, the result is inevitably self-induced misery. Mental attitude sins, plus the absence of Bible doctrine, lead to human viewpoint and can only produce disorientation to grace and agony of soul. While there are many different mental attitudes, there are only two basic viewpoints to life, the divine viewpoint and the human viewpoint. Not only are these viewpoints completely antithetical, but God's viewpoint is said to be infinitely superior to that of man. "The unbeliever is capable only of the human viewpoint since he is alienated from the

life of God, (Eph 4:18), and the enemy of God in his mind, (Col 1:21). However, the believer constantly struggles between the divine and the human viewpoints. Believers are “not of this world,” but are “in the world” (Joh 15:19), and so the norms and principles, as well as the philosophies of Satan’s world system, bombard them from all sides. The world expects the believer to conform to satanic systems and be like the rest of humanity, while God desires for him to “be transformed” to His way of thinking (Rom 12:1-3). Therefore, it is important that we learn the divine norms and standards which should govern our thought pattern.”

Pastor Thieme concludes: “People often have what they call legitimate excuses as to why they cannot come to Bible class for one reason or another, but you can always justify what you want to do. Your decisions depend on what you think. If human viewpoint is predominant in your right lobe, it will neutralize your Christian life. You cannot live God’s way if you do not think God’s way. But when believers do not think God’s way, they will believe in spirituality by means of taboos, ecstasies, or asceticism.”

Next in Ecclesiastes 12:3, we have “the mighty men,” which can refer to the legs, the knees, or the feet. The Hebrew word for *stomp* is the Hebrew word *avath* which simply means to break down. This refers to a loss of all physical, bodily energy. After that, we have “the grinding ones,” the teeth being lost. In the ancient world, when people lost their teeth, they couldn’t replace them as can be done with modern dentistry. Solomon says that they stand idle, which means that they cease from labor. Now, if you have bad teeth, please do not think that you’re in reversionism! However, often, a loss of teeth is associated with a disease in the gums, and disease can result from garbage in the soul. We have areas of weakness in our sin nature. If we consistently make bad decisions in that area because we don’t apply doctrine, we can do damage to certain parts of our body. As we age, those parts of the body start to break down; once again, good health is associated with a healthy mental attitude from Bible doctrine.

Continuing in verse 3, we have a loss of eyesight. One of the greatest blessings God ever gave us was eyesight. If you lose your eyesight, you will need to rely on three kinds of energy attached to your life: you need the spiritual energy of Bible doctrine in the soul, you need the mental energy to adjust to using other senses for

perception, and you need the physical energy to keep moving in life even though you're blind. To be blind without these things is disastrous to the believer. With these things, you, though blind, can cope in every possible way and derive great blessing from it.

So we have a description of a number of tragedies that are related to old age, not necessarily the elapse of years but rather the loss of energy. For the believer, the solution is always a return to the spiritual energy that comes from Bible doctrine. Every bit of doctrine you perceive and metabolize is another bit of energy in your soul.

Ecclesiastes 12:4. "And the doors on the street are shut [isolation from social life] as the sound of the grinding mill is low [digestive system fades], and one will arise at the sound of the bird [insomnia], and all the daughters of song will sing softly [loss of hearing]."

Everyone goes through social isolation at some time in his or her life. Sadly, this becomes the norm for an elderly person who has consistently made negative decisions in life. Isolation is the meaning behind the phrase "the doors on the street are shut." The street represents the main stream of life. Without spiritual self-esteem, people become more and more isolated as the years go by, until finally, after many years, they have lost all contact with the rest of the world. They become confined and their lives are devoid of all social contact. The human being is a social being, and when isolation is complete, there is a further breakdown in the mentality. And unlike those who have become isolated as prisoners of war, these have made a decision themselves to become isolated. This has become a problem in our society, as the advanced in age are no longer cared for by their families, but are thrust into homes where there are no familiar faces. In the ancient world, homes for the elderly did not exist. This is in direct violation of the fifth of the Ten Commandments, which have been given to the client nation as a condition for blessing by God.

- Exodus 20:12. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you."
- Exodus 21:15. "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."
- Exodus 21:17. "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

These commands, to honor your father and mother, and not strike them or curse them, were given not only to little children, but also to adult children who had parents in old age. However, a believer who has matured through the various stages of spiritual adulthood, though he may be old, can handle the problems of a failed society magnificently. But for those who have by their own volition become more and more isolated over the years, their so-called golden years become years of despair and loneliness.

The next problem in our verse is a failed digestive system. The phrase “the grinding mill” is the Hebrew word *tachanah*. The word is used for grinding flour or meal and it speaks of the digestive system not working properly, i.e., indigestion. The Hebrew word for “low” is *shaphal*, which means depressed or contemptible. So we have another manifestation of darkness in the soul, which is a contemptible digestive system. You can get antacids from the drug store, or you can get in doctrine class and change your system of thinking.

Insomnia falls next in the list of woes for the elderly. “Arise” is the Hebrew word *quwm*, which means to jump up as if startled. The word “sound” is the Hebrew word *qowl*, which means to chirp, it refers to the chirp of a small bird. To be startled at the chirp of a small bird is to be devoid of a relaxed mental attitude and the tranquility of soul that comes from spiritual maturity. Since birds chirp in the early morning, this part of verse 4 refers to insomnia, which is an inability to obtain adequate sleep. At the end of this verse we see that *all the daughters of song will sing softly*. They don’t really sing softly; it just sounds soft because of lost hearing. The music, which is given for enjoyment, cannot be heard. Deafness causes a form of isolation from society due to the inability to hear conversations and other forms of entertainment.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 says, “Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place [different phobias in life] and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms [naats = despised, no capacity for the enjoyment of life], the grasshopper drags himself along [loss of strength], and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street [he’s remembered for a short time].”

The Hebrew word for “afraid” is the qal imperfect of *jare*, which refers to the different phobias or fears in life. There are many fears that neutralize a person’s thinking; in fact, psychology has given names to these fears because they are so common. Acrophobia is

the fear of high places, claustrophobia, the fear of confined spaces; zoophobia, the fear of animals; agoraphobia, the fear of open spaces; even triskaidekaphobia which is a fear of the number thirteen, and there are many more. However, regardless of what a person fears, all fear is sin, as it is against the will of God. God wills for us to have peace and courage in this life, and He has provided His Word to eradicate all fears from our souls.

