

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Poetry

January 5: Job 1-2 (Kevin Crittenden)



JOB STUDY

Week 1

Poetry reading for 1/5/17

Job 1 & 2

Good Morning, Everyone and welcome to this reading of the book of Job.

Family relationships were important during the time of Job – they identified you and gave you a place in society. So allow me to introduce myself. My name is Kevin Crittenden, of the tribe of Gentiles, a member of the San Jose COC at 7th and Mission. You may know my wife, Kathleen nee Munger, sister of Janice Shelton, daughter of LeRoy and Dorothy Munger. I've always lived in California; on my map, anything east of Nevada is marked "Here there be dragons."

I've come late into the Vineyard, becoming baptized on Father's Day this past year. That day is meaningful for me as I was able finally to replace the earthly father who abandoned me with the Love of the Heavenly Father who through His Mercy allows even me to share in His Inheritance.

Now to the matter at hand:

We'll start out the Poetry study with the book of Job, a book written to explore the relationship between God and human suffering. As human beings, created by God, we desperately want to believe that our world, also created by God, is a place of moral order and justice. And yet, we see a disconnect, an unsettling (dare I say?) disturbance in the force. Good people, Godly people, experience tragedies in their lives while bad people often flourish. Why?

In Psalm 1 (thanks to Steven Wright for sharing this Psalm with us) we read that whatever endeavor the righteous pursue will prosper whereas the way of the wicked leads to destruction. This often seems contrary to our everyday experiences, right?

We've all seen instances of tragedies, either in the lives of someone we know or in our own lives. When the tragedy is personal, it becomes less of an intellectual matter to think about than if the tragedy involves some stranger that we read about in the newspaper.

So I'll use a personal situation as an example. You can remember your own example. Three years ago, around Thanksgiving, my then 2-year old granddaughter, Katelyn, (photo below) was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness called Aplastic Anemia. Her bone marrow couldn't produce enough blood and platelets so she became dependent on transfusions. She spent a long time in the hospital. She's in remission now and doing well, praise the Lord!

As humans wanting to make sense of our world to preserve a sense of justice and moral order, we could ask:

---Was this sickness a punishment sent by God to chastise Katelyn's parents for something they did or neglected to do?

---Or was this illness a part of God's overall plan, seen like the ravelly bits of a tapestry that we now only glimpse from the back side and if we could but see the beautiful front of the tapestry, it would all make sense?

---If so, how could this horrible experience for an innocent 2-year old be part of any good plan? Was there no other way for an omniscient and omnipotent being to accomplish His will?

---Is God involved in all such situations or does He allow chance to play a part in His Creation?

--- Does Satan act independently of God to inflict this kind of torment?

---Where was God?

These are the type of questions that people ask when confronted by suffering. Let's keep them in mind as we read through Job.

Like all good stories, the book of Job, creates a setting, introduces us to the characters, sets up the situation, and takes us through the resolution. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the main characters, the setting and sets up the conflict. Chapter 42 contains the denouement. The interior part of Job contains the agonistic and complicated theological and philosophical arguments that grapple with man's desire to make sense of his world.

Controversy: There is thought that Chapters 1, 2 and 42 were an earlier work and that the "interior" of Job, the Poem of Job, was a later, more complicated work. Thus there would have been multiple authors.

Who wrote Job? The author is anonymous, although Rabbinic tradition ascribes it to Moses. Some believe it was Job himself, or Elihu, or Solomon. The author was certainly an Israelite, thoroughly immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures. He was quite knowledgeable and experienced, as shown by his writings on the constellations, meteorology, mining operations, boats, and plants.

When was this book written? It is generally agreed that the book was written between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE with the 6th century BCE as the most likely date, as the author uses a lot of vocabulary with meanings known in later Hebrew.

Where does it take place?

Job 1:1-3 There was a man in the land of Uz (pronounced "ootz") whose name was Job. . . so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

The story of Job is set outside Israel to the east and south (Uz is related to Edom which may be the setting of the book)

Thoughts for Job 1 and 2:

Job 1:5 Job would offer sacrifices on his children's behalf in case they had sinned. Do you see a foreshadowing of Christ sacrificing Himself on our behalf?

Job 1:6 – Who are the "sons of God?"

Why does God enter into what seems like a wager with Satan and allow Job to be tested? This testing of righteous people is echoed in Gen 22:2 Then God said, "Take your son, your

only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

We also see the theme of testing people of integrity elsewhere, such as Joseph fleeing Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39) and Daniel refusing to eat forbidden food (Dan 1).

Note the character of Satan. This Satan seems to work for God and is subject to God’s control. Contrast this description to the description of Satan in 1 Pet 5:8, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Satan as described by Peter is not looking for (or needing?) God’s approval.

Do you think that Satan and God still have such “conversations” and that God “allows” Satan to test us? And that the more “righteous” we are, the more we become Satan’s target?

How do we reconcile this “testing” with James 1:13 - “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”

When we are tempted, are we not also being tested?

What about Job’s children? Weren’t they innocent? Why were they “expendable” in this testing of Job?

Consider the contrast between Job’s reaction to actual misfortune, Job 1:21, and the reaction of the rich person when anticipating the loss of his wealth in Luke 18:22-23. What might be our reaction to such loss?

The loss of Job’s possessions didn’t do it, so Satan tries again. This time, the suffering becomes corporeal. It brings to mind Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.”

Job 2:9 – Why does Job’s wife offer this advice: “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” She seems to think that if something like this tragedy could happen to a good man like Job, what was the point of being so pious all those years. Why doesn’t she support him? Is she being used by Satan? What possible good could come from her advice? Is death better than suffering? This question has relevance today as courts decide the legality of euthanasia. And I’m sure that this question weighs on the minds of those considering suicide.

Job 2:10 – Job ascribes his suffering as coming from God rather than Satan. Was Job aware of Satan or know that Satan was under God’s control? Do we think that Satan, today, is acting under God’s control?

Job 2:11-13 – Three of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, come to offer condolences. The Jewish ritual of sitting Shiva where the mourners wear torn clothing and sit for seven days low to the ground is very like what Job's friends did.

The first two chapters of Job seem to describe a God who does not hesitate to inflict suffering on His most devoted follower. Do His actions in these chapters seem to violate your innate sense of right and wrong? Is it allowable to question God?

Comment:

Nancy Didion:

Thank you for your personal introduction and the thorough, thought-provoking intro to Job!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Thanks, Kevin! Plenty of food for thought, approaching this remarkable epic. Pain, suffering, blame, guilt, presumption, justice, karma, meaning and value, God's might and mercy, all are issues brought into discussion in Job! On the question(s) regarding God and Satan in Job 1-2, I would suggest that the text does picture God as having power Satan cannot thwart but not God controlling Satan. Satan asset Scott God has a hedge of protection around Job, staying Satan's hand. God allows Satan to act against Job, within limits. This isn't God controlling Satan, who roams the earth at will, but clearly Satan is not equal to God, cannot thwart God. What Satan is doing here in Job is the backdrop of Peter's observation that he goes around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. I have an opinion... That God really did want Satan to consider Job, to think about him, and how with all his frailty he will not turn away from God when he suffers. Satan expected Job to react as he himself would react, and curse God. Peter wrote that God wants all to come to repentance. Might he not have longed for Satan himself to consider and then reconsider? Clearly even angels have unanswered questions, and that would include Satan.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

One lesson from Job is this: All that we have is our soul. PRAISE GOD you submitted yours to Him, Kevin Crittenden. Thank you for blessing us with a weekly study in poetry. Jesus states, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Through refining the Lord made Job something better.

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

The text states that when "the sons of God" presented themselves before God that Satan came with them... was he not considered a son of God too?

Comment:

Christina McClung:

Thank you

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:

Really appreciate your thoughts Kevin. I to appreciate the personal information. I see you on fb and now I can make some connections because I do know Janice Shelton. Praise God that you are a worker for the Lord and we are benefiting from it.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

So glad you don't mind me being a "name-dropper." :-) And thank you!

Comment:

Doug Twaddell:

Don't forget that in Luke 24:31, Jesus tells Peter, "Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat." This has always reminded me of Job. Peter was about to be tempted (the three denials) and Jesus tells him that Satan is behind it with God's allowance. Jesus also says He has prayed for him. Jesus was encouraging and rooting for Peter to prevail during this trial. Perhaps this is the process God refers to when He assures us He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle. Satan tempts us trying to get us to do wrong. God, however, tests us to see if we will do the right thing. God is like a teacher that prepares their student for a test desiring them to pass successfully, not fail. If, and when, we do fail, God does not celebrate our weakness. Instead, He is faithful to allow repentance and offer forgiveness to start preparing us for further testing.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Job 1:6 – Who are the “sons of God?”

First, I will here re-iterate sister Joanne’s question . . .

Joanne Caffie The text states that when "the sons of God" presented themselves before God that Satan came with them... was he not considered a son of God too?

Do you think that Satan and God still have such “conversations” and that God “allows” Satan to test us? And that the more “righteous” we are, the more we become Satan’s target?

Next, I will insert here a pertinent comment from Brother Charles in yesterday’s thread . . .

The curse was on the tempter, not upon snakes. While we see an analogy in the form of the snake, snakes don't "eat dust." Satan, on the other hand, was cast down. When the Lord asked Satan in Job 1-2 where he had been, the answer was "roaming throughout the earth... going back and forth on the earth." His wings had been clipped, in a manner of speaking, limits imposed. He became "the god of this world." The seed of the woman crushing the serpent's head in Gen 3:15 is certainly a prophecy of Jesus, born of woman, defeating Satan through death (Heb. 2:14-15). I'm oversimplifying here for brevity, but hopefully it makes sense.

Then here, I insert some thoughts . . .

In reference, especially to Charles’ words “. . .his wings had been clipped . . . he became ‘the god of this world.’” above, I will add this:

1.) 2 Corinthians 4:4

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (Satan is now identified as “The god of this world.”)

2.) (Revelation 12: 7 – 10, 12) references a “war in heaven”

Note:

1. (Isaiah 14:7 -14; Ezekiel 28:12 – 19) give us some light on this; addressing: Satan’s prideful aspirations, and indicate that the inducement of man to sin in the garden, was the pivotal point in this war, and precipitated Satan’s “demotion”

a. Key phrases in this passage to symbolically identify Satan would be: “Lucifer” or, “day Star” / “Son of Dawn” (Isaiah 14:12), “Guardian Cherub” and, “Stones of fire” (Ezekiel 28:14, 16) – and yes, this would also connect with “Sons of God” in: (Job 1:6; 2:1 etc.,)

b. I would connect, all of the above with (Revelation 12:1 -9)

c. I would also note that he is being called “the accuser of the brethren” in the revelation passage, which is what he is doing before God the father in the case of Job.

d.

Next, consider: Luke 10:18

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

2. Jesus puts this in the past tense.

a. Speaking of this event as having already happened prior to the context of the present; which context, he was addressing with his disciples at the time in which he was speaking to them.

b. I would place then this even that occurred as pertaining to all of the above that I have just referenced; AND, including the days of Job!

i. Back to (Revelation 12) – [which is a multi-faceted/all-time continuum: look at the entirety of the history of the universe at a glance!] and notice now (vv.10 – 12).

1. A change occurs! Satan is no longer able to go "to and fro"

a. He can no longer access heaven to come before God and accuse us like he did Job.

b. What he CAN do still, is try to "Knock us down" with his "Tail" (Rev. 12:4) (by inducing us to sin and hoping we will not repent and therefore we may forfeit or inheritance in heaven)

c. "The blood of the Lamb" (v. 11) has overcome Satan.

d. But just like a snake, the head of which has been crushed, Satan is going to "Thrash about with great wrathful, last "Nerve impulses" if you will, because he knows now, that his end (spoken of in Revelation 20:11 – 14), is sealed, and therefore he must use every bit of the "Short time" (12:12) that remains.

i. The moment that our King Jesus set foot out of the tomb, this thing was done! The serpents head was crushed! (Genesis 3:15)

ii. Satan, is done!

iii. Finished!

iv. Defeated!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you all for your comments! Normally I would provide you with the correct answers for all the questions that have been raised but we're watching Katelyn for awhile and I'm sure you'll understand that grandchildren take precedence. :-)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

This is from my phone just now. Just finished the Bible study that I lead at an assisted living place on the West side of town called "Legend " so, I will post the intro to my post above which somehow got left out, when I get back home. I actually used the same notes as above, for my outline today, since it fit perfectly into our current study (a couple of questions that were raised there last week.)

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Phones are getting too smart when they can make FB posts!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

ok . . .home now, did a little trek around the yard to see if Mr. Fox has been about, but, not yet! He is probably hunkered down in his den waiting for something above 15 degrees F. Anyway, what now appears below, is what should have been the lead in to my post in response to yours Kevin Crittenden. I must give credit where credit is due as well as say "Thank You" brother! Brother Kevin, you pose several questions! Very good questions! I copied and pasted your

questions into a document, with the thought that I would address each; I now realize however, that this endeavor might take me several years lol! So, I will limit my response here to only a couple of the related points that you raise. . . .

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Kevin, I've already been extremely blessed by the 7 Studies simply by becoming your FB friend!!! Your conviction and way with words is outstanding and I am so grateful to have gained you as a brother. Here are a few of my thoughts on Job. I'll try to space them out throughout the book :) "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 I don't want to get ahead of the story but I think there is no doubt that Job became a better servant because of what God allowed him to go through. If you agree with that, then it should be difficult to question God in what he allowed. In the scriptures God is referred to as a "consuming" fire as well as a "refining" fire. He is NOT two kinds of fire...He is only one. Whether his fire is "consuming" or "refining" depends on the type of vessel that is put into it. If you are a servant made mostly of gold, the fire will refine you, burn off the dross and leave you more pure and a better servant of God. If you are not a servant at all but made of paper or straw you will be consumed. We can't blame the fire. We have to look at ourselves. I talked with Tom Woody about this before he re-congregated with the church on the other side because although I appreciated Tom's work in the Lord before his cancer I feel he was turned into a much better servant as he went through the fire. The Lord's fire refined him rather than consumed him because of Tom's love for the Lord. I know this because Tom talked about one of his favorite verses in Job. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him!" 13:15

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Marc! People have told me that I have a gift for writing and ought to pursue that. But those were my Physics teachers. My English teachers made much of my abilities in math and science. But that's a horse of a different feather.

I suspect you and I have been through fire - and will face more refining in the time we have remaining to us. That is to the good. It will make us better servants of the Lord. Maybe someday (if my mettle continues to be tested) I'll even be mature!

The Babylonian captivity was a refining fire which purified the remnant in the crucible of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar. As I understand it, God wanted to "mature" His people to get them ready for the New Covenant. Removing the physical Temple proved an important step in that process - the necessity of relocating the Temple from an exterior building to an interior place in one's heart where God could dwell.

As for Job becoming a better servant, unfortunately we have no record of any shortcomings before his trials began.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

The refining brought to light for Job what his shortcomings were and the moment he repented everything was restored and even doubled. Perhaps even more impressive than Job's faith in God was God's faith in Job that the fire would refine him rather than consume him.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

p.s. You should've listened to your Physics teachers...I hear they are pretty smart people. :)

Comment:

Charles Fry:

In the course of the dialogues in Job we catch glimpses of his strengths and weaknesses. We'll see him as not only one who had been religiously diligent, in the first two chapters, but the practice of true religion in good works, hospitality, generosity, helping the needy, those kinds of things, and acknowledging he had some wayward behavior in his youth, worked at curtailing lust, and was guilty of "common" sins. He insisted, and rightly so, that he hadn't suddenly or secretly done some terribly wrong to merit his losses, his grief, his suffering. He acknowledged that, like his friends and his community, he thought that was how God's justice worked in this world, good people got good stuff, and bad people got bad stuff. He learned, and perhaps realized he'd always known, that didn't fit real world observations. And so, at the end of the book, his awareness of God in awesomeness and transcendent wisdom and power provoked an end to common misconceptions about God, and about mankind in relation/comparison to God that he had shared with his peers. Like Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Job saw himself differently, more realistically, and God differently, more magnificent, as a result of his experiences and God's self revelation.