The Hebrew word for “terrors” is from the noun *chathchath*, which refers to fears and phobias. The Hebrew word for “road” is *baderek*, which refers to the course of life or travel. As a person gets advanced in years and neglects Bible doctrine, fear takes hold of more and more areas of the soul. It gets to a point where the older person has a fear of his very course of life. This makes him more isolated, and he is afraid to continue to travel down the road of life. God did not design us to live this way, but if we neglect His word, if we don’t remember Him in our youth, these fears will control our lives, therefore, fear is optional. If we live in carnality and reversionism (perpetuated carnality; no rebound), we choose to have fear in our lives. If we choose to live in the plan of God for our lives, we choose a life of peace, courage, and prosperity.

The *almond tree* in the Bible has two meanings: it can represent white hair, or it can represent capacity to taste the finer things in life. “Blossoms” comes from the Hebrew root word *naats*, which means to be despised. Since white hair in old age is generally not despised (in fact any hair at all in old age is a source of thanksgiving). The “almond tree” in this passage refers to capacity for life and enjoyment in old age. Since the almond tree is being despised, there is no capacity for life, or a loss of capacity for life. Interestingly, the almond is related to the dulling of the taste buds, which is analogous to loss of capacity for life. The almond plant itself is bitter, but the nut is sweet, and many, as they enter old age, carry with them bitter memories of former injustices, and feel hatred, anger, and resentment toward others. When they were young, they were very gracious and relaxed, and gave everyone their privacy. But when they get old and cannot do what the younger people can do, they get angry and mad. They want the pastor to teach on sin, they want him to scare the hell out of the young people, and they despise seeing others enjoy certain prosperity and blessings in life. So capacity for enjoyment of life is despised. The *grasshopper* speaks of our weakness and our loss of

physical strength and skill. The ten spies who brought back an evil report in Numbers 11:33 used this word in the same way in Numbers 13:33, “There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

These spies felt weak and insignificant when they compared themselves with the giants and considered the power of the men of Canaan. The application is that those who advance in age without doctrine in the soul feel weak and insignificant when faced with the normal details of life. The aged person without doctrine cannot endure the slightest burden; to them the molehill becomes a mountain. This is a great disaster for those who have neglected their relationship with God when they had the energy to develop it. Again, though, it was their choice, they disobeyed that most important commandment and so they are under a curse.

- Mark 12:30. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”
- First Corinthians 16:22. “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.”

The phrase “and the caperberry is ineffective” speaks of their desires failing. The Hebrew word for “caperberry” is *‘abijownah*, referring to both appetite and sexual desire. The NIV translates this phrase, “and desire no longer is stirred,” the NKJ reads, “and desire fails,” and the TLB says, “without sexual desire.” The sexual desires, and desire itself have gone. The Hebrew word for “ineffective” is *parar* and it means to be frustrated. Sexual desire is frustrated, which implies a temporary or a permanent loss of sexual ability.

Think of all these disasters mentioned so far in this passage: In Ecclesiastes 12:2, there’s the loss of prosperity, loss of right man or right woman, and loss of the various blessings from God. In Ecclesiastes 12:3, there’s the shaking of the hands, the weakening of the legs or the knees or the breakdown of the feet, loss of teeth, and loss of eyesight. In Ecclesiastes 12:4, there’s no social life, there’s a breakdown in the digestive system, insomnia, and loss of hearing. Then the many fears in verse 5, no capacity for the enjoyment of life, and loss of sexual strength. To face these disasters without stored-

up doctrine is unbearable. All of these disasters are put before us to remind us, and to challenge us to be alert when it comes to our relationship with God, especially while we are young or while we still have youthful vigor. We will all face disasters in our lives, either by means of the law of volitional responsibility, which is reaping what we sow, or by means of undeserved suffering. God always gives us the Bible doctrine that we need to be prepared for these disasters, but if we reject those doctrines today, we will have nothing to meet the disasters of tomorrow.

Before we cover the last phrase in Ecclesiastes 12:5, let's look at the Living Bible translation because it really makes it clear, "You will be afraid of heights and of falling—a white-haired, withered old man, dragging himself along; without sexual desire, standing at death's door, and nearing his everlasting home as the mourners go along the streets" (TLB).

For the believer with positive volition toward doctrine, God provides a magnificent death. He saves the best for last. Death is a profound subject, not because it ends this life, but because it demonstrates that God can take the thing that people fear the most and make it something that is magnificent and great. The Bible says that people fear death all their lives, and yet Christ has delivered anyone who will believe in Him from that fear.

- Hebrews 2:15. "That He [Jesus Christ] might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."
- First Corinthians 15:55. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

God has provided a magnificent death for all of us. This magnificent death may come very rapidly; it may even come gloriously like dying in battle or dying saving someone's life. It may come in a very difficult way, such as after a long period with some lingering disease such as cancer. God has appointed for us many things in our allotment of time He has appointed unto us adversities and blessings, as well as defeats and successes. At the end comes God's last appointment for each believer, and it can be the best thing of all, a death that brings glory to God. God saves the best for last. If you have capacity for life as a believer, then you are going to have capacity for dying and death. You will not live in fear of death and you will not have any regrets. You

will be excited about the fact that you're going to meet your Lord. You will have total confidence and security that your family, friends, loved ones, and even pets are going to be taken care of fantastically by the grace of God. Job 5:24-26 says, "You need not worry about your home while you are gone; nothing shall be stolen from your barns. Your sons shall become important men; your descendants shall be as numerous as grass! You shall live a long, good life; like standing grain, you'll not be harvested until it's time" (TLB)!

However, all of this is predicated upon your perception, metabolization, and application of Bible doctrine. The more doctrine you take in before you find your right man or your right woman, before God gives you your first promotion, before you get your first million, the better off you're going to be. By consistently taking in doctrine before you come to the dying stage, you'll be far better off than at any other time in your life. God has saved the best for last, but for the believer who has been negative toward Bible doctrine all of his life, death becomes a horror.

The last phrase in Ecclesiastes 12:5 begins, "For [should be translated *because*] man goes." The Hebrew verb for "goes" is the qal active participle of the verb *halak*, which means to walk one step at a time. Every step you take is one step closer to death. Every day you have taken one more step toward the dessert of life. Right now you might be on the appetizer or the soup, you might be on the salad, you might be on the entrée; however, death is the dessert. After all, death is just a valley that should not be feared (Psa 23:4). At the other end of the valley is eternity, where He shall wipe away every tear from your eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the old things have passed away.

The phrase "eternal home" is the Hebrew phrase *`owlam bayith*, which has two meanings: an eternal palace or an eternal dungeon. Believers await an eternal palace, while those who have rejected faith alone in Christ alone await an eternal dungeon. Where they spend eternity all depends on their attitude toward Christ and their answer to Matthew 22:42, "What do you think about the Christ?"

- John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

- John 3:18. “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Continuing in Ecclesiastes 12:5, “While mourners go about in the street.” The Hebrew verb for “to go” is *cabab*, which means to go about without direction, or to go around and around. Mourners go around and around beating the breast, wailing, and crying for the dead. The Hebrew word for “mourners” is the noun *caphad*, which has two meanings: real mourners who have legitimate sorrow or hired mourners who were professionals that were paid to mourn for the dead to give the impression that they were really missed. If a person has lived a normal Christian life, which is the super-grace life with maximum doctrine in his soul, there will be loved ones who miss him and who legitimately mourn with legitimate sorrow. If you were to die today, would anyone miss you, or would mourners have to be hired to fill up the funeral parlor? If you lived an empty life because of perpetuated reversionism, no one is going to miss you except for the few who are supposed to, and even they are probably glad that they are rid of you and your misery. That is tragic, but unfortunately, that is the eulogy for a lot of believers who have neglected, disregarded, ignored, overlooked, and became indifferent toward their relationship with God.

To remember God means to act decisively on behalf of Him, and to drop our rationale of self-sufficiency and to commit ourselves to God. In this passage, Solomon is not describing what old age is going to be like for all of us. He is describing what old age is like for an individual who did not take his relationship with God seriously while he was young. Solomon was not faithful to God in the days of his youthful vigor. He gave his youthful vigor to all of the things we have studied in the book of Ecclesiastes. His mother, Bathsheba, warned him in Proverbs 31, but like many sons, he ignored the advice of his mother.

As Proverbs 31:3 says, “Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings.”

On the other hand, Solomon’s father David had a grand old time in old age. In Psalm 92:14, David writes concerning the older person: “They will still yield fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and very green.” David also taught this to Solomon. The righteous, who

live in doctrine, shine brighter and brighter until the full day when they die and go home to be with the Lord. This is written in Proverbs 4:18, “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.” David, on his dying bed, could testify to this in 1 Kings 1:1-4, “Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. So his servants said to him, “Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm.” So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the girl was very beautiful; and she became the king’s nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her.”

By the way, if you think that his wife Bathsheba got all upset because of this, look at her attitude toward her husband David. First Kings 1:15-16 says, “So Bathsheba went in to the king in the bedroom. Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was ministering to the king. Then Bathsheba bowed and prostrated herself before the king. And the king said, ‘What do you wish?’” First Chronicles 29:28 says, “Then David died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor.”

We read about many men of God who were positive toward God’s Word and how they came to the end of their days in full vigor, quite unlike the description given to us by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:1-5.

- Genesis 25:8. “And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people.”
- Genesis 35:29. “And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age.”
- Job 42:16-17. “And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his grandsons, four generations. And Job died, an old man and full of days.”
- Job 5:26. “You will come to the grave in full vigor, Like the stacking of grain in its season.”

Ecclesiastes 12:6. “Remember Him before the silver cord is broken [before there’s a stroke] and the golden bowl is crushed [a negative

EEG], the pitcher by the well is shattered [a negative EKG] and the wheel at the cistern is crushed [a cardiac arrest].”

The verb from verse 1 is carried over into verse 6, so Solomon again is asking us to remember our Creator before something happens. The “silver cord” is the Hebrew noun *chebel*, which means a thread, a cord or a rope. Silver is used because it is often associated with old age, so this is a poetic reference to death. The Hebrew word for “broken” is *rachaq*, and it means to be snapped or removed. Therefore something in the human body is snapped or worn out, which is exactly what happens when there is a stroke. The “golden bowl” is the Hebrew noun *gullah*, which is a very interesting and revealing word concerning this passage. It is a container that holds oil with a wick dipped into it. The silver cord is a wick dipped into oil from the golden bowl that produces a flame, and this flame represents the spark of life. The oil represents allotment of time or the energy of life. Since the energy of life comes from the brain, which can be measured by an EEG (electroencephalogram), the golden bowl filled with oil represents the electrical charge stored in the brain. If the golden bowl is cracked, you are dying slowly as the oil leaks out, but if it is smashed, you die instantly and your EEG is just a flat line. The electrical spark is gone because the soul, the real you, has left the body. It’s that electric spark in your brain, the soul, that allows you to be renewed by giving you the ability to learn the things of God. Second Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed” (NIV).

The breathing of your brain is the vital part of your life. A few dead brain cells will not prohibit you from living and functioning as a normal member of the human race, but when there is a progressive decay in the brain cells, the ability to function is gradually lost. This loss can lead to a mental disability called dementia, which is a deterioration of intellectual faculties such as memory, concentration, and judgment, resulting from a disorder of the brain. It is often accompanied by emotional disturbance and personality changes. There are many things that can destroy our brain cells and impair our cognition or understanding of things. The conditions include brain injuries, cerebral tumors, AIDS, alcohol, medications, infections, chronic lung diseases, and inflammatory diseases. Medical science tells us something very interesting about dementia and the destruction of the brain cells as a person gets older. The following

quote should sound very familiar to you in light of our study; once again, science catches up with the Bible.

“A number of psychosocial risk factors also predispose the elderly to mental disorder. Those risk factors include loss of social roles, loss of autonomy, the deaths of friends and relatives, declining health, increased isolation, financial constraints, and decreased cognitive functioning.”

There is a direct relationship between the mental diseases of old age and one’s neglect of his relationship with God in his youth. This is not mere speculation, but rather a warning from God to His people, just as He warned Israel.

- Deuteronomy 28:1. “Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commands which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”
- Deuteronomy 28:15. “But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”
- Deuteronomy 28:28. “The Lord will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart.”