In context of Job's experiences, and yes, Marc, of Tom Woody, I think of

2 Cor 3:17-18

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

NKJV

and

Isa 61:3

3 To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

NKJV

Beauty for ashes. The first two verses of Isaiah 61 is what Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth, Luke 4, and said he was fulfilling.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you all for your comments! This is such a fine example of mutual edification at its best. Thank you so much, Marc, for setting up this vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge from many separate locations.

Comment:

Wendy Range:

Any comments on 1:16 regarding the servant's perception of "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep?" Did God actually burn up Job's sheep, or did Satan have the power to do that, and the servant just assumed it was God-sent? I tend to think the latter. In Chapter 2, Satan strikes Job with boils. The conversations between God and Satan and the verses mentioned earlier in this discussion are in agreement that God is a protector against evil

according to His wisdom, not the inflictor or temptor. It makes me think of Jonah and the gourd that provided shade; the heat was always there, but only when God withdrew the protective shade did Jonah blame God for the heat. Job was wise to worship God for giving him good "gourds", even after they were violently removed from his life.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

I agree with you, Wendy, that Satan was given the power to destroy Job's possessions. God told Satan not to lay a hand on Job himself. At this time. I don't know how familiar the servant was with the concept of Satan. Even today, when disaster strikes, (Hurricane Katrina), some will say it is because God is punishing (New Orleans) for having too many (pagans, homosexuals, whatever). They don't say it is Satan acting to carry out God's Will. So . . . is God involved? Is this Satan's doing? Is this just a normal and expected occurrence that sometimes happen because of the natural laws set in place to govern our world?

Replies:

Wendy Range:

Thanks, Kevin! Yes, assuming any *certainty* for a level of God's involvement or intent regarding any earthly calamity is not our place. See Job. :) Natural laws so often are allowed to run their course. All of the good in our lives we can attribute to God's mercy and protection, just as Job did.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

A couple more comments on 1:16.

First, the language: "the fire of God". This may not be an attribution of who sent the fire, but a superlative regarding the magnitude. of the conflagration, something like "a mighty fire." For example, Psalm 80:10 mentions "the cedars of God" which several versions render "mighty cedars" or some equivalent rendering, rather than the literal phrase.

Second, Exodus 9:23 describes the Lord sending "thunder and hail and fire" on Egypt.

Interpreters suspect that the fire in both Job 1:16 and Exodus 9:23 refers to a lightning storm, a reasonable possibility, especially considering Psalm 78:48.

Third, when "the Lord sent" fire (or lightning) in Exodus 9:23, this action, along with the other plagues, is attributed to "destroying angels" (KJV "evil angels") unleashed by God in Psalm 78:49. It is at least consistent and reasonable to suppose that Satan unleashed could bring down the mighty fire or lightning seen by the messenger.

Fourth, a couple of comments in the dialogues of Job would suggest that Job and his friends were at least aware of the concept of fallen angels, as in Job 4:18, 5:15, 25:5 for example. With all that we have in scripture, we still have a hard time sorting out the mechanisms of suffering and mischief, and whether there is intended meaning in the events, as did the folks of Jesus' generation, Luke 13:1-5.

Replies:

Wendy Range:

Thanks, I hadn't thought of most of that. I had wondered about the fire of God being a figure of speech, and I appreciate the other possible references.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

I love my new church family!

January 12: Job 3-4 (Kevin Crittenden)

Poetry reading for 1/12/17 Job 3 & 4

Having set the stage and gathered the characters, the story of Job now jettisons prose for sophisticated poetry, jumps off the high-dive and plunges directly into the pool of Theology.

It starts peaceably enough.

The three friends who have come to comfort Job are politely silent.

Finally, Job, in the midst of his incredible physical and emotional suffering, begins his lament and begins by cursing the day he was born. This seems a far different attitude from Job's earlier statement when he humbly answered his wife "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"

Job isn't necessarily talking TO his friends but perhaps is just giving voice to his torment.

Note the similarity of the beginning of his speech in Job 3 to Jeremiah 20:14-18 when Jeremiah had been beaten and put in the stocks by Pashhur the priest. Being a prophet could be (was) a difficult ordeal.:

14 Cursed be the day I was born!
 May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!
15 Cursed be the man who brought my father the news,
 who made him very glad, saying,
 "A child is born to you—a son!"
16 May that man be like the towns
 the Lord overthrew without pity.
 May he hear wailing in the morning,
 a battle cry at noon.
17 For he did not kill me in the womb,
 with my mother as my grave,
 her womb enlarged forever.
18 Why did I ever come out of the womb
 to see trouble and sorrow
 and to end my days in shame?

Perhaps the writer of Job was familiar with the book of Jeremiah.

Job pictures death as freedom from the toils of life, a place of rest for all, the great as well as the small, princes as well as paupers. Death awaits us all after a life of struggle and toil, why not sooner than later?

Job at this point is not asking God any questions; he is just venting his profound grief and sorrow. He wishes he were dead, that the accumulation of all his wealth, only to have it whisked away leaving him in torment, was not worth all this misery.
Ecc 1:3 "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?"

At this juncture, all four of the characters present are struggling to maintain the belief expressed in Psalm 1, that the righteous prosper while the wicked perish. There are three assertions that this group is struggling to maintain:

- 1 – God is Omnipotent – all-powerful
- 2 – God is Omnibenevolent - completely good
- 3 – Job is a righteous man

Since they didn't consider it possible for a completely good God (assertion 2) to let an innocent man like Job suffer if He could prevent it (assertion 1), then something has to give. The obvious assertion to challenge is number 3 – that Job is a righteous man.

I'm sure you are all familiar with The Serenity Prayer (I've included it below). I want to draw your attention to the lines:

“Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life”

Even in this prayer, the idea is that IF you do His Will, you will be reasonably happy in THIS life as well as the next. The implication is that if you are unhappy, then you've strayed from doing His Will. Do we have this same expectation for our lives?

One thing that Job does not do is say, like Cain in Gen 4:13, “My punishment is more than I can bear.” Does Job think he is being punished by God? What else could it be? And if he is being punished, Why?

Job 3:14 might refer to the pyramids of Egypt.

Job 4 – Eliphaz begins to lay out his argument against assertion 3. He starts by praising Job for the good things he has done, how he has counseled others in their grief and then (Job 4:5-9) says, Turn it around and pretend you are the one who needs counseling. What would you say to yourself?

Eliphaz goes on to relate a dream that he had where an angel (Job 4:15) tells him that even angels make errors (Job 4:18) so how much more will mortal man err? (Job 4:19) And when they do, they will be punished.

Note how the statement “... and his angels he charges with error” anticipates 2 Peter 4 “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;”

Eliphaz asks “Can mortal man (Job, you, me) be in the right before God?” (Job 4:17)

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;

So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.

Amen.

(prayer attributed to Reinhold Neibuhr, 1892-1971)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Saved the reading for this morning so I will reply now. Thank you very much, brother Kevin Crittenden! For your thoughts on Job 3 and 4! You bring out a very important part of what should be part of our take on Job; the "venting not asking" thing that Job was doing. People miss this too easily. I wonder if Job's friends gasped and shuddered as they heard? Oh, the assumptions we make eh? Oh, the arrogance! Job's expression of his sorrow and grief is Like we find David doing also at times when he expresses grief or other emotions. "Imprecatory" is the word brother Charles Fry used yesterday I believe! Let us not be so willing to limit God that we are unwilling to be honest with him, knowing that he is THE one that we should go to. He can take it. He can see it for what it is. People cannot, Job's friends proved that. If we are the human ears listening, let us seek God's interpretation and response.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

As has been noted, we don't know when Job was written, or who wrote Job. The setting of the events seems to be in the days of the patriarchs, from references to places, names, the manner of attributing wealth, Job's lifespan, and a few other clues, but that's inference, not assertion. We can be sure that Job was famously remembered in the days of Ezekiel (Jeremiah's contemporary) since he is mentioned as a notable man of faith (along with Noah and Danel or Daniel) in Ezekiel 14:14, 20. Whenever he lived, Job's predicament of losing family, wealth, and health sure did bring up serious questions about a common world view, still around, that people get what they deserve in this life. The impact of tragedy and sickness was cumulative, harder to take the longer it lasted, and all the more exasperating since it didn't fit the common idea that Job must have brought it on himself. The likeness to Jeremiah's plaint is very apropos. The circumstances that brought about their suffering were quite different, but the loneliness and frustration were much the same.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

The friends were doing such a good job and then 4:2 happened.... "but who can withhold himself from speaking?"

The answer... Isa 53:7

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth"

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

OK, I have to wonder if Job's wife was bringing out coffee and plates of sandwiches all this time.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Maybe she had decided it was a good time to go and visit her mother. Job was having some halitosis and body odor problems, along with everything else.

Job 19:17 My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am loathsome to my own brothers.

NASU

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

So in addition to all his other problems, Job's wife was going to bring back his mother-in-law. Oy vey!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Job's wife wasn't very supportive to her husband. (Job 2:9 His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!") I wonder if this was part of Satan's plan?

Replies:

Steven Wright:

She was overcome by the human perspective on suffering.

Butch O'Neal:

Thanks, Steve. Certainly she loved her husband. His plight may have been more than she could bear!?

January 19: Job 5-6 (Kevin Crittenden)

JOB STUDY

Week 3

Poetry reading for 1/19/17

Job 5 & 6

Job has voiced his extreme grief and torment while his three friends listen. When Job is finished, the Poet Laureate of Teman, Eliphaz, begins trying to comfort Job.

Teman is a region of Edom (Jer 49:7). The name Eliphaz means "my God is strength." Esau's firstborn son is named Eliphaz (Gen 36:15)

In Job 5:1 "Who will answer you?" refers to man, "holy ones" are those in heaven, the "sons of God" in Job 1 and 2. Eliphaz emphasizes that there is no entity anywhere, on Heaven or earth, for Job to appeal to except God (Job 5:8)

Job 5:2, 3 "Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple" is a proverb – Eliphaz, bless his heart, is intimating that Job is a fool.

Job 5:6 "For hardship does not spring from the soil . . ." Eliphaz makes the point that our troubles don't just randomly happen. Human beings like causes for things. For some people, this takes the form of superstition. If I suddenly get sick, it's because a black cat crossed my path. If I wear my lucky sweater, then the 49ers will win a game. (maybe)

Job 5:7 "Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" Another proverb that Eliphaz uses to make the point that, as mortals, we are bound to err.

Butch pointed this out in Gen 6:5 “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”

What is Eliphaz saying? He likens Job’s case to a man held in high esteem; someone who has done good things but has done something unethical. This man is held accountable for his actions, disappointment is expressed but his good deeds are remembered. Think of many political leaders – many wonderful accomplishments during their term of office but unable (unwilling) to remain faithful to their wives.

Continuing Eliphaz’ example, God is holding this upright man responsible for his transgression (whatever it was) but, remembering his good deeds, will bless him in the end with the blessings of many children, abundant wealth and a full vigor in his ripe old age. Job 5:24-26.

Eliphaz concludes by emphasizing that Job should apply his example of this good but wayward man to himself. Job 5:27

Accept the correction of God, Job, and consider yourself blessed. Job 5:17

Eliphaz is saying “Look, Job, we all make mistakes and we all pay the price for those mistakes. You are a good guy, better than most of us, so God will favor you again once you have paid your debt.”

Now imagine Job, stricken and prostrate amid the ruins of his life, hearing from his friend how God will bless him with a rich replacement life in the end. So buck up, Job, and take it like a man.

Does Eliphaz really think that having new children will erase Job’s memory of his original children? That he could ever forget his 7 sons and three daughters?

In Job 6, Job finally is able to vouchsafe a reply. But instead of saying, “Thanks, guys, what you say makes sense. I really needed to hear that” he says, to their surprise, “You guys disappoint me! You’re like a wadi, filled with water during the rainy season but dry as a bone in the summer when water is most needed. True friends would support me in my time of need. Jerks!”

Job 6:6-7 Job is referring to Eliphaz’ argument. “I refuse to touch it; such food makes me ill.”

Job 6:8-10 Job, shell-shocked in misery, wishes for God to take his life. If that happened, Job would be able to take consolation in that he did not DENY the words of the Holy One. It should be mentioned that Job 6:10 has an alternate translation: “I did not SUPPRESS my words against the Holy One.” Job is angry with God and speaks forthrightly. Job makes the point that God prefers angry but honest words to flattery.

Is it acceptable for a religious person to question God or be angry at Him? If you do, can you still say that you are religious? Does God prefer the expression of valid emotions to unfelt piety? Can you truly love God if you feel compelled to censor your feelings?

Job 6:24 – Job challenges Eliphaz to point out his mistake. If he can, Job promises to keep quiet.

Job 6:28 “But now be so kind as to look at me.” Eliphaz was speaking to Job without looking at him, a mark of respect in ancient Near Eastern culture.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Brother Kevin Crittenden, you certainly put it down well! Thank you so very much! I especially appreciate your questions! That's the real bruh! God does not want vain religion. Too many people worship their religion instead of their God! Yes, The omnipotent God, who knows our heart already, wants to HEAR our heart! God gave us our emotions, God wants us to give our emotions to him, in order that he may purify them! The religious culture we have inherited, compels us to the censorship approach to our feelings. It was the unrighteous King Ahaz, who said, "Oh, I could never ask the Lord for a sign (even though the Lord said, 'ask') - that would be impertinent!" (ok I'm paraphrasing, but that was the gist of it!) How did the Lord respond? "Oh really now! You, who offer your babies to Molech, would PRETEND not to offend me! Well, guess what! I'm gonna give you a sign any way! " Show me a married couple that says, "Oh, we never argue!" And, I will show you a married couple that is either blind, and/or lying, or worse yet, they don't really love each other!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! I never had a real "bruh" before. What is it?

Steven Wright:

You be the real bruh, givin us the real bruh! :)

Kevin Crittenden:

Um, thanks. I think. :-)

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Serious stuff, but I did laugh more than once, at the dandy summaries. "Bless his heart." 😊

Thank you, KKevin Crittenden

Replies:

"Jerks!" :-D

Kevin Crittenden:

Hopefully a little humor once in awhile won't offend anyone's sensibilities that I'm not treating the subject with enough reverence.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin. I've enjoyed getting to know you these past 3 weeks and count it a great blessing to study the Word with you and Kathleen states away! :-) Lesson for me in this reading: mere presence can be a greater comfort than words of advice sometimes prove to be. Eliphaz sat wordless with Job through a whole week to show his sympathy and friendship. Yet when Eliphaz felt compelled to speak he wounds Job deeper and angers the Lord.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

In studying for this week's lesson in Job 7 & 8, I realized I had overlooked the one clear quotation from Job in the NT. It was found in Job 5:13 & quoted in I Corinthians 3:19

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Paul's ability to recall in detail the writings of the Law, Prophets and Wisdom literature to lend support to his epistles without the luxury of computers, Google and Bible software is astonishing! What a memory and what an ability to recall just the right verse. We see through this that the Holy Spirit was indeed busy ensuring Paul's edification, the edification of his audience and the edification of those throughout the ages since.

January 26: Job 7-8 (Kevin Crittenden)

JOB STUDY

Week 4

Poetry reading for 1/26/17

Job 7 & 8

In Job 7, Job has finished speaking to Eliphaz and resumes his soliloquy, with God listening from the wings.

Job 7:6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle . . . "

Job 7:9 ". . . so one who goes down to the grave does not return."

Part of Job's lament is: Life is too short and the grave is permanent.

You will notice that no mention is made of a life beyond death; any hope beyond the grave.

Sheol is the place where the dead go but it is neither Heaven nor Hell. People do not return to this life from Sheol. Dead is dead.