The Hebrew word for “madness” is *shiggaon*, which means madness, to howl, or to rage. This madness among the Jews was a result of their own volition. They had made their own decisions to succumb to the sins of emotion and the sins of arrogance. Therefore, when it says that the Lord would smite them or strike them with madness, it was simply referring to a fact that they became mentally ill by their own decision to do certain things such as living by their emotions and their arrogance. The description of the curses that result from the rejection of God’s Word in Deuteronomy 28 fit the description by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12 almost flawlessly. Deuteronomy 28:65 says, “And among those nations you shall find no rest, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul.”

And if you don’t think God does this under the dispensation of grace, look at 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body

rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”

The Greek word for “weak” is the adjective *astheneo*, which means to be feeble, to have loss of energy, loss of strength, or depression. “Sick” refers to any number of illnesses, and “those who sleep” refers to the sin unto death. Negative volition in any generation carries with it the very real results of mental and physical suffering.

Leviticus 26:14-16 says, “But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine [or mope or waste] away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up.”

A person with dementia may lack insight into his or her disability. Outward manifestations are tragic: There is the loss of memory, the inability to learn new information, problems speaking, and the tendency to repeat oneself. There are the problems of becoming confused and lost. Added to this is the change in personality and lack of judgment. The person becomes very irritable, anxious, depressed, and restless, and all of this can go on for years. In the final stages there is the inability to feed oneself and the loss of bowel and bladder control. All of the outward manifestations are covered in a mental attitude of fear, which results in the person’s further isolation, and lack of care for their appearance and their very lives.

Medical science states, “The culprit, which robs millions of people of their memories, their minds, and ultimately their very lives, is Alzheimer’s disease.” However, God’s Word states, “The culprit, which robs millions of people of their memories, their minds, and ultimately their very lives, is their very own free will.” This is not to say that anyone who has a mental disease must be in reversionism, but rather that there is a connection between our spiritual health and our mental health. In the Bible, the heart always refers to the right lobe of the soul, the place where wisdom is stored. The Word of God shows us the cause of many mental diseases.

- Proverbs 13:12. “Hope deferred makes the heart [right lobe] sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

- Proverbs 14:10. “The heart [or the right lobe of the brain] knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.”
- Proverbs 21:4. “Haughty eyes and a proud heart [or a proud right lobe of the brain], The lamp of the wicked, is sin.”

Our heart must be filled with doctrine, or it will be filled with stress, and that’s when the mental problems begin.

- Psalm 25:17. “The troubles of my heart are enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses.”
- Psalm 38:8. “I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart.”
- Psalm 38:10. “My heart throbs, my strength fails me; And the light of my eyes [personality], even that has gone from me.”
- Psalm 40:12. “For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head; And my heart has failed me.”
- Psalm 102:4. “My heart has been smitten like grass and has withered away, Indeed, I forget to eat my bread.”
- Romans 1:28. “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,”
- Romans 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,”

Arrogance is found in the heart (Oba 1:3). Sorrow emanates from the heart (Lev 26:16; Neh 2:2). Pressure from stress is related to the heart (Psa 34:18). Discouragement is related to the heart (Num 32:7, 9). This shows us the importance of having Bible doctrine circulating in the heart to eliminate these things and to keep them out of our hearts.

- Proverbs 4:23. “Watch over your heart [right lobe] with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.”
- Proverbs 24:14. “Know that wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find it, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.”

- Mark 12:30. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

Continuing in Ecclesiastes 12:6, we have the phrase “the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed.” In the ancient world they would have clay jugs that they would put on a wheel to fetch the water. This is a reference to the cardiovascular system that pumps blood to the other parts of the body. If the jug was broken, then there would be no water. The jug represents the blood vessels that carry the blood, and the wheel represents the heart that pumps the blood. If the wheel (the heart) is working, but the jug (the set of blood vessels) is broken, then there is no circulation. The Hebrew for “crushed” is the nihil perfect of *ratsats*, which refers to a mechanical breakdown or malfunction in the mechanism of the wheel. If the wheel stops working, then that is the equivalent of a heart attack. All of these physical and mental ailments that Solomon has described for us in chapter 12 show just how frail and feeble the human body is. That is why Solomon entreats us to remember our Creator in the days of our youthful vigor. Don’t believe the lie that you are strong, you are frail, and since you are frail and your life could end at any time; today is the day to start remembering your Creator. Today is the day of salvation.

- Psalm 39:4-6. “Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient [*chadel*, meaning frail, fleeting, feeble, or flimsy] I am. Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight, Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah. Surely every man walks about as a phantom; Surely they make an uproar for nothing; He amasses riches and does not know who will gather them.”
- Psalm 90:10-12. “As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away. Who understands the power of Thine anger, And Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee? So teach us to number our days, That we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom [Bible doctrine].”

- Psalm 144:3-4. “O Lord, what is man, that Thou dost take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that Thou dost think of him? Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.”

Ecclesiastes 12:7 “Then the dust [the human body] will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

In verse 7, finally, after all the mental and physical problems of old age have passed, death comes to our bodies. Death is not an end; it is only a time of passage when our soul and spirit ascend back to God who gave it. Our earthly bodies are simply houses for our soul and spirit. God never leaves an empty house around once the real you, the soul, leave the body. Once the soul and spirit have departed, the body is said to be naked. In verse 7, Solomon states that the body is dust and it returns to the earth as it was. The human body is made up of elements that originate from the earth, mere dust. Therefore, it is the soul, or the breath of God, that is the real you, the part of you that really matters. Genesis 2:7 states, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

We have now come full circle in our study of Solomon’s life. The Preacher, the man with the message, now repeats what he stated in the very beginning of his journal. Life without doctrine, life without God, and a life lived in neglect of your relationship with God is an empty, meaningless life. **Ecclesiastes 12:8**, “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher [Solomon], “all is vanity!”

There are three principles that we can glean from the first eight verses of Ecclesiastes 12. First, you must face then fact that you’re not getting any younger. Ignoring old age will not make it go away. If you’re pretending to be twenty when you’re seventy, you just look foolish. Those clothes don’t fit any more. Secondly, God has designed man to be empty without Him. Our hearts will find no rest and our souls no peace until we place our lives in His loving hands. Like Augustine said, “Thou has made us for Thyself and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.” God planned for us to be restless without Him. The many parts of life that are boring and monotonous have been designed that way on purpose, and the purpose is that we may see that we are totally empty without God.