Job 7:17-21 "What is mankind that you make so much of them, . . . reads much like

Psalms 8:4 " what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

Psalms 8 explores the wonder and worth of man in light of God's marvelous Creation and expresses joy that God takes care of him whereas Job's complaint is that God is putting a lot of attention into insignificant mankind and testing them always to see whom He can punish. Job feels like God is stalking him.

Job 7:20 "If I have sinned, what have I done to you, you who see everything we do?" Job is feeling the injustice of his punishment, an injustice that could be removed if only God were to explain Himself. Job wants his day in court and to hear what he is being accused of. He questions God. Do we dare to question God? Do we have the right?

Job winds it up with a few more questions of God and then simply states that pretty soon he'll be dead and will no longer be a target for God's (unmerited) punishment.

Meanwhile, Job's friends are listening to all this and growing restive. All of them feel the need to defend God. After all, they have in mind Butch's early morning reminder of Deuteronomy 32:4 that says quite plainly: "He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!"

Job 8 – Now Bildad, no less a poet than Eliphaz, comes striding out of the dugout, spits his ‘baccy scornfully on the ground, steps confidently up to the plate and begins to hold forth. He has a different slant on the argument that Eliphaz used.

The meaning of the name, Bildad, is uncertain. He is a Shuhite and thus connected to Shuah, the son of Abraham and Keturah. (Gen 25:2) Bildad seems more impatient than Eliphaz and this leads some to conclude that Bildad is younger. However, from Job 15:10 “The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father” we get the idea that some of Job’s friends are older than he is and therefore wiser.

Job has called into question the belief that a good and loving God rewards good people and punishes evildoers. Job’s attitude is anathema to the three friends.

Eliphaz’ argument was “Job, you had your hand in the till, even if you don’t remember, and God is calling you out for it.”

Bildad is more direct with Job, taking him to task for questioning God and accusing him of perverting God’s justice. He begins to defend God who is still able to pay attention while busily engaged in running the Universe.

Job 8:4 “When your children sinned against him . . .”

Well, Ouch! Rather than place the blame squarely on Job as Eliphaz did, Bildad takes another tack, saying essentially that this isn’t all about Job and what he did or didn’t do; his children must have sinned and so THEY were punished. After all, Job had this possibility in mind when he offered sacrifices on their behalf. And as far as the other terrible misfortunes, the Sabeans attacked because that’s the kind of animals they are. They attack others. The Chaldeans as well. Nasty folks whose nature is to hurt innocent people.

Job 8:8-10 “Ask the former generation and find out what their ancestors learned . . .”

Bildad is essentially saying, “Look here, Job. You think you’re the brightest star in MENSA? Look at all the sages that came before you! And those wisest of men believed in a righteous God. So should you! Get with the program!”

Job 8:20 “Surely God does not reject one who is blameless. . .” Here Bildad echoes the argument advanced by Eliphaz.

Bildad, evidently reading from the Prosperity Gospel, concludes by saying “Job, if, and this is a big if, you are pure and upright (Job 8:6) then God will restore you to your former good life with a happy, fairy-tale ending. (Job 8:21)”

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I really like how you put the conversation into modern-speak. It helps me to have a view of this story that makes more sense to me. Thank you.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome! Although I could simplify it as I mentioned before:

Job: Woe is me! My life is miserable and so are you.

Friends: Shut up!

Job: You shut up!

God: (sigh)

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Commenting on tomorrow's reading tonight feels like cheating, but I may not have time for it tomorrow anyway.

That shot that Bildad took at Job's dead children was a really low blow.

I appreciate the glimpses Job gives of his physical misery along the way, as in 7:4-5.

Job's view of death and afterlife (Sheol) are much like that of King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) and King Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:9, 18). Quite different from Paul's declaration that it is better to die and be with the Lord (Philippians 1:21-24), but Paul knew Jesus had overcome death and given life to those who believe in him. I'm glad to live on this side of the cross for several reasons, including this expectation!

Nevertheless, I don't read Job's never to return sentiment as a hopeless expectation of eternity in Sheol. Like Solomon or Hezekiah he did not look forward to waiting unproductive as a disembodied soul in Sheol, and he definitely did not expect to return to life in this world after he died, but we will be seeing Job make some pretty strong expressions of hope and even confidence in eventually standing before God for judgment and seeing the Redeemer with his own eyes.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

It may be that Job did not develop that confidence until later. He is still spiraling downward in his misery. There is also the story in 1 Sam 28 when Saul visits the Witch of Endor to consult Samuel, who was in Sheol. Did the witch really see Samuel or was she making it up like modern day "fortunetellers" are thought to do, by me anyway.

Saul: What do you see?

Witch: I see a ghostly figure coming up out of the Earth

Saul: What does he look like? (Assumes it's a man)

Witch: An old man wearing a robe.

Saul makes the leap that this is Samuel.

Of course, Dead Samuel makes a lengthy pronouncement that the witch probably could not have fabricated.

This story makes me think that individuality is not lost in Sheol and that possibly it is just a holding area.

Steven Wright:

I believe the LORD made an exception in this case, that is why the woman was so terrified! She knew this could not normally happen. She had a "familiar Spirit" that is, she was in contact with one of Satan's minions, who fed her information which enabled her to deceive people. This was altogether different than that, and she was frightened! But this does not negate the "holding area" concept.

Charles Fry:

It does seem, Kevin Crittenden, that Job sort of builds up a head of steam as he goes along, gets more assertive. Perhaps when he expresses some of those hopes and expectations he is describing things that were more his private belief than a public consensus, as he is emboldened by some fatalism about his circumstances and his audience.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Two things from (7:9), as Charles Fry said, it gives us perspective on Job's perspective of the subject. Also, as you intimated in your comments Kevin Crittenden, people who die and are buried, do not come back here from there, not in some semi-decayed bodlily form (Zombie), nor in any visage, spirit, "ghost" or other form. And about that "short guy" definately not a chum, But a chump! His words strike me as very proprietary and yet, just plain mean!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Yeah, watching him stride must have been interesting.

Joanne Caffie:

But whar about Abraham & Elijah?

Charles Fry:

Joanne Caffie, do you mean Abraham as in "God is not the God of the dead but of the living" in Matthew 22:32 when Jesus answered the Sadducees? Showing that 400 years after Abraham's time, God was/is still his God? That therefore Abraham still existed? Abraham is even pictured as the host at a welcoming feast in the abode of the dead (Sheol or Hades) among the righteous in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

Or the remarkable appearance of Elijah and Moses on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured in Matthew 17:1-13? That was certainly an exceptional event. Both of those men had departed this world in unusual circumstances, Moses by death, but his body buried by God, Elijah by being taken up bodily in a whirlwind, and nobody could find him or his body afterward. Their appearance talking to Jesus was contrary to the normal experience of the dead, who have no further involvement in this world, but this was a testimonial to Jesus and to his select disciples, an encouragement as he turned his steps toward Jerusalem for the battle of the ages.

Isa 8:19 19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?

NIV

Joanne Caffie:

I was speaking of yhe latter.

You hear people from the Bayou in LA saying all the time that these spirits are real.

Thanks for the clarification.

Steven Wright:

Ah!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Kevin! Job does not believe he is sinless, yet he does not feel the sins he has committed deserves the suffering he's enduring. In his misery he complains. Yet he does not abandon God or curse him as Satan said he would (1:1, 2:5) Job may not have a lot of patience right now but he does persevere. (James 5:11)

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Job does not want to question God's essential goodness nor His sense of judgement. He desperately wants to know HOW he has sinned and must ask the One who knows. We, as human beings, feel comfortable and secure in a world that has cause and effect as opposed to random chaos. Job is feeling the effects; now he wants to understand the cause. How often have you heard, when something terrible has happened, people crying out "Why? Why has this happened? Why now? Why me?"

February 2: Job 9-10 (Kevin Crittenden)

JOB STUDY

Week 5

Poetry reading for 2/02/17

Job 9 & 10

I'm hoping that all my Gentle Readers (both of you) will remember that earlier in our study (page 6), we had our three assertions:

- 1 – God is Omnipotent – all-powerful
- 2 – God is Omnibenevolent - completely good
- 3 – Job is a righteous man

Last week, in Chapter 8, Bildad accused Job of questioning assertion number 2. Job seems to think that God is, well, picking on him without giving a reason. We might call it bullying.

Job says "Look God, I stand innocent before You and yet You torment me?"

Bildad said "Our God is a righteous God and takes care of His own. He called His wrath down upon your children because THEY were the one's who stepped out of line. So stop blaspheming God with your sick perversions of His justice. Job 8:20 "Surely God doesn't reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evildoers."

Job picks up the thread now and begins by acknowledging the truth that Bildad has spoken. God is indeed just.

Job 9:1 "Indeed, I know that this is true."

But Job isn't judging the way that God runs His world. Why? Because he knows it's futile. Job brings in the fact that God is Omnipotent; He has absolute power. What chance does a mere mortal man have to prove his innocence against a Prosecutor wielding absolute power?

Job expounds on the awesome power of God, echoing the sentiments of Eliphaz (Job 5:9, Job 9:10)

Job 9:12 "If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?'" Job acknowledges that there are no limitations on God's justice. He can do what He wants. If there WERE a system of checks and balances on God, then God would not be God. Job 9:19 – ". . . And if it is a matter of justice, who can challenge him?"

So Job asks (Job 9:14) "How then can I dispute with him?" God is Judge, Prosecutor, Jury and Executioner.

Job, sitting desolate in his physical and mental anguish, enduring the condemnation of his friends, continues to spiral down into despair. He despises his own life and then cries out (Job 9:22) "It is all the same; that is why I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked."

The underlying thought here is "Why bother to be righteous? Why bother to do good? Why try to live according to His will? He will destroy you anyway, just like He does the wicked."

This is reminiscent of the quote by the Earl of Gloucester in Shakespeare's King Lear: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods; they kill us for their sport."

In our society today, this is an ongoing issue: "Why do good people suffer and wicked people prosper?"

In 1985, the movie "Shadowlands" came out, which told of events in the life of C.S. Lewis. In the beginning of the movie, Lewis is shown lecturing an audience on the question of Why God lets good people suffer. He tells the audience that pain is the chisel that God uses to shape His people into their full capacity, helping them become deeper, wiser and stronger.

C. S. Lewis was a life-long bachelor but soon after the lecture he meets and falls in love with an American woman, Joy Davidman. They marry and he writes "Surprised by Joy."

After only a few happy years, she develops bone cancer and dies a slow, agonizing, lingering death as her husband watches helplessly. This real-life experience changes Lewis' perspective of pain being God's chisel to the idea that suffering of the righteous is a mystery beyond our understanding.

Our real-life experiences outweigh classroom theology and this is what Job is struggling with.

Anyway, Job here is perilously close to free-falling into the despair of nihilism.

Definition: Nihilism - the rejection of all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless.

If good people and wicked people are equally punished, then what difference is there between good and evil?

On the flip side, if we, by our righteous behavior, could influence God to treat us well, then would He still be Omnipotent? Would not this ability to influence God turn Him into some kind of cosmic vending machine? You pray the right prayers, offer the right sacrifices, insert the right number of good deeds, pull the knob and get a blessing?

Job 10:2 "I say to God: Do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me." Job is offended by Bildad's accusation that Job is judging God. Rather, says Job, "God, put ME on trial. Then show me the evidence. Tell me what crime I have committed. Show me the error of my ways."

The rhetorical questions that Job asks in Job 10:4-7 are meant to convey the idea that God does not understand what it is like to live as a human. If He did, He would not persecute Job so, knowing of Job's innocence.

Starting with Job 10:8, Job says "God, you formed me so lovingly, you nurtured me, fed me, clothed me, gave me life. Why did you do that if you are just going to throw me away like something you are ashamed of?"

Job 10:14-17 expresses Job's thought that God is watching him like a hawk, ready to punish at the slightest infraction.

Job 10:20 Job is sure that he will die soon and asks God to leave him alone so he can get some respite from his punishment, "a moment's joy", before going to the grave.

This particular section of Job may resonate with anyone who has endured stretches of time in their life when the days were gray and lifeless, the joy sucked out of them, when nothing but trouble and fear loomed on the horizon, the future was dreaded and they spent their waking moments worrying about surviving the near future and their sleeping moments steeped in the nightmare of the soul. At such times, death seems like a welcome option.

As you probably know, President Abraham Lincoln suffered greatly from melancholy (depression). Here is an excerpt from an article in the Atlantic Monthly entitled "Lincoln's Great Depression":

"Elizabeth Keckley, Mary Lincoln's dressmaker, once told of watching the president drag himself into the room where she was fitting the First Lady. "His step was slow and heavy, and his face sad," Keckley recalled. "Like a tired child he threw himself upon a sofa, and shaded his eyes with his hands. He was a complete picture of dejection." He had just returned from the War Department, he said, where the news was "dark, dark everywhere." Lincoln then took a small Bible from a stand near the sofa and began to read. "A quarter of an hour passed," Keckley remembered, "and on glancing at the sofa the face of the president seemed more cheerful. The dejected look was gone; in fact, the countenance was lighted up with new resolution and hope." Wanting to see what he was reading, Keckley pretended she had dropped something and went behind where Lincoln was sitting so that she could look over his shoulder. It was the Book of Job."

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I am so blessed to know you and have the benefit of reading your thoughts and interpretation of this book. It is a great encouragement to me. Thank you for all the work you are putting in on this!

Comment:

Ryan Ingle:

What great insight you brought to this lesson! Thanks for your hard effort! I did not know all that about C.S. Lewis.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Good stuff! I don't delight in Job's suffering, but I am delighted that God does understand discouragement, melancholy, our struggle with pain, and doesn't write us off when we are mentally and spiritually wrestling and confused. Thank you, Kevin Crittenden.

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

I also appreciate your efforts. You are giving me a much better understanding of Job. Interesting about C S Lewis and Lincoln. God bless you. Keep up the good work.

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

I concur with ALL of the previous comments. A "Job" very well done. #Punintended

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother Kevin! Very useful and helpful! And, God is no chisler, but he is indeed a comfortor!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Yup, God gives freely of His bounty. No chiseler, indeed!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, all! As you may have surmised, I have been in an unhappy place where there seemed no hope on any horizon, wallowing in anxiety, fear and doubt. Death seemed quite the comforter at that time. The stigma of reaching out for help, the shame of being in that dark place kept me in isolation for far too long. I am so hopeful that anyone reading Job will find encouragement to KNOW that God is there alongside them as they walk in the darkness of the Valley of the shadow of death. I am also so hopeful that if you sense that someone in your circle of friends is in need of comfort, that you reach out to them. BE the means by which Jesus expresses His love for us. Judgement has no place in these situations but unconditional love does.

Replies:

Joanne Caffie:

I know of someone who is currently in that state but won't seek any help. I don't know what I should do

Kevin Crittenden:

Joanne Caffie - I sent you a friend request - let's talk.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! Your experiences and knowledge is a blessing for many!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

As yours is!!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Job 9:33 "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us,"

Heb. 9:24 "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:
Amen, Marc!

Comment:

Anita Bown:
Excellent!

Comment:

Linda Whitworth Davis:
Thank you all for the comments. It helps with understanding Job and God.

February 9: Job 11-12 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 6
Poetry reading for 2/09/17
Job 11 & 12

So far Zophar has remained respectfully silent. But now, having listened attentively to all of the preceding duologues, he bestirs himself. Bildad has tagged out and so Zophar tags in. He steps up to the podium.

By the way, although we only have mention of Job and his three friends up to this point, it may very well be that there were more in attendance. In fact, we will find out later that Friend Elihu was in attendance but patiently keeping his counsel.