Thirdly, now is the time to prepare for eternity. Preparing for retirement is commendable, but it's all for nothing if we have not made adequate plans to spend forever with God. The Lord wants us to entrust our lives to Him so that we can enjoy His presence endlessly. As C. S. Lewis says, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"

All that are in hell choose to be there. The eternal fire was originally prepared for the devil and his angels, yet hell had to be enlarged (Isa 5:14) to accommodate every member of the human race that would reject the free offer of salvation through faith in Christ our Lord. But it's never too late if you are alive, it doesn't matter how much you may have screwed up your life in the past. Anyone can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and in that moment, obtain eternal life in heaven that can never, ever be lost.

- Matthew 25:41. "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'"
- John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish [no date with the eternal fire], but have eternal life."

It's never too late for anyone who has not yet tasted death. Even though you may be battered and scarred by the mental and physical abnormalities described in this chapter by Solomon, it is never too late to believe in Christ and turn your life around. Myra Brooks Welch wonderfully illustrated this principle in a famous poem:

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
What am I bidden, good folks, he cried,
Who'll start the bidding for me?
A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?
Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three . . . But no,

From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
 Came forward and picked up the bow;
 Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
 And tightening the loosened strings,
 He played a melody pure and sweet,
 As a caroling angel sings.
 The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
 With a voice that was quiet and low,
 Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
 And he held it up with the bow.
 A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
 Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
 Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
 And going and gone," said he.
 The people cheered, but some of them cried,
 We do not quite understand.
 What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
 The touch of the Master's hand."
 And many a man with life out of tune,
 And battered and scarred with sin,
 Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
 Much like the old violin.
 A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
 A game—and he travels on.
 He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
 He's "going" and almost "gone."
 But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
 Never can quite understand
 The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
 By the touch of the Master's hand.

Yet it seems that Solomon is much more confused now. Like setting bookends to his life, he begins with vanity in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and ends with vanity in Ecclesiastes 12:8. Though a man of God, and though a king of God's nation, Solomon wrestled with the questions of his life. People are not too surprised when a philosopher or a professor struggles with the questions of life; after all, they're supposed to ask the questions, but when a man of God questions the purposes and reasons of life, he is scorned as a worthless preacher. For centuries,

it was believed that there were only several hundred stars in the universe. With the invention of the telescope, we now know that there are over two hundred billion in our galaxy alone. It was once accepted that the Earth was supported on the backs of elephants and turtles, and yet we now consider this absolute foolishness, knowing that Earth is suspended in space by the gravitational pull of the sun. Millions of young men and women toss their caps into the air every spring upon the completion of their college degrees. Despite thousands of dollars spent, and sleepless nights of study and cramming, they seem to leave with more questions than they have answers.

There is the story of a man who went up to his professor following a lecture and said, "I've been reading my text, and I've been listening to your class lectures. There are various points at which your lectures disagree with the text assigned for the class." To which the professor replied, "Really, bring up your text and show me where there is disagreement." When the student did that, pointing here and there to several contradictions, the professor calmly, yet deliberately, ripped the pages from the book and tossed them aside saying, "Now there, now it agrees with me!" You might be thinking that a scandal must have ensued, but to the contrary, his lecture hall was filled for the rest of the year.

Could you imagine a pastor ripping pages out of your Bible because he does not agree with the text? That would produce a scandal indeed, and most likely a church split or a firing of the pastor. In fact, you might think that a bolt of lightning would descend from heaven and strike him dead right there. There's sort of an unwritten law among ministers that says, "Thou shalt not doubt, struggle or rebel, and if thou dost, thou are dust." It comes with the territory. Therein lays the mystery of Ecclesiastes. For many it is extremely difficult to piece the book together with any sense of consistency and calm resolve. It is so because Solomon isn't a philosopher, he's not a politician, and he's not even a member of the clergy who doesn't have the guts to ask questions and stand up for what he believes. Most of us are used to pastors who compromise their teaching so as to not cause any waves in their congregations. They're nice people who only want to be accepted by their peers, but this is not Solomon. Solomon is the Preacher, the man with the message, and he is not afraid to write what he knows and to ask the tough questions. Solomon admits without reservation that to him, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

God is not hesitant to record for us the truth about His own children. God not only records the victories of His people but He also records their defeats. Righteous deeds and sins as well as strengths and weaknesses are all recorded for us to see, and most of us take comfort in that. We say if Solomon, or David, or Moses, or Paul could fail then maybe I'm not as bad as I thought I was. Yet, when a minister or a pastor-teacher shares his doubts and weaknesses in real time, then people are shocked. This is why you learn as a pastor with whom to share your doubts because there are not many who can handle it. Every minister of the Word of God has doubts, failings, weakness, and sins just like you. No minister has one-hundred percent of the knowledge of God and yet sinners will judge him when they see his feet of clay. Fortunately for us, Solomon is long gone into heaven and we can look at his doubts and failings very objectively. Don't forget that this is the same man who at one time was highly praised by God. In 1 Kings 10:23, "King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom."

Why did he go from wisdom to vanity? You remember, don't you? He pursued a path of happiness that was void of God. He forgot his Creator in the days of his youth. He pursued and completed eight experiments: academics, pleasure, family, philosophy, money, reputation, sex, and the hero image. His honest conclusion after this monumental waste of time was, it's all empty; this thing called life has nothing to offer. We should all thank God that he didn't write to impress anyone or to score points with his peers. We should all thank God that Solomon told it like it is, and that he was honest about the mess he made out of his life because he neglected his relationship with God.

Now hold on, we're not finished yet! As we have seen a number of times, Solomon, at some point in his old age, did rebound and recover. Confession of sin restores each of us to fellowship with God, but it does not erase the ramifications of our many negative decisions. Solomon's results were not erased either, but the second half of this chapter and the epilogue of this book are written by a Solomon who has wisdom flowing through his heart again. In verses 9-12, Solomon talks about himself. In verses 13-14, he talks about God. **Ecclesiastes 12:9** writes, "In addition to being a wise man, the Teacher [the man with a message] also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs."

Notice that the teacher not only is to be a wise man, but he is also to teach the people knowledge. The Hebrew word for “taught” is the piel stem of *lamad*, which in the piel stem means to teach very intently, or to train. It means to teach with repetition. This is an interesting word because it also begins with the twelfth letter in the Hebrew alphabet which is *lamedh* representing an ox goad. An ox goad has a point on one side and a smooth, chiseled end on the other. The ox goad reveals two concepts that are both found in this passage. It represents the principle of rebound and recovery, which is analogous to using the smooth end. It also represents the faithfulness of God in disciplining us or teaching us the hard way, which is analogous to being hit with the pointed end. In other words, one way or the other, we will learn. Isaiah 29:24, “These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who complained will learn doctrine” (NKJV).

The ox goad was used to keep the ox moving, as confessing and forsaking sin keeps the believer moving. Motivation to keep moving in the spiritual life comes from realizing that all of our sins have already been judged. God pushes us along with the smooth side of the ox goad—His marvelous grace. In reality, the point of the ox goad was stuck in The Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, when He died for our sins. This represents God’s justice and righteousness, and the smooth part represents God’s love.

The Hebrew word for “ponder” is the piel stem of *'azan*, which in the piel stem means to be sharp mentally, to weigh words very carefully, or to concentrate intently. This is what a teacher of doctrine must do; he must ponder and weigh the words of God carefully. He must work hard to compare scripture with scripture in their historical context and in their original languages. He must search diligently to the point of exhaustion. And when he is teaching the same congregation, night after night, for year upon year, he must fill their souls with the meat of the Word of God. It’s amazing how guest speakers can show up at a church and wow the crowd with a great message, while the faithful pastor of that congregation hasn’t gotten a wow in years. It’s because they’ve heard all his stories, they’ve heard all his jokes and analogies, and they must be trained in the point-by-point doctrines of the Word of God. Therefore, the faithful teacher of the Word of God must search out and ponder every doctrine that he studies.

The Hebrew word for “searched out” is the piel perfect of *chaqar*, which means a very heavy categorical study. It means to search, to investigate, to dig up treasures, to explore, and it connotes a diligent, difficult probing. The piel stem means intensive activity, the same word in the same stem is used in the book of Job. Job 5:27, “Behold this, we have investigated it, thus it is; Hear it, and know for yourself” (Job 5:27).

This is why a teacher or a man with a message, the pastor-teacher for the church age, can’t afford to waste his time counseling, visiting people or getting involved with cleaning up the devil’s world. His job is to study and teach, search and teach, dig up and teach, etc. He should have no time for other nonsense, and in fact, he should have no time for legitimate functions of the church that should be done by other members such as deacons. Acts 6:2-4 advises, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables [take care of problems]. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of doctrine, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

The Hebrew word for “arranged” back in Ecclesiastes 12:9 is the piel perfect of *taqan* meaning to compose, to make straight, to get right to the point and be crystal clear. It’s used here for the composing of doctrines in poetical meter in the book of Proverbs. When you mess up your life like Solomon did, you get right to the point. You’ve got nothing to lose, and when we read the book of Proverbs we see that Solomon did just that.

When you look at a harlot that is tempting you with sexual promiscuity, you cite Proverbs 6:26, “For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life.”

When you look right at that man drenched with pride and arrogance, you say, Proverbs 11:2, “When pride comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.”

When you look at that cheap, stingy, cheapskate, tightwad you say, Proverbs 11:24, “There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, but [it results] only in want.”

When you look right at that woman, you could care less whether she likes what she hears or not, you say to her: Proverbs 12:4, “A

virtuous woman is the crown of her husband, But she who shames him is as cancer in his bones” [That’s Solomon’s marriage seminar!].

Solomon concentrated on the notes that he had taken when he was a boy, and his father and mother taught him many proverbs. Solomon had taken David’s instruction and teaching down in note form, which he now uses as his textbook. He searched out proverbs that came to mind, and he finally arranged them in an order, the order in which they are found in the book of Proverbs. Having recovered from reversionism, he began to compose the sayings in meter, and to write doctrine in poetry, and this became the book of Proverbs. **Ecclesiastes 12:10** reveals, “The Teacher sought to find delightful words [just the right words, words of delight or pleasure] and to write words of truth [doctrine] correctly or accurately [the doctrine of inspiration].”

God the Holy Spirit led him to reveal what a total loser he was, and this is often considered to be one of the greatest illustrations of the doctrine of inspiration. If Solomon had been on his own, he would never have recorded for us all of his failures and his wasted time. The Hebrew word for “sought” is the piel stem of *baqash*, meaning to strive after fervently, to earnestly seek, to labor passionately, to be devoted, or to search diligently. The same word is used in Deuteronomy 4:29, “But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.”

The verbs in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 12 are in the piel stem, which means that Solomon is seeking with all his effort. For the first time since he was a very young man, he is fulfilling that verse found in his Bible: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deu 6:5).

The word for “delightful” in verse 10 is *cheepets*, which means words of pleasure, words of value, or something precious. God intends for His words to give us pleasure. He wants you to have pleasure now rather than waiting until you’re in heaven.

- Job 36:11. “If they hear and serve Him, They shall end their days in prosperity, And their years in pleasures.”
- Psalm 16:11. “You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

Even though Solomon messed up his life, God still gave him another chance to make something out of his latter years. Time in reversionism is lost and you can never get it back. You suffer loss of the rewards that you could have received during that time, but as long as you're alive you still have opportunity to make the best out of the time you have left. Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs poetically, and so it is fitting that another poem represents his life very well.

Those Wasted Years

I looked upon a farm one day,
 That once I used to own;
 The barn had fallen to the ground,
 The fields were overgrown.
 The house in which my children grew,
 Where we had lived for years,
 I turned to see it broken down,
 And brushed aside the tears.
 I looked upon my soul one day,
 To find it too had grown
 With thorns and thistles everywhere,
 The seeds neglect had sown.
 The years had passed while I had cared
 For things of lesser worth:
 The things of heaven I let go
 While minding things of earth.
 To Christ I turned with bitter tears,
 And cried, "O Lord forgive!
 I haven't much time left for Thee,
 Not many years to live."
 Those "wasted years" forever gone,
 Those days I can't recall;
 If I could live those days again,
 I'd give him my all and all.
 Don't wait until it's too late!

Perhaps Solomon had in mind himself when he said in Ecclesiastes 5:4, "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!"