The name "Zophar" means "young bird." The name is found nowhere else in the Bible. As a Naamathite, he is indirectly connected to the sister of Tubal-Cain (Gen 4:22)

In his speech, Zophar merely rehashes arguments that have gone before. He patiently explains to Job: "God is smarter than you, His creation is beyond man's understanding so ADMIT your faults, THROW yourself on His mercy, and ACT like a righteous man. Only THEN will you be restored to His good graces. After that, You and He will go in the fields together and walk and talk as good friends should and do."

At hearing this, Job's voice is not exactly ringing with laughter. His three friends don't get it; rather than being supportive, they are witnesses for the prosecution.

Job begins his rejoinder by addressing his friends in a sarcastic manner: (Job 12:1-2)
"Doubtless you are the only people who matter, and wisdom will die with you." Essentially:
"Yeah, you fools think you are the smartest people in the world but here's a news flash – I'm just as smart as you. Not only that, but even the animals know what you know."

Job feels the cruel derision of his friends and attributes it to the fact that THEY haven't been afflicted as HE has. We see this thought echoed elsewhere in the Bible when widows, orphans, the poor and the marginalized are derided by the 1%ers – the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, Priests, etc.

Has much changed since those days? In our society, the marginalized, the poor, the sojourners and the homeless are looked down upon. They stand in our streets, some with children, and we (including this author) avoid eye contact. The attitude is "Well, they must be

lazy”, “They continue to make poor choices”, “They’re just living from bottle to bottle.” We have not been as afflicted by life as they have.

In our culture of individualism, how you fare in this world is dependent upon your own choices rather than social forces. Pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and singlehandedly overcoming adversity is a great virtue in America. Think Horatio Alger; the epitome of the rags-to-riches ideal. A linchpin of the American Dream.

An Iranian folk proverb reads: “If you see a blind man, kick him; why should you be kinder than God?” The tacit understanding is that the blindness was brought on by God. Why? Because the man did something to deserve his suffering and so God wants him to suffer. Job’s suffering (our suffering) was(is) deserved. We remember that the suffering in New Orleans caused by Hurricane Katrina was identified (by some) as a punishment from God because of the sinful nature of that city.

Job’s friends have pointed out the beauty and majesty of the natural world with the concomitant idea that the God who created our perfect natural world imposed that same perfection on the moral world.

Perhaps they had Psalm 19 in mind:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

...

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

8
The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

9
The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

However, Job has suffered some terrible real-life experiences and so he counters the idea of the dual perfection of the Natural World and the Moral World with a proverb (Job 12:11) “Does not the ear test words, as the tongue tastes food?” Job is not swayed by his friends’ arguments; his ears detect shoddy reasoning.

Why is it shoddy? Well, nature can easily turn from orderly to destructive causing great damage just as rulers can be too ambitious or egotistical, causing great suffering. Anyone who has had their house destroyed by flood, or tornado, or earthquake is not admiring the grandeur and perfection of the natural world. If random destruction is part and parcel of the perfection of the natural world, then the random suffering of the righteous is part of the perfection of the moral world.

Therefore, Job rejects this view of dual perfection. He desperately wants to believe in a God of Justice and Compassion.

Rabbis long ago taught that a world of strict justice, with no allowances for human weakness, would be an unlivable world. Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" comes to mind. God has no limitations on his power. He need not be limited by thoughts of Justice and yet in a conflict between Power and Justice, Job hopes, Justice will prevail.

The question can be asked: "Does God pray?"

One answer is "God does indeed pray, and His prayer is 'May it be My will that My attribute of compassion overrule My attribute of justice.'"

Job continues to hold on to the hope that God's Divine Justice will prevail over the arbitrary use of God's Divine Power.

Comment:

Lori Watt:

Another great entry! I especially like your perspective given in: "Anyone who has had their house destroyed by flood, or tornado, or earthquake is not admiring the grandeur and perfection of the natural world. If random destruction is part and parcel of the perfection of the natural world, then the random suffering of the righteous is part of the perfection of the moral world." I've never thought of it like that before.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I'm thinking that studying Job can be discomfoting for some people - the idea of questioning God may not sit well for them. We see Job as TRUSTING in God's Justice SO MUCH, that he knows he can count on God's support in his quest for truth. God gave us a mind; I expect He is glad when we use our intelligence and Job is doing just that. We are also expected to study the Word for ourselves, not just blindly accept what we have heard from childhood:

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.—Php 2:12-13.

Charles Fry:

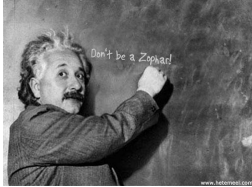
You are quite right that some really "don't get" Job's attitude, maybe suspect his friends are wrong in the particulars but right in the principles. I find Job very reassuring. Not because of a rosy outlook but because the man and theme do speak to the difficulty of keeping faith in a fallen world, and the impossibility of really seeing purpose and value in every experience, of knowing "why" for everything that comes along. And yet, God is not offended or angered by the questions, the confusion, the grief, the outspoken distress. This is a beautiful insight into the character of God and his determination to love us.

Marc Hermon:

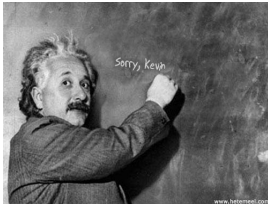
Not to be a Zophar and shower on but Job's problem as we find out later is the same problem we all have in our spiritual walk: putting a focus on ourselves rather than putting the focus on God. Both Job and Christ were allowed to suffer to shine a light and condemn the devil. Job wasn't perfect so it takes him "42 chapters" to "repent in dust and ashes" and to realize that his suffering was glorifying God to the devil's shame. Christ, on the other hand being of God, always put the focus on his Father, and unlike Job "opened not his mouth" and willingly accepted the suffering. Jesus

demonstrated the attitude that almost always eludes mankind (and especially me). "Not my will but Thine be done."

Kevin Crittenden:



Marc Hermon:



Charles Fry:

Job's reaction to his encounter with God at the end of the book is much like Isaiah's reaction to his vision of God, or Peter's reaction to Jesus. So it is fair enough to say Job had the same problem mortal men have, even people of faith. However, God explicitly says Job had said what was right or true about God, unlike his friends. God says he was not angry with Job for what he said. God at the end characterizes the words of the friends as folly, but does not say the same about Job's words.

Jesus, when he suffered, had some assets Job didn't have, in the sense that he had prophetic scriptures, knowledge of why he was suffering, knew what was going to happen, what the benefit and outcome would be (see Hebrews 12:1-4). Even knowing what he knew, in the course of his horrific suffering, he asked, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" There was no fault in that outcry, he did not reject God or curse his tormentors. Even the sinless Savior could express his distress, his feeling of loneliness, and request some bit of relief ("I thirst.")

Job was certainly not sinless, didn't consider himself to be, but he was a righteous man and did not yield to the almost incomprehensible pressure brought to bear against his whole being. Job didn't know why he was having these horrid experiences, those questions were still unanswered after the encounter with God in 38-41, but his questions and his reasoning did not anger God, and were not a misrepresentation of God as were the "karma" like assumptions of his friends, assumptions Job himself had to discard in the process of his struggle.

Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)

5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Luke 5:8-11 (NIV)

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Job 42:7-9 (NIV) 7 After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. 8 So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has." 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Charles! I hope we can take away from the Book of Job the point you are making - that asking the hard questions in the quest for difficult answers is not blasphemy.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Superb! Thanks for that brother!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Fo' shizzle!

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

You certainly have a way with words. Thanks for helping me better understand Job.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you for your encouragement! I certainly am learning a lot about Job. And speaking of language - as I explain to my ESL learners - a picture painted with only 10 colors will lack the vibrancy and beauty of one painted with 100. So it is with the English language which has so many wonderful and apt words with which to express our thoughts and feelings. Well, they tell me I can get a job as an English teacher in China or Japan or Korea or Taiwan . . . even though my degree is in Physics. ^-^ Anyway, you have a blessed day and thanks again!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

I always look forward to your thoughts, Kevin Crittenden! You help me consider passages in a new light. I appreciate your life applications as well. Thank you! :-) Zophar's assessment of Job's condition was not accurate and he unfortunately thought God should speak against Job (11:5). We know God eventually spoke against Zophar Himself. Zophar repented after being rebuked by the Lord. In chapter 11 Zophar does speak truth and knowledge toward repentance: a devoted heart begins a change of life (11:13), forgiveness must be sought from

God by yielding/stretching out our hand to Him (11:13) & there is joy and peace in forgiveness (11:15-19).

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger! Indeed, we can find much joy and peace in forgiveness of the people in our lives, whether from long ago hurts, to today's injustices. Indeed, we unfortunately allow even the possible future actions of people to hurt us. (I just know my husband is going to forget my birthday again!) We must look to the Lord for His example of forgiveness and try to emulate His perfect ways in our own lives. It really is for our own good. But not always so easy.

February 16: Job 13-14 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 7

Poetry reading for 2/16/17

Job 13 & 14

Job 13 and 14 finish up Job's lengthy soliloquy. Job hides nothing in what he says; his soul is laid bare before his friends and before God. He is at his most vulnerable.

I think this is the proper attitude to adopt when coming before God. Don't bother to try to hide anything. Job is also opening himself up before his friends. But as we see, our friends, like Job's, may not have the ability to support us. Trust, a cornerstone of Faith, must be established before vulnerability, and empathy, can be truly expressed. We are exhorted to love one another and to confess our sins to one another. But, naturally, we ought not just choose ANY old "another" with whom to air out our scarlet side.

So what can you do if you have no empathetic friend, no one with whom you've developed an emotional trust level? For men in particular, shame is locked away within. We don't talk much about our feelings. We're raised to be doers and solvers; if there's a problem, we're expected to take action. Well, this is a huge topic by itself. Back to Job.

Job reiterates that his knowledge is not inferior to his friend's. But he's tired of arguing with them and having THEM argue the case for God, as if God needed their help. Job asks them to please butt out; he want to argue his own case with God.

Essentially he says to his friends: "I know what you are saying and, believe it or not, I understand it just as much as you do. But I really want to bring my case before God Himself. You three continue to slander me and are worse than useless. So I wish you would just shut up, especially as you spread lies about me in God's name. Are you willing to risk Him calling you out for that? Could you bear His scrutiny? I just want to talk with God and, afterwards, let the chips fall where they may."

Job 13:15 "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him . . ." Job has reached a turning point. He is regaining a nascent sense of confidence in God's goodness. He has reached the depths of his psychological and spiritual katabasis and is remembering to trust in God, a necessary prerequisite to his subsequent anabasis.

Note that a few pages back, Job was sure he was going to die very soon and then God wouldn't be able to use him for target practice anymore. Now, he has changed his mind and

believes he will indeed live unless God slays him. But Job is willing to trust in God's goodness in his search for answers and meaning within the context of his situation.

Job 13:16 " . . . no godless person would dare come before him!" Job has not abandoned God at all!

Job 13:18-19 " . . . I know I will be vindicated. Can anyone bring charges against me?" Compare to Isaiah 50:8 "He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other!" It has been suggested that this is the opening formula of a plaintiff in a court of law.

Job now prays directly to God and asks Him to grant two wishes:

- 1) Cease tormenting him
- 2) Let him present his case and have God reply

Job is saying "God, if I am so almighty important that you keep track of every one of my misdeeds so you can punish me, then aren't I worth a moment of your valuable time so that you can explain why I'm being punished? And if I'm too insignificant a worm for you to waste your time talking with, then why am I important enough to You to mete out my punishment?"

Job 13:24 "Why do you hide your face?" This is an idiom with the meaning Why are you hostile to me?

In Job 14, Job returns to idea that life is transient and troubled.

He is essentially saying, "We humans are only on earth for a very short time during which our lives are filled with problems and woes. So why, God, do you bother us with even more problems? Go do something more worthy of your ineffable Self and let us do our own thing until we die."

Job now muses on the possibility of a continued relationship with God after death and uses nature as an example. This "second chance" could be construed as compensation for the troubles experienced in the "first life."

He says "Even trees get second chances – you can cut them down at the base, like a Christmas tree, and they will sprout back up when watered. Yet man gets only one shot at life, so whereas the tree has hope of renewal, man does not. " Job 14:12 "so he lies down and does not rise."

He continues "If only you could hide me in the grave for awhile until you stop being angry with me. Then, you will remember me and restore me after which our relationship will be much better. You will have a lot of compassion for the creature (me) that you have formed with your hands and watch over me without holding my sins against me."

However, given the absence of that renewal, Job continues in a despondent vein: "slowly, remorselessly, immutably, you, God, chip away at a person's hope until it is destroyed and they die, never knowing the fate of their children."

Job makes a reference to the heart-wrenching loss of his own children here. He will know nothing more about them. But Job is also speaking as any parent might – none of us will see our children grow into old age.

"Sometimes we look to the end of the tale
where there should be marriage feasts,

and find only, as it were,
black marigolds and a silence.”
- Azeddin el Mocadecci

This concludes the first cycle of speeches.

The friends' position is the traditional one, namely:
God is Great
God know us more thoroughly than we do
God uses his rod only when He has a reason to

So, since nobody (including Job) is perfect, he should stop insisting that he is innocent, repent, and throw himself on the mercy of God. If he did that, then most likely a merciful God would forgive him and restore his fortunes.

In contrast, Job offers up his own experiences in opposition to the friend's abstract beliefs. To Job, his own experiences outweigh (and are more persuasive) than his friend's theoretical discourses.

Comment:

Lori Watt:

Thank you, again, for such a well-thought-out post. You are helping me to understand this book so much better!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! Your words are so understandable.

Comment:

Ryan Ingle:

I know with almost complete certainty that I couldn't handle what Job went through and not been a lot worse than Job. Yes he did question a lot but in contrast, i don't think many of us would do as well as he did! Thanks Kevin for yet another great analysis of the story!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! It's true that Job is undergoing horrific experiences that few of us can fathom. And yet, this is not to detract from our own personal struggles. "Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Our own battlefields are horrific to us, and there really is no way to make comparisons with someone else's. My pain is real to me as your pain is to you. It took me a LONG time to understand that most people I meet are struggling with something. Job, therefore, is a comforting book, giving us permission, as it were, to voice our grief. 1 Thess 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

February 23: Job 15-16 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 8

Poetry reading for 2/23/17

Job 15 & 16

Cycle Two of the speeches begins with Eliphaz once more picking up the argument from where it had fallen behind the couch.

In the first cycle, the friends were trying to tailor their arguments to come up with something that would convince Job to repent and throw himself on the mercy of God. It's all very respectfully done. They were making allowances for Job's devastating losses.

In this second cycle, the friends are losing patience and beginning to wonder What is wrong with Job? What unacknowledged sin must he have, that he cannot "get it?" It must be that his stubbornness and arrogance are proof of his impiety. The situation is becoming less respectful. Job's intolerable suffering is laid by the wayside and no longer taken into account.

You may wonder why the friends don't just say "OK Job. I guess we'll have to agree to disagree" as we often do today for the sake of maintaining relationships. But the author of Job is intellectually rigorous (unlike many of us today - - and by "many of us", I mean me) and really wants to explore this topic thoroughly. I suspect he was going through all of this as a way of finding meaning in his own life. Again, due to worldly distractions, something that we only touch lightly on in our own journeys.

So, here's a question for you: Why do YOU think that the Book of Job was included in the Bible? It's not about the Law. It's not about the Prophets. It's not about History. It's not about Heritage. It's not Advice on how to live a Godly life. It's not a Book of Paeans to God nor does it Delineate God's Will for us. And does it say that Job is even a Hebrew? (The author most likely was.) Job lived in Uz, believed to have been located in the south of Edom.

In his speech, Eliphaz essentially says, "Job, my boy, your immaturity makes you arrogant; you think yourself wiser than your elders, which attitude, as you doubtless are aware, flies in the face of our culture. You are too young and immature to teach us who are senior to you. I'M not the one condemning you, your own words do! Just listen to yourself! You're speaking as if you were privy to God's Council."

[Note: God DID have a council (Job 1:6) but, of course, neither Job nor Eliphaz knows this. Poetic irony.]