This warning has for centuries been Solomon's warning to the entire world. **Ecclesiastes 12:11** says, "The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd."

The words, or the doctrines, of wise men are like goads. "Goads" is the feminine plural of the Hebrew noun *dorbovn*, which refers to a stick about eight feet long. On one end of the stick is an iron point, and on the back end of the stick is a little medal disc that is used for cleaning the plow. The goad is something that is used to motivate action in animals or increase their speed. Words can do that to believers. Solomon framed his words so that when they reached the brain they would explode and motivate action and increase speed. All of humanity can read the book of Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs and get something from it.

The skeptic David Hume was seen walking in the snow at 6:00 AM one day toward a little chapel where George Whitfield was preaching. Someone who knew the skeptic said to him, "You believe this stuff?" He responded, "No I don't, but that man in the chapel does, and I can't stay away!" There's something about the words of God that goad (prod, jab, and poke) even the skeptic. Opposite the point of the goad was the chiseled end that was shaped just right for cleaning the mud from the plow. Bible doctrine drives you toward your objective (with the pointed end), which is the super-grace life, and doctrine also cleans the mud out of your life. The mud could be sin, failure, or anything that is slowing you down spiritually. Bible doctrine points us in the right direction and motivates us to keep going.

The second part of this verse is not in the correct word order. The correct word order is as follows:

- Ecclesiastes 12:11. "Dibreey [The words of] chakaamiym [the wise] [are] kadaara'bonowt [as goads] uwkmasmarowt [and as nails] natuw`iym [fastened] [by] ba`aleey [the masters of] `acupowt [these collections] [which] nitanuw [are given] mee-Ro`eh [from shepherd] `echaad [one]."
- Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The words of the wise are as goads; and as nails well fastened are the words of the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd" (ASV).
- Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd" (KJV).

Therefore the correct word order should be:

- Ecclesiastes 12:11. “The doctrines of the wise are as goads, and as well-driven nails are fastened by the masters of collections and are given from one shepherd.”

The word for “well-driven nails” has the idea of a tent stake, *masmer*, which was a special type of nail, an iron nail or an iron stake. There were three kinds of nails at this time in the ancient world: wooden plugs, bronze nails, and iron nails. At the time, iron nails were very hard to come by, though they were used for many purposes because they were the strongest and most secure nails. By analogy, all things are secured and stabilized with doctrine, which is stronger than anything else. The word for “fastened” is the Hebrew verb *nata`* which means to strike, to set anything upright so that it is fixed in the ground, to plant, or to establish. The communicator of doctrine must teach divine truth so that his students become rooted and grounded in the Word of God. A believer whose feet are secured in the Word of God is immovable.

The word “masters” is *ba`al* in the Hebrew, and it refers to one who has achieved superiority in a trade. In context, this would be one who has achieved superiority in driving nails or a master carpenter. However, taken a step further, since the subject is wisdom (doctrine), the master carpenter is a master of Bible doctrine. When you, as a believer, master the Word of God, it’s like driving a nail in your life, and you now have stability and a confidence and security that you didn’t have before. The one who pounds the nails is the One Shepherd, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible is the very mind or the thinking of The Lord Jesus Christ (1 Co 2:16). Every part of the Word of God is something that Christ has thought in eternity past. Since every thought that Jesus Christ had for mankind has been reduced to writing through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then all doctrines *are given from one Shepherd*. As a shepherd feeds his sheep, God feeds us spiritual food, which is His word.

There are many other words that have existed all throughout human history that have nothing to do with the Word of God. These are not goads or well-driven nails, but they are usually the viewpoint of mankind. And that’s why in the next verse Solomon gives us a warning. **Ecclesiastes 12:12** cautions, “But beyond this, my son, be

warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.”

We live in a day of tremendous amounts of information. There is so much information that is passed electronically and freely throughout the world in a matter of seconds that no one could ever read it all. In fact, this fulfills a prophecy found in the book of Daniel describing the last days before Christ comes back—Daniel 12:4, “knowledge will increase.” Most of it will not do a thing for you eternally. Therefore, verses 11 and 12 are a contrast between divine viewpoint and human viewpoint. The Bible is called the word of the Father in Hebrews 4:12, the mind of Christ in 1 Corinthians 2:16, and the voice of the Spirit in Hebrews 3:7. This one great book is the sum total of divine viewpoint and is our spiritual food. Yet the world is filled with many books that only represent human viewpoint, and oftentimes, satanic viewpoint.

The phrase “My son” is the noun *baniy*, which does not refer to the relationship of a father and a son, but as it is used frequently in the Bible, as a student. For example, this was the relationship between Paul and Timothy:

- First Timothy 1:2. “To Timothy, my true child in the faith.”
- Second Timothy 1:2. “To Timothy, my beloved son.”

Both Paul and John called their students “my sons” or “my children.” A student is under the discipline of his teacher until he moves on. The student is called a son to represent the authority of the communicator. In this dispensation, the authority would belong to the pastor-teacher. The Hebrew word for “warned” is the nihil imperative of *zahar*, which means to be warned or admonished by teaching. Solomon is saying that he wants his students to learn through teaching and admonishing and not through experience. The warning comes through the Word of God, which is the easy way to learn. If you have to be warned by divine discipline; that’s the hard way to learn and a sign of stupidity. The ability to sit under academic teaching with concentration and objectivity under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit and heed the warnings of God’s Word is the smartest way to live this life. But when God has to deal with you personally because you would not sit under the teaching or because you rejected the teaching, it is a sign of immaturity, stupidity, and a

lack of recognition of authority in life. The word “wearying” is the Hebrew noun *jagi`at*, which means weariness. It means something that does not sustain, refresh, or stimulate the soul as the intake of doctrine does. After a foundation of doctrine is built in your soul, you’re going to discover that the human viewpoint that you read in history, philosophy, psychology, etc., is very wearisome. **Ecclesiastes 12:13** says, “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.”

Solomon’s conclusion is anticlimatic, but very profound. There’s no fanfare, just a simple statement. He finishes this great book by telling us two simple things that you have to pay attention to. You have to take God seriously by fearing or respecting God, and when God speaks, listen and do what He says. After all his searching, Solomon is concluding that the plan of God is very simple. Mankind complicates the plan of God with his own schemes.