Eliphaz continues "If God doesn't even trust the angels because of their rebellion, then what makes you think that we mortal men could possibly be pure? We are, by nature, evil and wallow like pigs in corruption. Listen, Job, to the wisdom that has been handed down by the sages. The man who rebels against God, the one who questions God, calls down punishment on himself. He lives his days in fear, never knowing when that punishment will be meted out. Anxiety, woe and dread are his lot, following him all the remaining days of his life. Job, you speculated about a second chance when you talked about the tree renewing itself but you can forget about that, the wicked man will not escape the darkness and God will wither his shoots with fire."

In Job 16, Job thoughtfully sips his coffee, feeling both sadness and anger building up, and then lashes out, mainly at Eliphaz. Job had been hoping that his trio of "comforters" would be silent, but Eliphaz' verbal intrusion had thrown that idea out the window.

In Job 16:2-5, Job directs his comments to all of his friends at first and then to Eliphaz in particular. He says:

"Yada, yada, yada, how you DO go on! All of you are miserable comforters! Eliphaz, will you never stop talking? What is WRONG with you? If our positions were swapped, I could also chide you with fancy talk, but, as your friend, I would encourage and support you. At least I would TRY to give you some relief."

Job now dismisses his friends and begins lamenting his lot again.

He says “My pain remains whether I speak or not. God is angry with me and has sicced my friends on me. They are become wicked and ungodly and are united against me. I was doing ok in life but God chose to make me his target and, without mercy, continually attacks me. And yet, throughout all this, my prayer is pure, I maintain my innocence. “

Job 16:18: “Earth, do not cover my blood . . .”

This is an echo of Abel’s blood crying out from the ground in Genesis 4:10 “The LORD said, ‘What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!’” God’s mad and Cain’s about to get it.

We also remember in Deuteronomy 21 the measures that were needed for atonement for an unsolved murder.

“6 Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, 7 and they shall declare: “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. 8 Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent person.” Then the bloodshed will be atoned for, 9 and you will have purged from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the Lord.”

Murder is an affront to God, the Author of Life, and it is abominable to try to cover up the offence by burying it out of sight. This would include suicide as well – Job, as miserable as he is - would never contemplate such a heinous action.

So why does Job say “Earth, do not cover my blood . . .”?

Because he knows he is innocent and his death (innocent blood) would violate God’s own standards. He challenges God to live up to His own commandments. Have we ever (as parents) said “Do as I say, not as I do!”? God doesn’t play that game.

Job 16:19-21 “Even now, my witness is in heaven . . .he pleads with God . . .”

So, Who is this witness? Job believes he has a friend who can advocate for him with God; an intercessor. Was he talking about Jesus, who advocates for those whose names are written in the Book of Life? Well, no. Job was unaware of Jesus. It’s more likely that since God is acting as Judge, Prosecutor, Jury and Executioner, then He is also the Chief Witness for the defense of Job. Job is counting on God to act as his witness in Heaven.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Saddest and best line in the Book of Job (16:2) and here are some thoughts related to (16:21) The Indwelling Spirit

The promise of the Holy Spirit is in fact the culmination of all that Jesus said to comfort those eleven troubled men. In that hour of turmoil, they feared being left alone. However Jesus assured them that they would not be left to fend for themselves; they would have a supernatural Helper. The Greek word translated "Helper" (parakletos) literally means "one who is called alongside." The King James Version translates it "Comforter," which is one of its meanings.

- When you look for scriptural designations for the Holy Spirit.
- o Specifically designations with the word “Spirit.”

You find such as:

- "Holy" (Acts 1:5)
- "My" (Gen. 6:3)
- "God" (Gen. 1:2; 24:2)
- "Lord" (Jn. 3:10)
- "Truth" (Jn. 16:13,14)
- "Spirit" (1st Jn. 3:24)

- These all can be considered as descriptive names.
- With simply: "Holy Spirit" being given as his personal name.
- Another designation we mentioned was...

"Jehovah/Lord" (Isa. 61:1)

- Also consider: (Isa. 11:2)
- o "Sevenfold Spirit of God"

- 1. "Spirit of the Lord"
- 2. "Wisdom"
- 3. "Understanding"
- 4. "Counsel"
- 5. "Might"
- 6. "Knowledge"
- 7. "Fear of the Lord"

- A list of descriptive attributes of the Holy Spirit – given in Jewish symmetrical literary style.

- But when we have the phrase: "The Comforter," we have a term which designates a work i.e.

- o "The Doctor"
- o "The Lawyer"
- o "The policeman"
- o "The Mayor"
- o "The Carpenter"
- o "The salesmen"
- o "The Elder"
- o "The Deacon"
- o "The Evangelist"
- o Etc...

- So the work of the Holy Spirit for each and every one of us personally, is to be our comforter

o That is his role with us after he comes to live in us.

o That is, His job description

o The Greek word translated "another" may provide a helpful clue in understanding Jesus' meaning in John 14.

There are two Greek words frequently translated "another": heteros and allos.

☐ Sometimes the biblical authors used those words interchangeably, but sometimes they used heteros to speak of another of a different kind and allos to speak of another of the same kind (e.g. the "different" [heteros] gospel vs. "another" [allos] gospel in Galatians 1:6-7).

☐ Allos is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit: "another [allos] Helper."

- That could be His way of saying, "I am sending you one of exactly the same essence as Me."

- He wasn't sending just any helper, but one exactly like Himself with the same compassion, the same attributes of deity, and the same love for them. Jesus had been the disciples' helper for three years. He had helped them, comforted them, and walked alongside them. Now they would have another Helper--One exactly like Jesus--to minister to them as He had.

Now by contrast, consider this...

Daysman "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us that might lay his hands on us both". (Job 9:33 KJV)

- Arbiter ESV
- Umpire ASV and RSV
- Mediator NKJV
- Someone to mediate NIV
- Arbitrator NASB

- o The Hebrew here for, daysman is: "Yakach" "to be or make right. Plead. Argue [for the defense] Justify [a'justifier'].

- o Consider this in the context of the book of Job. See: (1:6-12; 2:1-6).

- o With regard to Job, what was Satan doing before God?

- ☐ Satan was accusing Job! And even for that matter, God Himself!

- ☐ What is Satan called in (Revelation 12:10)? Ans., "...The Accuser..."

- "Diabolos" (c.f. 1st Tim. 3:11) "Slanderers."

- ☐ Because of his rebellion in heaven, Satan was cast down and the earth became his domain.

- ☐ On earth, Satan could realize some of his aspirations, but only by "Dethroning/Corrupting" man.

- ☐ The strategic battle in this war between Satan and God, took place in the garden.

- ☐ Because Adam and Eve let that battle go to Satan, he became "The prince of this world" (Ezekiel 28:13-17; Isaiah 14:12-15; Genesis 1:26, 27; 3:1-7; John 14:30).

- ☐ In this capacity then, he also claimed the auspicious title of "The accuser of our brethren" (ibid.)

- ☐ Moreover, though he was stripped of the former rank which he enjoyed in heaven, he still, for a time, enjoyed access.

- ☐ This is why we find him doing what he does in the story of Job.

- ☐ But the cross took care of that! (John 12:31, 32; Revelation 12:1-12)

Bearing this entire context in mind, and taking this together with the context of Job's statement in (9:33), consider: (Job 9:32-35). Compare and Contrast: "For he is not a man, as I am..." (Job 9:32) with; (John 1:14; Heb. 4:15). Look again at the word: "Daysman" (Job 9:33a.) in light of the N.T. Advocate: In the Greek: "Parakletos" "An intercessor, consoler, advocate, comforter." This is our LORD and Savior, "...Jesus Christ the righteous..."

(1 John 2:1) My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

But because of Jesus, we have not just one, but TWO COMFORTERS! For in: (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), we see this same word: "Parakletos" used by Jesus in reference to the Holy Spirit.

Now reflect again on this phrase: "...that he might lay his hands upon us both..." (Job9:33b.) In Eastern lands, it was customary for a judge to place his hands upon the heads of the two parties in a dispute as a demonstration of his authority and desire to render an unbiased verdict. Job's statement implies that no human being is capable of acting as this sort of intercessor between God and man, see also: (Job 16:2), where Job speaks of his friends saying, "...miserable comforters are ye all..." But we have Jesus as our Judge, see: (2 Timothy 4:8; Acts 10:42; 17:31)

Jesus, is our Mediator: (Galatians 3:19-20; 1 Tim.2:4; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). And again, likewise, we have the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:12-17, 26, 27; Jn. 7:37-39; Acts 2:38; 5:32; Ro. 5:5; 15:13; 2 Co 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14; 3:16; 4:30)

What Job sought, we have! And more than Job could ever have imagined! We have these blessings because of Jesus! We have these blessings with Jesus! We have these blessings IN Jesus! And Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

and, (just a bit more) [?] The Holy Spirit is not a mystical power; He is a person just as Jesus is a person.

(No more "IT")

[?] He is not a floating fog or some kind of ghostlike emanation.

[?] It is unfortunate that the translators of the King James Version used the term Ghost instead of Spirit.

[?] The Holy Spirit is a person, a real being who by spiritual means lives inside us!

[?] And so all believers have two paracletes: the Spirit of God within us and the Son of God in heaven.

o For again: 1st John 2:1 says,

[?] "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The Greek word translated "Advocate" is parakletos.

[?] The disciples must have been greatly encouraged and comforted to hear Jesus say that He would send another Helper to minister to them when He left.

[?] But Jesus' promise extended beyond that. His next words beautifully culminate the message of comfort:

• "That He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). Not only would the Holy Spirit come to dwell with them, but also He would never leave.

[?] The apostle Paul said that Christ in us is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27),

“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

☐ And Christ promised His Spirit would reside in us (John 14:17).

“Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor, knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

He was going to be “In them,” and then he would reside there permanently

☐ And He will reside in us permanently

- o Jesus didn't tell the disciples He would come back and leave again.
- o Nor did He say He would leave and be back in two thousand years.
- o He said He would leave, then come back and be in us and with us as long as we live, and throughout eternity.

o In Matthew 28:20 Christ says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

o He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Consider: there's no such thing as a true Christian who doesn't possess the indwelling Christ (Romans 8:9).

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

Some people think they have to search for the Holy Spirit, but He dwells in every believer. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Maybe it is time to turn on the switch!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thanks, Steven! I was able to sense and finally recognize the working of the paraclete in my own life before I "turned on the switch." I know from personal experience that the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of all, whether baptized or not. He is there as a guide and a comforter IF we allow Him to be.

What gave comfort to Job when his wife and friends turned on him was his rock-solid belief in God's Goodness and Justice. Hopefully we can remember this when in our own lives, we seem stuck and friendless in a pit of despair. Turning our thoughts to Him is what Dr. Paraclete recommends.

Replies:

Just catching up after a funeral in Wellsville, KS. This morning and, the Bible Study I lead on the West Side of Topeka at a retirement home on Thursday afternoons. My Thursday evening study in Lawrence is a cancel, so I am sitting here in My car at a Topeka Dillons ,while my Father-in-Law does a bit of shopping. You are welcome my brother Kevin! Glad you engaged the switch! They can become inoperable if we wait too long! Yes, Dr. Paraclete is the best doctor there is! His recommendations are always THE BEST!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Some may wonder about the work of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerate, which Jesus described in John 16:7-11 as what the "Helper" would do in "the world."

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." NKJV

We see this reflected in the two heart reactions of Acts 2 and Acts 7:

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Acts 7:54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. (NKJV)

Both groups were convicted by the Spirit of God through the preaching of the word, one responded with repentance, the other with rage. (See also Acts 16:14, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, Hebrews 4:12-13)

Comment:

Charles Fry:

"Why do YOU think that the Book of Job was included in the Bible?"

One reason, it is about the struggle. "The Problem of Pain." The apparent lack of justice all around. The nonsense of a "prosperity gospel." The difficulty of suffering and the reality of uncertainty, even for the godly and the faithful. Maybe especially for the godly. It is about Moses saying, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?" (Num 11:11-12) Or Gideon asking, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." (Judg 6:13) It is about Jeremiah writing, "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?" (Jer 15:18) Or Paul remembering that, "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." (2 Cor 1:8-9)

Job says, "there will be struggle," and you may not know why, and it may not seem fair, and it may seem to go on intolerably. Not because God doesn't see or doesn't care, not even for any discernible purpose or value we might imagine or embrace or find consolation in, and yet, for all that, Paul's conviction is true, we can survive "the test," with, as Job says our "integrity" intact. (1 Corinthians 10:13, Job 2:3, 9, 6:29, 27:5)

Replies:

Michael Rogers:

Good thoughts Charles

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I love this comment, Charles-- thank you.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

As always, thanks, Kevin Crittenden! For me the book of Job serves as a constant reminder that in the end all we have is our soul. Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. John

16:33 "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." No matter what physical circumstance we find ourselves in we have eternal hope thanks be to Christ.

March 2: Job 17-18 (Kevin Crittenden)

The date setting on my watch tells me it's only Feb 29 but I think I still should post my thoughts for the Mar 2 reading. It's been a busy day today - I hosted a baby shower for two of my students, one due in April, the other on June 1. Great fun! So here you go.

Week 9

Poetry reading for 3/02/17

Job 17 & 18

Having replied to Eliphaz' second speech, Job continues his lament.

In the first part of this section, Job reiterates that his life is fleeting and there is only death on the horizon. And during these final moments, he must endure the hostility, judgment and mockery of his friends.

He turns to God.

Job 17:3 "Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?" Job thinks that if God is concerned about him, then God Himself could become a pledge for Job as there is no one else.

This is similar to Jesus becoming a "pledge" for us as shown in Heb 7:21-22:

"21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

"The Lord has sworn

and will not change his mind:

'You are a priest forever.'"

22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant."

Job then prays to God that the arguments of his friends will not prevail. (Job 17:4)

He then goes on to say (Job 17:6) "God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit."

It is thought that this verse should instead be translated as:

"God has made me a byword to everyone, I have become like Tophet of old."

This reference to Tophet links Job to Jer 7:30-31 - "30 For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, saith the Lord: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it.

31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart."

Jeremiah was condemning Israel for turning to pagan worship. The valley of Hinnom was adjacent to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and was used for the burning of corpses, (perhaps those infected with disease rendering them unfit for burial in the family crypt) and also for the sacrifice of children to appease a pagan god. Moloch comes to mind.

When Job says “I have become like Tophet of old,” he is making an extremely serious charge against God. God has killed his children and destroyed his home and in so doing, has acted no better than a pagan god.

Job 17:9 “Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger.”

Is this Job speaking? Well, yes, in his misery, perhaps he is mocking the words of Bildad in Job 8:20 “Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evildoers.”

After this, Job taunts his friends, challenging them to give it another go, and then despairs at the hopelessness and brevity of his life.

In Job 18, Bildad picks up the club and starts beating Job with it.

Bildad takes exception to being called “stupid” by Job. He goes on, saying “What makes YOU so different and more important than everybody else on Earth? Now here’s a long list of bad things that can happen to a peccant man, i.e. you!”

Bildad expounds on the well-deserved suffering of the wicked but does not address Job’s complaint about the undeserved misery of the innocent at God’s hand.

Gone is the appeal to Job to reconcile with God for the restoration of his fortunes.

In Job 18:4, Bildad complains “. . . must the rocks be moved from their place?” What is he saying? Essentially, “Listen, Job. We have a comfortable understanding of God and His world. We take comfort in the belief that God punishes the wicked and nourishes the righteous. So quit rocking the boat! We don’t want to have this bedrock belief system disturbed. It gives us comfort in our lives, that God’s justice always prevails as we think it should. Our religion gives us comfort – we’re not looking to challenge our understanding of God and if you keep talking like this, we’re not going to listen to you.”

Perhaps Bildad speaks for us as well. Over time, we develop a deep comfort level in How Things Are Done in the church. Any perturbations to that can cause a Disturbance in the Force. I am reminded of an incident I heard about when a church member needed to be late for services and asked that the Communion be delayed so he could partake. This relatively minor rearrangement of the schedule for that one time caused some dissention in the group. “We’ve always done it this way so let’s not change a thing.”

Job’s position, of course, is “I’m not going to lie to God nor am I going to lie about God. My personal experiences drive my search for answers.”

I will now relate one of the famous Nasruddin stories. Stop me if you’ve heard it.

(Definition: A Mullah is a Muslim learned in Islamic theology and sacred law.)

One night, Mullah Nasruddin had lost his ring, so he set out to search for it under the street light.

Two policemen came by as it was 3 in the morning and they thought he might be a drunk.

“What are you doing there?”, they asked Nasruddin.

“Sirs, I’ve lost my ring and I am looking for it.”

The policemen began to help him look for the ring.

Finally, after futilely searching for the ring, they asked him:
“Are you sure this is where you lost it?”

Nasruddin replied:
“No, I lost it there,” and pointed to his house.

The policemen asked incredulously:
“Then why are you looking for it here?”

Nasruddin replied:
“Because it is dark in my house, and it is light over here!”

Sometimes the rigorous search for truth needs to take us into the dark recesses where the spiders and goblins lurk and where nightmares are born. As it has Job. Truth doesn’t always reside in the comfortable, well-lit places. Another topic for another time.

In Job 18:19 “He has no offspring or descendants among his people, no survivor where once his lived”, Bildad voices the ultimate punishment – not having anyone to carry on one’s name. This is death on steroids, not only one’s personal death but the cancellation of one’s future. Job already is in extremis at the loss of his own children; these words of Bildad are unusually cruel.

We’ve been seeing how Job’s friends are unsupportive; can it tell us something about ourselves? Let’s say that you have a good friend who calls you because she is in crisis. (I’m assuming the friend is a woman because men don’t usually know how to pick up a phone when they are in trouble.) So you go over to your friend’s house and she tells you that her husband just announced that he is leaving her. What will you say? What would be comforting?

1. “Oh, that’s terrible! What did you do?”
 2. “ Typical! Men! I wouldn’t wipe my feet on the best part of one.”
 3. “There, there, cheer up. There’s plenty of fish in the sea. You’ll meet someone else.”
 4. “That’s terrible. But let me tell you what happened to me.”
 5. “Everything is in God’s hands. This is part of His plan. Someday you’ll understand.”
 6. “Maybe if you fixed yourself up, you know, lost a few pounds, get some stylish clothes, . . .”
- So, How do WE respond to those in need? Do we comfort them? Or do we tell ourselves “I don’t know what to say”, and then avoid them. What can we do to be a blessing to those who need and trust us most?

Romans 12:15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

One reason to bring this situation up is that this happened to me. Years ago, before I was married, one of my co-workers needed an outlet; she was distraught because her husband wanted out of the marriage. They had a young son at the time (about 2). And I had no good reply. I wasn’t able, nor knew how, to talk about such things. I failed her that night when she needed a friend the most; it is a regret that I continue to carry with me.

Comment:

Michael Babb:

Being asked for help or advice when you have nothing to give is extremely hard. Not long ago I had someone, who I did not know well, come to me to express difficulties in her life. At the time I told her I would pray for her, and advised she seek guidance from her church, but I have always been bothered that I could offer something better.

And even with good friends there have been times when all I could offer was prayer and an ear to listen. We can't always relate, and we can't always offer a solution. It's terribly frustrating.

Replies:

Kathleen Munger Crittenden:

And often what is needed most is someone to BE with us. Not fix, not offer advice, not analyze, just BE.

Michael Babb:

That is true, but not something I am all that good at, nor all that good at recognizing. A good point though.

Kevin Crittenden:

Yup. Job's friends were doing fine until they started talking. Perhaps the aging process, which enhances wisdom (so I hear), also enhances compassion and empathy. "Had I known then what I know now . . ." is a frequent visitor to my thought patterns. I know your frustration, Michael, in feeling that I should know the correct thing to say or do to rectify the misery in people's lives when they come to us. But as Kathleen says, sometimes we just need to be there.

Kevin Crittenden:

OK, sounds like we need a men's workshop.

Kevin Crittenden:

You bring the games.

Kathleen Munger Crittenden:

It's to some degree a gender difference. SHE expresses frustration, HE wants to find/fix the problem, SHE gets frustrated because she JUST WANTED HIM TO LISTEN!!!

Kevin Crittenden:

Say what?

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

What will you be making at the workshop? I'd like a new corner shelf please.

Kevin Crittenden:

Kimra - Is that for the corner that Dave has to stand in?

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Nobody puts Davey in the corner.... 😊

Comment:

Michael Babb:

Thank you for the post by the way, it was good food for thought.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! Good thoughts!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Back to the detail on 17:6, there is that place called Tophet in Jeremiah, but I'm doubtful about Job referencing that for a pile of reasons, including place and time. Every major translation goes with the spit in the face idea, and the NET Bible notes say this:

6 c tn The word תֹּפֶת (tofet) is a hapax legomenon. The expression is "and a spitting in/to the face I have become," i.e., "I have become one in whose face people spit." Various suggestions have been made, including a link to Tophet, but they are weak. The verse as it exists in the MT is fine, and fits the context well.

As noted, being spit on fits the context. Job has gone from respected to despised, because of the prevalent idea that good people get good things from God, and people suffer because they deserve it (karma). This degradation of being spit on will come up again in 30:10. God isn't doing the spitting, but God didn't stop it.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thanks, Charles! The Book of Job invites the reader to become involved in the discussion so that we feel we are there with Job and the friends. I have no idea what a hapax legomenon might be, maybe I left it in my Sunday pants, but I'll look it up. It sounds like a creature from one of Mike Babb's games.

Kevin Crittenden:

Hapax Legomenon - a term of which only one instance of use is recorded.

From Wiki -

There are about 1,500 Hapax legomena in the Hebrew Bible; however, due to Hebrew roots, suffixes and prefixes, only 400 are "true" hapax legomena. A full list can be seen at the Jewish Encyclopedia entry for "Hapax Legomena." [19]

Some examples include:

Akut (אָקוט – fought), only appears once in the Hebrew Bible, in Psalms 95:10.

Atzei Gopher (אֶצֵי-גֹפֶר – Gopher wood) is mentioned once in the Bible, in Genesis 6:14, in the instruction to make Noah's ark "of gopher wood". Because of its single appearance, its literal meaning is lost. Gopher is simply a transliteration, although scholars tentatively suggest that the intended wood is cypress. [20]

Gvina (גְּבִינָה – cheese) is a hapax legomenon of Biblical Hebrew, found only in Job 10:10. The word has become extremely common in modern Hebrew.

Zechuchith (זְכוּחִית) is a hapax legomenon of Biblical Hebrew, found only in Job 28:17. The word derives from the root זָכַח z-ch-h, meaning clear/transparent and refers to glass or crystal. In Modern Hebrew, it is used for "glass."

Lilith (לִילִית) occurs once in the Hebrew Bible, in Isaiah 34:14, which describes the desolation of Edom. It is translated several ways.

Michael Babb:

If you encounter a Hapax Legomenon in the wild, you better hope you have an enchanted ax.

Kevin Crittenden:

Michael I think I'll need some enchanted legos as well.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin Crittenden! I imagine Job would have been greatly comforted with this verse: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8:18. I believe this is a great place to start with those suffering terrible things in their life. Sometimes there's no escape or room for physical comfort so we must look to the eternal hope and gift of salvation; thanks be to Christ!

March 9: Job 19-20 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 10

Poetry reading for 3/09/17

Job 19 & 20

The Book of Job was penned a long time ago by an unnamed genius, long dead, who wrestled with certain ethical and theological issues, probably hotly debated and then addressed in his magnum opus. He lived in the pre-exilic era (Before 597 BCE). So at least 2,600 years ago.

The Book lives in the Old Testament and lies buried just before Psalms. Many of us go to Psalms frequently for comfort and assurance, right? But what about Job? You may reply, Well, that is an old tale, it's hard to read, the characters talk funny, it speaks about places I'm not familiar with and, really, what has it to do with me in my modern life? I may as well read a book on Phrenology. (Caution: I am NOT suggesting this.)

I suggest you think again about the value of Job to your life.

Job 19 is a cry of deepest despair and in it, Job echoes the misery of every man in every age who is mired in the nadir of his life. In our modern times, we might call it "Hitting rock bottom." Who among us has not sunk into the depths of anguish at some time or other?

Job is written for you.

Remember that Job, the man, has lost all his children, his possessions and his servants. Only his wife remains and even SHE urges Job to curse God and die. His friends journeyed from afar to comfort him but came with an agenda in mind and systematically began attacking one of the most important things Job had – his integrity.

Note the following:

19:13 "He has alienated my family from me . . ."

19:15 – "My guests and my female servants count me a foreigner. . ."

19:17 – ". . . I am loathsome to my own family"

Job is speaking for every Unfortunate Wretch who once led a pleasant life, only to have it ripped away and replaced with misery and woe. The homeless, eking out a marginal existence

along our highways and byways, have fallen out the bottom of our society. Surely, their lives were pleasanter once.

19:21-22 “Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh?”

Here, Job is reproaching his friends for siding with God against him, rather than standing with him in his hour of need and railing against God’s perceived injustice.

19:25 “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth”

Who is this redeemer? Job had no hope or belief in, or understanding of, the Christian afterlife so this redeemer, in Job’s mind, does not refer to Jesus as the Redeemer who saves sinful people from Hell. But Job did know about God.

In those times and, indeed, in these times, a redeemer was the guy that fixed things. If something was wrong or unfair, he felt obligated to do something about it. How many times have you acted as a redeemer, paying off a friend’s debt, comforting a child in tears, buying groceries for a sick friend? (In our times, women act as redeemers as well, of course.)

In those days, a redeemer could:
Ransom those sold into slavery (Lev 25:47-55)
Redeem property (Lev 25:23-24)
Avenge the blood of a kinsman (Num 35:19)
Preserve the line of a deceased relative (Deut 25:5-10)

God is called a redeemer in Exod 6:6, 15:13; Ps 103:4

Job here is confident that God will act as his redeemer and will appear (stand) as a witness for Job.

And so we come to Job 20 when Zophar makes his second appearance. He is personally upset at the slurs that Job has made about him, although Job is an equal-opportunity downtrodden wretch – his slurs were for all of them.

Zophar says essentially, “You dissed me, son, so I’m gonna say this: You are guilty of gross sins and we identify you as a wicked man. You should know, then, that the joy of the wicked is short-lived; no matter how good he has it, it’s only for a brief while. Everything he does comes to nothing, all the good food he eats turns to vomit, all the treasures he has stolen he cannot enjoy as he is enveloped in terror brought on by God’s wrath. His children will be forced to make amends for him. So don’t envy the wicked!”

Zophar doesn’t mince words or beat around the bush.

Of course, no one has said a thing about envying the wicked but Zophar was miffed and was on a roll.

Next week, we’ll see what Job makes of THIS.

Comment:

Lori Watt:
Another excellent posting! Thanks!!!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Maybe they'll let me keep this job a little longer.

Lori Watt:

I'm pretty sure your job is safe. Not sure about you getting any vacation time, though.

Kevin Crittenden:

Yeah, this retirement is getting to me - I need a break.

Marc Hermon:

We're giving him 6 days off and he only has to work on Thursdays...but I will take this time again to express my sincere gratitude to our volunteer teachers in the 7 Bible Studies. Spending even a little time each day in the Word of God in my opinion is a real life changer. I feel so blessed and encouraged each day to read the daily reading, these posts and comments....and we're not even 1/4 of the way done!

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you Marc! By spending more time in the Word, I'm seeing cross-connections that I otherwise would have missed. My thanks to everybody involved, you, the other volunteers and the commentators for providing a great life-enhancing environment.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

19 is a favorite of mine, both for the soul wrenching expression of Job's awful plight, and the defiant assertion of faith that somehow God will indeed redeem him, the real Job. Of course, his expression of faith does foreshadow what God did do, coming to earth, and will do, in resurrection and judgment.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

A good go-to chapter!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen! And, thank you brother Kevin!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Your reference of Job "hitting rock bottom" reminds me of a post that I read today. This person allowed that when he 'hit rock bottom' in his addiction, he discovered that for him, 'rock bottom' has a 'basement'. I can imagine Job possibly feeling just that way.

Comment:

Michael Babb:

A thought about Job. There are instances where people suffer due to reaping what they sow, and there are instances, like Job, where they suffer in spite of the fact that they are doing right in God's eyes. When people suffer, especially those who we see as being sinful, there is sometimes a small part of us that might think that they are reaping what they sow, and that feels like justice, or righteousness. And because of the horrible and severe things that

happened to Job, his friends may have assumed that he had in fact done something to deserve it. Just as we might tend to believe of those around us. With that in mind, can we ever be sure of which is which when people suffer calamity? Should we look at someone who is living a certain lifestyle, who might encounter consequences that seem like a likely result of their actions, and say "Well, that's what they get for living that way?" Is that something we should spend any time at all on? I'm not sure if I am phrasing this right, so forgive me if I am unclear.

Replies:

Steven Wright:

Vengeance belongs to the LORD, but he does not enjoy it! Our time is better spent praying for their repentance and our own! Best to understand that "time and chance happens to us all" and, "The rain falls on the just and the unjust!"

Kevin Crittenden:

You are right, though, that we do have a knee-jerk reaction of "they deserve it" when we read about a gang member being shot by another gang, or somebody injured in an accident because they were going way too fast. It feeds our feeling of moral superiority which connects to sinful pride. So, as Steven so rightly points out and is so difficult to inculcate as a habit, let us cultivate compassion and leave judgement to the LORD. He doesn't need our help in that area.

Kevin Crittenden:

I should have said "As Steven so Wrightly put it . . ." Can't believe I missed that.

Steven Wright:

<"Eh?" emoji>

Comment:

Steven Dallas Thompson:

This is hard sometimes brother.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Kevin Crittenden: Are you sure your expertise was only physics? I think you are a contender for literary craftsmanship! :-) Thank you, once again! Tonight's reading made me think about the Prosperity Gospel. Zophar is proud that he is a healthy and prosperous man, for in his view, that's proof of his goodness and righteousness. This is the same message of the "health & wealth" prosperity gospel – that God wants us to have perfect health, total happiness, and financial gain in this life. All we need to do is ask specifically, live the right way and God will come through. This belief is contrary to the Bible. Jesus says we will have tribulation. Peter says we shouldn't be surprised by suffering. James says to expect it, and to count it all joy. And Paul says it brings endurance and glory. I Thess 5:18, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

"I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God. I myself will see Him with my own eyes - how my heart yearns within me!"

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Yes, Ginger, indeed the image of God in the Prosperity Gospel, as I understand it, is much like a vending machine - you put in the right prayers, the right thoughts, the right actions, pull the lever and He grants you perfect health, total happiness and financial gain. So if you have those things already, you are obviously morally superior and more favored by God than those other folks. Thank you for observing this! And isn't it beyond wonderful to wake up every morning with the thought that you have been redeemed through His blood!

Replies:

Joanne Caffie:
BEYOND Wonderful!

March 16: Job 21-22 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 11

Poetry reading for 3/16/17
Job 21 & 22

Last week, Zophar advised Job not to envy the wicked. Not that Job WAS but Zophar decided to go down that particular rabbit hole.

Job starts out saying “Guys! Guys! Listen to me! Hello! I’m talkin’ here. When I’m done, then you can continue your mockery of me.”