The Hebrew word for “fear” is the qal imperative of the verb *jare*, which means to respect God by being occupied with who and what Christ is. This word means to respect and to stand in awe. It means to have a love for someone that is based upon mentality and not on emotion, which is here today and gone tomorrow.

What does it mean to respect God? Respecting God is vital to our spiritual lives. Ecclesiastes 8:12 says, “Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who respect God, who respect Him openly.”

Respect for God is manifested by keeping His Word in your soul; Deuteronomy 8:6, “Therefore, you shall keep the commands of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to respect Him.”

Respect for God is manifested by serving Him; Deuteronomy 10:12, “What does the Lord your God require from you, but to respect the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Respect for God gives the believer confidence under pressure; Job 4:6, “Is not your respect of God your confidence?”

Respect for God is manifested by your gifts to Him; Psalm 76:11, “Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; Let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be respected.”

Respect for God is manifested by assembling together to hear His word in Deuteronomy 31:12, “Assemble the people, the men and the

women and children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and respect the Lord your God.”

Respect for God is manifested by sincerity [academic honesty] and truth; Joshua 24:14, “Now, therefore, respect the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth.”

First Samuel 12:24. “Only respect the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.”

Respect for the Lord means divine blessing for the believer; Psalm 34:9, “O respect the Lord, you His saints; For to those who respect Him, there is no want.” And in Psalm 115:13, “He will bless those who respect the Lord, The small together with the great.”

Respect for the Lord is manifested by humility. Proverbs 3:7 says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes; Respect the Lord and turn away from evil.”

Solomon’s second concluding principle is to keep God’s commands. The Hebrew word for “keep” is the *qal* imperative of *shamar*, and it means to guard something as very valuable. Therefore, this is not a command to be sinless, it means you guard the Word of God in your soul as the most valuable thing you possess, and you do that by your daily intake of doctrine.

None of us are excluded from these two principles. Solomon states this is what makes every man complete. The phrase “applies to” is not found in the original language. The last phrase should be translated to “this is the whole man or the complete human being.” The complete human being is a believer who has a relationship with God because he respects God, is in awe of God, and guards and values His commands. As with everything, this lifestyle depends on the volition of the believer. Will he respect God and keep His commands, or not? The choice is his.

It is for this reason that Solomon writes his last verse. **Ecclesiastes 12:14** says, “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

There’s not an action that has ever been or ever will be committed that God will not make a judgment for or against. When we stand before God after we exit this earth, God will bring every act to His evaluation. He doesn’t tell us the method He will use to do this. Perhaps He will replay our lives for Him and us to see, and then He will evaluate each act. A report from the Montreal Neurological

Institute said, “Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of movie film complete with sound track. The film library records your whole waking life from childhood on. You can live again those scenes from your past one at a time when a surgeon places a gentle electrical current and applies it to a certain point on the tip of the cortex of your brain.”

The report goes on to say, “As you relive the scenes from your past, you feel exactly the same emotions you did in the original experience.” Could it be that the human race will be confronted by this irrefutable record at the judgment of God? Whatever the method, it is clear that every act will be judged. As Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, “For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

Why does Solomon close like this? Because you don’t live your life ignoring God and get away with it! You don’t run wild with the things of God, and then have God look the other way. There is accountability. Ananias and Sapphira were under the dispensation of grace, the church age, and God killed them for what they did (Acts 5:1-11). You and your God will be face to face with one another and He will evaluate your time on earth. The only way to get ready for that moment is to respect God and keep His doctrines. As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:1, remember your Creator now. Jesus Christ is the one that can give you life and that is life more abundantly. He’s the One who has a marvelous way of washing away your sins and giving you a whole new beginning. The judgment of God is not for sin, and that should give us great comfort. The Hebrew word for “act” is *ma`aseh*, which means an action, a work, or a labor. This word does not refer to sins. Solomon used this word twenty times in this book and each time it refers to works, not sins! The Hebrew word for *sin* or *sins* is *chata*. “Transgressions” is the Hebrew word *pasha*, and *`avon* is the word for iniquities. All sins have already been judged two thousand years ago on the cross, and God will never ever bring them up again. If He did, He would not be just because He would be judging a sin twice. Hebrews 10:17 reiterates this point, “And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” And again in Hebrews 8:12, “For I will be merciful to their iniquities, And I will remember their sins no more.”

Many believers walk around in fear because they are taught that when they stand before God, every overt sin, sin of the tongue and

mental attitude sin, is going to be brought before God and judged. Bible doctrine says that statement is blasphemy. The word “act” refers to the deeds and the works that we’ve done while on earth whether they are visible or hidden. The production of divine good is often hidden and out of the view of others. It may be something you think while under pressure, the avoidance of arrogance, or thinking with courage when faced with disaster. Many things are hidden from others, but nothing is hidden from God. Everything you do as unto the Lord, the Lord takes note of it and the Lord decorates or rewards you for it. Whether others see it or not is not the issue. The phrase “whether it is good or evil” refers to whether it is divine good or human good. The Hebrew word for “good” is *towb*, referring to the production of divine good as per John 4:24, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The Hebrew word for “evil” is the noun *ra*, which refers to human good or the things we produce without the filling of the Spirit or motivation from Bible doctrine. Human good is the good we produce from the energy of the flesh. It is rightly called evil and is never acceptable to God. Isaiah 64:6 states, “All our righteous deeds are like menstrual rags” (corrected translation).

If you have human good, it will be brought to light before God. It will be burned before you enter into the eternal state with your resurrection body. For this reason it is called wood, hay, and straw in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15.

So the results of living for God, in time, have phenomenal repercussions in eternity. The amazing thing about it all is that you can enjoy life to the maximum with the happiness of God, and then be rewarded in eternity for doing just that. That’s something that only God can do. But for this to be a certain future for the believer, he must act decisively on behalf of God now. If he is doing so already, then he must continue to do so. The last chapter of Solomon’s amazing journal is a warning to every believer not to do what Solomon did. Happiness is not found anywhere else but in God. Remember Him, respect Him, and guard His commands, and you will be a complete and mature spiritual man.

Deuteronomy 32:4 *“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.”*

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The Word of God is meant to be taught according to *isagogics* (historical background), *categories* of doctrine (comparing scripture with scripture), and *exegesis* (the study of the original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

Isaiah 28:10 (KJV) *For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.*

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Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*