He continues: “You’re trying to sell me on the idea that the wicked do not prosper, that their time of pleasure is but a mere evanescence, soon gone and leaving no trace, like morning dew in the summer heat. But answer me this, if you can. Why do so many wicked people prosper, growing old comfortably, surrounded by grandchildren and with increasing influence and social standing? You know as well as I do that this happens! Their children prosper as well, their homes are safe and there is no fear. God doesn’t punish them. In fact, they’re doing so well that they even dare to disown God since they are already loaded. ”

Actually, Job’s description of evil people, living into a comfortable and secure old age, with their offspring carrying on their name, is the complete opposite of Job’s actual situation. His prosperity is gone, his easy life is gone, his lineage is gone, his integrity is under attack and his social standing is plummeting. Which facts support the syllogism that Job’s friends are using:

The wicked are punished.
Job is being punished.
Therefore, Job is wicked.

In 21:15, Job speaks for the prosperous wicked, imagining them saying: “Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him? We already have everything we want.”

We see an echo of this sentiment in Matt 19:24 “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

The sentiment “What would we gain by praying to him?” shows an attitude of self-centeredness and a complete lack of gratitude. Worldly riches, easily acquired, can flatter our egos into adopting this attitude but . . . the happiness they bring just doesn’t last that long.

“Many wealthy people are little more than the janitors of their possessions.” – Frank Lloyd Wright.

“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” – Percy Bysshe Shelley

On a side note, if you are interested in the science of happiness presented in an approachable form, then I recommend the book “The How of Happiness” by Sonja Lyubomirsky, PhD. One scientific conclusion she mentions is: “Spiritual people are relatively happier than nonspiritual people, have more satisfying marriages, use drugs and alcohol less often, are physically healthier, and live longer lives. People who perceive the divine being as loving and responsive are happier than those who don’t.” – Pollner, M. (1989). Divine relations, social relations, and well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30:92-104

21:19 “It is said, 'God stores up the punishment of the wicked for their children.' Let him repay the wicked, so that they themselves will experience it!”

Job brings up the idea that the consequences of the wicked are visited upon the next generation; Job challenges God to punish the doers of the evil, not their innocent children.

Exodus also expresses the principle of visiting punishment on the children:

Exod 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

However, Deut 24:16 reverses that idea: “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.

So what do you think? Was God reversing his thought about punishing the children?

Job continues on with his theme that the wicked do indeed prosper.

21:29-30 “Have you never questioned those who travel?

Have you paid no regard to their accounts—
that the wicked are spared from the day of calamity,
that they are delivered from the day of wrath?

He winds it up by telling his friends that they cannot console him with their nonsense and that they have nothing left to tell him except falsehoods.

He is done listening to them.

He is done with this conversation.

He is SO done with their company.

NOW would be a real good time for them to leave.

But, sadly, they don’t take the hint and so we come to Job 22.

In 22, the gloves come off as Eliphaz begins Cycle 3 by continuing to beleaguer Job. No more Mr. Nice Guy, Eliphaz paints Job as the worst sinner ever, detailing all of his many transgressions, none of which were evident in Cycle 1.

“Job!” he says “Of what benefit is a schmuck like you to God? Why should He care if you are righteous? Do you really think that God is rebuking you for your piety when, in fact, your sins go on and on and on? You’ve exacted pledges from your relatives, and taken the clothing from the poor to ensure loan repayment! Not only that, but you’ve ignored the hungry and thirsty

when they came to your door! Widows and orphans came to you in desperation and you gave them the boot, even though you were a rich man and honored among your neighbors. Do you think that God doesn't see us down here? Do you think that He doesn't know? The wicked are destroyed and the righteous rejoice. So all you have to do is submit to God, confess your sins and Bob's your uncle!"

So . . . how do the righteous live, the ones that rejoice?

Psalms 15 notes the characteristics of righteous living:

Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
2 The one whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from their heart;
3 whose tongue utters no slander,
who does no wrong to a neighbor,
and casts no slur on others;
4 who despises a vile person
but honors those who fear the Lord;
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind;
5 who lends money to the poor without interest;
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things
will never be shaken.

Back in Job 22, Eliphaz has just recited a lengthy laundry list of supposed sins that Job has committed but it is done in sarcasm; since, obviously, Job's sin is unknown to all except God. Eliphaz' point is "Do you really think that God is going to present you with a list of your actual sins?"

In 22:21 Eliphaz says "Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you." (Again with the Prosperity Gospel! Had I joined one of those churches, I'd be rolling in clover. Oh, I guess I AM rolling in spiritual clover.)

And in 22:23 he tells Job to return to the Almighty so he can be restored. Job will respond to this in his rebuttal next week.

Eliphaz makes another reference to clean hands:
22:30 "He will deliver even one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands. "

Compare to Job's speech in 17:
17:9 "Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger."

"Clean hands" is an indicator of someone who has made a full confession; there are no more skeletons in the closet. We say nowadays, "Make a clean breast of it" or "Come clean."

James 5:16 instructs us: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

If we follow this admonition and confess our sins within the church, which is the only place that sin can effectively be dealt with, then we may take with clean hands and clear conscience the Communion set up by Christ as a remembrance of His sacrifice for us.

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Superb work as usual my brother Kevin!

Replies:

Thank you! Hopefully, they'll let me keep this job.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
"Bear with me while I speak, and after I have spoken..MOCK ON!" vs. 3 NIV

Comment:

Marc Harmon:
Just the other day my dad was complaining how come the bulls of the wicked never fail to breed! vs. 10

Replies:

Lowell Hermon:
NOT!!!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thank you, Kevin Crittenden! Lots of thoughts stirred thanks to your commentary. RE: Punishment of children. My 9 year old son & I are doing a 6 month Bible study of the NT. This evening in John 9 we read about the man who was blind since birth. Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Who sinned? - the man or his parents?" Jesus' response was "Neither this man or his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." This is an example that breaks down the principle that terrible punishments come on certain people because of sin of their parents. In this case, and in the case of Job, suffering is used to glorify our Lord.

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Borrowing a paragraph from the HCSB Study Bible on Exo 20:5 --- "Punishing the children for the fathers' sin involved penalties for successive generations who continued to commit the sins they learned from their fathers. This did not mean that in a court case a son would have to suffer the penalty for his father's crime (Dt 24:16), nor that individual standing or fellowship with God was determined by the behavior of one's parents (Jr 31:29-30; Ezk 18:1-32). It meant the excuse, "They don't know any better; it's how they were raised," doesn't work with God. But the Lord's faithful love would far exceed His judgment (to a thousand generations; Lv 26:39-45; Is 65:6-7; Jr 11:9-12; 32:17-19; Dn 9:8-16)."

March 23: Job 23-24 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 12

Poetry reading for 3/23/17

Job 23 & 24

Have you ever wondered, in the midst of an existential crisis, just where God is? Do you have questions for Him, in the midst of your anger and grief, as you helplessly stand on the shore and watch your un-lived life wash out to sea? Must He justify Himself to you and explain Why all this upheaval and suffering is necessary to His plan?

Job feels this way. He is exhausted – physically degraded and emotionally drained - and still reeling from the shock of recent events.

Eliphaz had sarcastically asked Job if he really thought that God would present him with a list of his sins. And Job replies “That is precisely what I want! Bring it on!”

Job laments: “God’s hand is heavy on me despite my pleas so I’m hurting a lot at the moment. Anyway, you told me to return to the Almighty so I can be restored but I don’t know where to find Him. I’d go to Him if I only knew where. Then I could present my case before Him and hear what he has to say.

“Would He oppose me? I don’t think so; rather I’d have a chance to establish my innocence and be acquitted.

“But, alas, no matter what direction I go in, I can’t find Him. But He knows me and knows that I have remained true to His Commandments. He is testing me to see the purity of my character, which is as pure gold. I should therefore feel confident and comfortable because of this and yet I’m really terrified because He, being Omnipotent, can do whatever He wants.”

We know the feeling of being tested, right? We might be good-to-go, filled with Christ one month but sinking into a pit of despair the next. Sin seeps into our lives through some kind of unspiritual osmosis, so testing enables us, through trust in Him, to nip that bad boy in the bud.

Fortunately, we have the wisdom of God, expressed here in James, to give us hope in hard times.

James 1:2-4 “ Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Job, however, was working without the safety net of the New Testament. He is doing the best that he can.

Proverbs 24:10 says “If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength!” I wonder if Job had access to this.

Job now continues:

24:1 “Why does the Almighty not set times for judgement?”
Of course, the reader knows from 1:6 and 2:1 that He does. Job is unaware of all that.

He continues: “There are plenty of wrongdoers who change the boundary markers, steal livestock, take away the widow’s livelihood, rob from orphans and use their influence to take advantage of the poor. The poor are made to work for the wicked and are left hungry and without garments, shivering in the cold. The groans of the dying for mercy and the prayers for help of the afflicted rise up from the city and go unanswered. And yet, God does not charge these wrongdoers! These people violate the Ten Commandments, skulk about in the darkness and rebel against the light. And yet, as you say, they are evanescent, soon to disappear. For a little while they are exalted, and then they are gone.”

“So which of you worthies can prove me wrong?”

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Kevin Crittenden! I look forward each week to your post. There are several thought-provoking comments above. Thanks for all your efforts!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger! I see that you are such an encourager for all of us and I am edified by your extensive knowledge of the Bible. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8. Just as Job stated in chpt 23 we must treasure God's words more than anything. Praise God for our Holy Bibles. I also cherish brothers and sisters-in-Christ who receive the Word daily with readiness of mind. We are blessed beyond measure from these studies.
<3

March 30: Job 25-26 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 13

Poetry reading for 3/30/17

Job 25 & 26

In our last episode, Job issues the challenge: “So which of you worthies can prove me wrong?”

Bildad, perhaps running late for an appointment, thinks he can prove Job wrong and, glancing at his watch, states his case quickly in only five verses.

He waxes eloquently, but briefly, about the grandeur of God and then throws out essentially the same question that Eliphaz brought up earlier: How, then, can a man, who is but a worm, be righteous before God?

Eliphaz had previously asked: “Can mortal man be in the right before God?” (4:17)

Also: 15:14 “What are mortals, that they could be pure, or those born of woman, that they could be righteous?”

So, Bildad offers nothing new in these short verses. God is God and we're not worthy.

Note: There is much controversy about these chapters (24-27). It is not always clear who is talking; some of what is attributed to Job in 26-27 sounds more like sentiments coming from his friends. Bildad's speech is short and Zophar doesn't get credit for saying anything in this third cycle.

Some scholars see 26:5-14 as more likely to be a part of Bildad's speech than uttered by Job.

One suggestion is that the incoherent language of chapters 24-27 reflect the brokenness of Job's soul; the consequence of a traumatic experience. Job, and his friends, are exhausted by attempting to explain the inexplicable. Trauma impedes speech.

Remember the story in Leviticus 10 where Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before the Lord and were struck dead? This was, of course, traumatic for Aaron and it says "Aaron remained silent." Was his silence humble acceptance of God's Will? Was he too traumatized to react? Or was he tempted to speak angry words against God and managed to restrain himself?

The psychologist, Theodor Adorno, observes that "after Auschwitz, there can be no poetry."

One suggestion is that the incoherence of chapters 24-27, where it really isn't clear who is saying what, reflects the breakdown of the dialogue as it comes to an end, with everybody talking at once, interrupting each other and shouting over one another's remarks. We've experienced this, right? Everything has already been said and nobody is listening to anybody else anymore. We've seen political speeches being interrupted by protestors who are screaming slogans – nobody is listening respectfully.

Job's reply to Bildad in 26:1-4 drips with sarcasm. He acerbically says: "How wonderful you are! You've given such strength to me when I'm down, and shared your wisdom and insights with me when I couldn't even think straight. Was it God helping you form your words?"

The rest of Job 26 talks about God's mighty power, as Bildad did, and finally, in verse 14, the point is made that all the mighty works that we behold and which speak to the power of the Creator, are but a faint whisper of God's actual power – we have not experienced the full thunder of His might.

We rather live in the middle of the spectrum of God's Creation, don't you think? Our modern technology allows us MUCH more knowledge of the scope of Creation than the author of Job had access to.

On the largest scale, the Hubble Space Telescope, and at the end of 2018, its replacement, the James Webb Space Telescope, allow us to see far into space and back in time. Hubble's observations have increased the number of observable galaxies by a factor of 10 – to about 2 TRILLION galaxies. And when you consider that our galaxy, the Milky Way, contains about 100 billion stars, you begin to get a sense of how insignificant we are in the scheme of things.

What Job also was unaware of, is on the other end of the spectrum – the world of the infinitesimal. You may remember the discovery of the Higgs Boson in 2012 using CERN's Large Hadron Collider. Using other imaging technologies, we are able to observe many arcane microprocesses at work within our own bodies.

Aside from measurable (large and small) objects, there are other aspects of this Creation in which we are nurtured that, frankly, we don't understand. Wave/particle duality. Quantum correlation and entanglement. Dark matter and energy.

Like the writer of the Book of Job, like the authors of Psalms, we now can also speak in awe about the many wonders of God's Creation but using a much-enhanced vocabulary. This is a shameless and thinly-veiled plug for the value of Science for those of you who distrust it. Science expands our knowledge of the depth, the complexity, the unthinkable vastness, the recondite intricacies of the workings of God's Creation. God is proud of His work, and our feeble understanding of it serves to glorify Him.

The point I'm poorly trying to make is that even with all our modern advantages, we still have yet to experience the full thunder of His might. The more we know, the more there is to know. If anything, instead of the hubris that all our accumulated data tends to foster within us, we might do better to feel humbled by the sheer magnitude of what we learn.

And now, as you sit there in utter awe of it all, remember that you, yes you, are precious in His sight; that He SO loved this world that He sent His only begotten Son to pay in full the debt of our sin, a debt that we ourselves could never pay. Jesus took on that burden for us, became the surety for our debt, paid it with every drop of His precious blood and, not only that, took that ledger where sins are written down, tore it up and nailed it to the Cross.

Comment:

Lori Watt:
Beautiful!

Comment:

Gaylene Green:
Amazing!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:
Thank you, Kevin.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
That was a tear-jerker, Kevin Crittenden! Thank you.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Were you chopping onions while reading? :-)

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Great verse for evidence of the Bible in Science... "He suspends the earth over nothing."

April 6: Job 27-28 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 14

Poetry reading for 4/06/17

Job 27 & 28

Well, color me embarrassed, folks, for I just realized that in true schnorrer fashion, I have been sadly remiss in not mentioning that I am using as a vade mecum for this study "The Book of Job" by Harold S. Kushner.

Moving on, this week we proceed to Chapter 27 with a continuation of Job's speech to his friends although, as mentioned last week, it isn't always clear who is talking.

In vv. 2-6, Job makes an impassioned and beautiful speech, professing his continued belief in God, his unshakeable integrity and challenging God to live up to His own standards of justice.

vv. 7-23 may be Zophar's missing speech or the rest of Bildad's short speech which continues with the theme of bad things eventually happening to wicked people who live for the moment with no thought of the morrow.

In vv. 7-8 we see that the wicked are synonymous with the godless. There is a choice to be made: you can be numbered with the wicked OR be among those who love and obey God. In Proverbs 8:10, Lady Wisdom says: "Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold. . ."

Behind the words of Lady Wisdom lies the voice of Jesus Christ, who, even now, is knocking at your door, asking: "Will you be a sheep or a goat? How say you?"

In a certain land lived a man who owned flocks of sheep and flocks of goats. At night, the wolves came but the sheep, who knew the sound of their Master's voice, stayed together under His care and were safe. But the goats, knowing not their Master, fled in terror in all directions and were soon scattered. These were marked for destruction by the wolves and banished to the outer darkness where there is much bleating and chewing of cud.

And so we come to Chapter 28 which is a short, beautiful piece of writing on the question of Where wisdom can be found. The most valuable earthly things, precious metals and jewels, are hidden deep in the ground where men work hard, tunnelling through flinty rock to get at them. Men know where to find these precious metals.

But how much more valuable is wisdom? And where can it be found? Certainly not in the same place as precious metals or out in the middle of the vast ocean. And it's not some mere commodity that can be purchased with all your fine gold and silver or precious minerals as Simon tried to do.

Acts 8:18 "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money"

Well, we know how well THAT worked out.

Having raised the question of Where wisdom can be found, the poet now proceeds to answer it. He says no living thing knows where to find wisdom and you won't find it in the netherworld

either. Only God knows where to find wisdom for He is the Creator of All. And He has defined wisdom for us:

Job 28:28 “And he said to the human race, ‘The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.’”

But look also at what Lady Wisdom says in Proverbs 8:22-23:

“The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; 23 I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.”

She and Jesus go way back to the beginning.

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Thus we see that the fear of the Lord – the beginning of Wisdom – always is.

In our culture, we tend to view wisdom as a byproduct of aging. The older we get, the more life experiences we have and the more understanding we gain. Hopefully. I’m still waiting. It may indeed be that the longer we live, the closer we can grow to the Lord and that is where wisdom can be found.

Pr 9:10-12 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

11 For through wisdom your days will be many,
and years will be added to your life.

12 If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you;
if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.

If anyone wants to know where folly may be found, well that’s easy. If wisdom is a byproduct of aging, then it must follow that folly is more pronounced in youth. (He said, speaking from personal experience) This obviously does not apply to everyone. I’m sure that none of you fine folks plowing through this were ever follyful. But we have expressions about the folly of youth. A young man sowing wild oats. Boys will be boys. The sins of my youth. Again, a whole new topic to talk about.

And when a young man’s folly brings consequences, anger is often the result. (I’m just talking about men here; women are a fascinating and beautiful Mystery unto themselves.)

In Shakespeare’s “Anthony and Cleopatra,” Cleopatra says:
“My salad days, when I was green in judgement”

Pr 19:3 “When a man’s folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD.”

So . . . why is Chapter 28 here? It’s lovely and all but how is it connected to the problems of Job? It certainly doesn’t sound like Job talking – Job is wrestling with grief, unhelpful friends and wanting his day in court and this language is much too serene.

Chapter 28, then, is an interlude, written by the poet, just like an intermission at the movies. You can get up and use the restroom or buy more popcorn before re-immersing yourself in the unfolding drama of Job. In 28, the poet, speaking of wisdom, anticipates the ending of Job, giving a taste of the eventual denouement of the story.

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I like how you bring bits of other literature to illustrate points. Thank you. (signed) A fascinating and beautiful Mystery unto myself aka Lori

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! I could use an illustrator to clarify whatever it is I'm trying to say. Any man who says he understands women is probably unfamiliar with them.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Kushner writes some very helpful books! Thank you for your perspective on the perspective!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! Actually, I'm learning a lot; don't know about anybody else.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin Crittenden! We definitely see from today's reading why Job falls in the category of poetry. Can't believe it's week 14!

April 13: Job 29-30 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 15

Poetry reading for 4/13/17

Job 29 & 30

The intermission is now over and we return to Job as he continues his lengthy monologue.

Job 29 and 30 form the bookends of a kind of riches-to-rags story, if you will, in which Job wistfully remembers a time of plenitude and honor (29), followed by the catastrophic plunge of his fortunes into penury and disgrace. (30)

In 29, Job reminisces about the Good Old Days, when he and the Lord were in a good relationship and he was one of the most respected members of the community. He remembers very well how blessed he was before it all fell apart. His reverie once more asserts his piety and his innocence. In keeping with the law and the Hebrew faith, Job cared for the weak and helpless, rescuing the poor, assisting the orphans, and supporting the widows.

Job is a good man who performs many good works; today he is the pious churchgoer who helps the elderly, contributes generously to the poor box, cooks for the basket dinners, sings in the choir, distributes the hymnals, shares his light with his neighbors, is renowned for his acts of charity, sends letters of support to the brethren, prays often and fervently and is a model human being who walks humbly in faith with the Lord.

Does he have a right to expect preferential treatment from God because of his good deeds? Do I? Do you?

Paul tells us in Eph 2:8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Job 29:14 “I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.” This was a way of expressing Job’s close relationship with God. Note the similarity to Eph 6:11 “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes”

Here is a translation done by the poet Stephen Mitchell which beautifully captures this passage:

“If only I could return to the days when God was my
guardian;
when his fire blazed above me and guided me in the
dark ---
to the days when I was in blossom and God was a
hedge around me
when he hadn’t yet deserted me
and my children sat at my side.

As I walked to the square of the city and took my seat
of honor,
Young men held their breath; old men rose to their
Feet;
Rich men stopped speaking and put their fingers to
Their lips.

But all that changes as we descend into Chapter 30.

Here, Job laments his current condition, where he has lost everything – his children, his servants, his livestock, his friends but also, - very high up on the list of Things That Are Really Important - his reputation. His integrity is in question. The Man Of The People is become the Lord of the Flies in the minds of his accusers.

30:1 “But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs.”

Job is depressed – the lowest members of society now laugh at him. But why should he care? Truly, our egos are fragile and we are easily hurt by the remarks and taunts of others. Remember being in Junior High School and having others make fun of your perceived physical shortcomings? We still feel the pain, right? (Note: if you were that bully to others in school, then shame on you! Actually, - better advice – pray that you can now be a comforter for those who suffer at the hands of bullies today.)

When Job was prosperous, he took pride in his accomplishments, sure, but he took more pride in the respect that those accomplishments engendered. And now, people that he formerly hardly noticed, let alone took seriously, were openly mocking him. His former good deeds and glory are unremembered or discounted or questioned.

We remember that the Pharisees were mockers of Jesus’ good deeds and cheerfully strode down the wide road that leads to destruction. They loved to discount the miracles performed by Jesus.

Matt. 12:24 "But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

Job lived in an age where a person's self-worth was largely defined by the amount of respect or scorn that they saw in the eyes of others. If you saw admiration in the eyes of somebody you were talking to, you felt better about yourself. But Job isn't experiencing that anymore.

Job says "Now, shiftless young men, no better than their fathers, roam around like a pack of wild animals. Banished from human society and living wild, they are making fun of me. Even they detest me, now that God has made me His target.

"I am suffering the woes and agonies reserved for the wicked. My God, I cry out to You but You do not answer. Here I stand, O God, will You not answer me? My punishment is more than I can bear. Will You not help me as I cry out in distress? Have I not helped others who were in need? Have I not done good in Your sight? And yet, when I hoped for good, You sent evil. When I needed light, You caused me to grope in the darkness. I have become an outcast, shunned like a leper. No joy is left within me and all I have has turned to torment and wailing."

A sad note to end the week on, but there it is.

Kevin Crittenden lives in an age where a person's self-worth is largely defined by:

By what? What defines OUR self-worth?

Do we feel better about ourselves when we see admiration in the faces of others?

Are we anxious about how many "likes" we get on our Facebook posts?

If somebody is angry with us, or disagrees with us, do we shake internally like a reed in the wind?

Do we compare our (few) accomplishments to what we "should have" accomplished by this age?

Do we worry that other people are smarter, better looking, more talented, better liked than we are?

I've been prone to all the above. Correction. I still am susceptible to all the above. And it carries me to an unhappy place.

So I think that right now would be an appropriate time for prayer:

Dear Jesus, my Precious Lord and Savior, who presented Yourself as the only acceptable sacrifice to pay the ongoing debts of my sin, I pray for a closer walk with You so that I may better understand the depths of your Love for me. I want to take comfort in Your enfolding embrace, Your unconditional acceptance of such a one as I. Help me become less prone to self-abnegation, less concerned about worldly judgement and grow to be more trusting in You.

—

In your precious name I pray, Amen

Comment:

Denise Waits:

Thank you.

Comment:

Bryan Bown:
Amen

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

So true, Kevin Crittenden. I often think of these verses: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." I'm reminded from study earlier in the week, like the Corinthians, when we strive to please self or man, we seek talents which are temporary. God has a more excellent way; one that never fades! Heb 12:1-3, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Question: In chapter 29 Job mentions, "How I long for the months gone by." Last week I was wondering how much time had passed. I think this gives us reference of months. Could someone enlighten me further regarding the time frame of Job? Thanks!

Replies:

Charles Fry:

Job's references to time and duration indicate a prolonged horrific illness with loss of status before his "friends" come on the scene. He didn't come to desperation overnight. Interestingly, the word for "months" in Job is an archaic word not typically used in the Hebrew Bible. But yes, he'd been suffering for months.

Job 7(NIV-WS) 2 Like a slave longing for the evening shadows,
or a hired laborer waiting to be paid,

3 so I have been allotted months of futility,
and nights of misery have been assigned to me.

4 When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?'

The night drags on, and I toss and turn until dawn.

5 My body is clothed with worms and scabs,
my skin is broken and festering.

6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
and they come to an end without hope.

Ginger Hermon:

Charles Fry: thank you!

April 20: Job 31-32 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 16

Poetry reading for 4/20/17

Job 31 & 32

In Job 31, Job finishes his monologue with a series of oaths attesting to his innocence. He is wrapping up his case and presenting it to God with the challenge that God present His indictment against Job.

Why has God been silent all this time? Remember that Job's integrity is being tested; he must not receive any support from God or Satan will claim victory. This is good to remember in our own lives – that our integrity should stand firm in the face of adversity, even when we think that NOW would be a really good time for God to intervene on our behalf. God is indeed present and aware.

I've read somewhere that the definition of integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is looking. I think of those Pharisees in Matthew 23, standing on the street corners with their showy tassels and Scripture verses on their foreheads and arms, acting all godly so they could be seen by men. It makes me wonder: Did they pray when they were alone or only when they had an audience?

Job, however, had no such Pharisaical bents (they hadn't been invented yet); he was indeed a man of integrity and uses chapter 31 to make a series of oaths based upon his integrity. These oaths serve as the capstone to Job's monologue. Job knows what he has and hasn't done. And he knows that God knows.

He starts off with a difficult one:

31:1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman."

Boy, do I want to skip over commenting on this verse. This is a difficult but obvious topic for a men's group. Naturally, we connect this to Matthew 5:28 "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

I remember that when I first started college, blissfully unencumbered by any such covenants that Job made, I walked across campus and fell in lust three times. And the last time I walked across a college campus . . . well, never mind.

Truly, for most men, a young woman's body is the most beautiful and wondrous thing he will ever see in this life. Advertisers use this to great advantage to bend our wills, both men AND women, to their profit.

The point here is that for Job, this covenant he makes with his eyes, before God, is indeed a difficult one for a man. We (men) are strongly visually attracted to women. Which is why dads don't let their daughters out of the house dressed like THAT!

There is much more to be said on this topic – how to live as a man in this sexually permissive culture in a manner pleasing to the Lord and our wives.

31:2-4 "For what is our lot from God above, our heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step?"

Job affirms that God punishes the wicked and is aware of Job's actions. THEREFORE, Job has lived according to a strict moral code and has not sinned against God. He is innocent and undeserving of this punishment.

Job continues with a series of oaths to the effect that he has walked in the truth; that he has never committed adultery; that he has always treated his servants fairly; that he has cared for widows, orphans and the poor; that he has never indulged in idol worship; that he has not

rejoiced at his enemy's misfortune; that he has always been hospitable to strangers; that he has not been hypocritical; and that he has not abused the land nor the workers who cultivate it.

This lengthy insistence, not only of his innocence but also of his exemplary piety, has been termed "the code of the Jewish gentleman." Job sets the standard for living righteously.

You can think of Job as answering the charges made against him by the friends:

22:6 (Eliphaz) "For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing."

31:19-20 (Job) if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or the needy without garments, and their hearts did not bless me for warming them with the fleece from my sheep

22:7-9 (Eliphaz) You gave no water to the weary and you withheld food from the hungry, though you were a powerful man, owning land—an honored man, living on it. And you sent widows away empty-handed and broke the strength of the fatherless.

31:16-17 (Job) "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless—"

So Chapter 31 can be read as a point-by-point rebuttal to Eliphaz and the others. "You say I did THIS and THAT but I didn't do any of those things. Sheesh! "

However, --

Chapter 31 can be spun differently. Let's look at Exodus 22:10-11 –

10 "If anyone gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to their neighbor for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking,
11 the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the Lord that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person's property. The owner is to accept this, and no restitution is required."

Suppose I am Charles' neighbor and he wants to take his family skiing in Missouri. So he's asked me to watch his chickens and ducks while the family is gone. Despite my best efforts (heroic, I might add), a nefarious band of dacoits jacks his waterfowl. When the family returns, an aggrieved Charles might accuse me of stealing them. Standing aghast and feeling indignant at this base accusation, I would immediately offer a demurrer, of course, but, even without proof, he might regard me frostily from then on. If, however, I swore an oath before God that I was innocent, then Charles would need to accept it because it is a fact that God does not tolerate the taking of His name in vain. (The third commandment, Exodus 20:7).

Well, Job wasn't being accused of stealing ducks and chickens BUT he was being accused. Job AND his friends were rock-solid in their belief that God would bring Justice, even if the courts let a guilty defendant go for lack of evidence. The term in rabbinical jurisprudence is, "not guilty in the eyes of the court but culpable in the sight of Heaven."

Job can therefore be thought of as invoking the law delineated in Exodus 22. He is swearing an oath before the Lord attesting to his innocence.

This is Job's last tactic. He invokes God's own law against Him. Because of Job's oath and without presenting proper evidence, God is required to drop all charges against Job.

In 31:35, Job signs his defense and rests his case. The ball is in God's court.

“The words of Job are ended.”

At this point, at the beginning of 32, everyone has fallen silent. So we now hear from a brash young man by name of Elihu, who has been listening patiently throughout. He hasn't said anything yet in deference to his elders.

Elihu is introduced as the son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram. His name, Elihu, means “he is my God.”

One can almost imagine Elihu, sitting on the sidelines, listening attentively to all of these arguments, and impatiently fidgeting, wishing he didn't have to be polite and defer to the wisdom of his elders, wisdom that he is beginning to question because obviously, the three friends are unable to do a better job and have left God looking guilty. Elihu is angry with the friends because of their abject failure and he is also angry with Job for trying to justify himself against God.

Well, everybody has stopped talking so Elihu seizes his opportunity and pops up like a jack-in-the-box. He is not so impatient, however, so as to forget to apologize to his elders for disagreeing with them, as common courtesy and politeness dictate.

All of 32 is devoted to Elihu's rather protracted preamble in which he justifies his necessity to speak.

He says “I am young and you are old (Thanks, Elihu) so I was fearful to say anything. I thought that since you three were older than me, you would speak from more wisdom than I have. However, wisdom is brought by the spirit of God, which gives understanding. So a young person, like yours truly, can also be wise.

“So therefore, listen to me just as I listened to you as you refuted Job's arguments. Oh, snap! I almost forgot. None of you were able to prove Job wrong. You gave up and agreed that God should refute Job, not man. So I'm not going to use your arguments; they didn't work anyway. So much for your wisdom!

“Am I supposed to just sit here and accept that conclusion? No, I'm now going to tell you what I know and rectify this situation. And I'm not going to pull any punches either; I'm going to tell it like it is. I don't do flattery and I don't do partiality.

Elihu has been talking to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in this preamble.

What Job heard: “Blah, blah, blah.” Job is waiting for God's response.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Very good, Brother Kevin. Thank you.

Comment:

Kathleen Munger Crittenden:
Thank you!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Thanks Kevin for not ignoring the subject. It seems because virtually all men have this as a struggle, that both women and men just chalk it up as "that's the way men are". It starts to become the definition of men and then many men don't try as hard to actually deprive themselves by turning away. 31:1 has been my go to verse for many years on this subject. I love it because it separates your eyes from yourself. It's kind of like saying, "OK, eyes I know you know you shouldn't look over there but you just can't help yourself. I will make a promise to you that if you try with all of your might to resist, I, the head will give you some help by turning you away from it." Keep fighting and resisting men! If it helps, use the other really bad quality that you probably have. Being too competitive and hating to lose! Take each battle one at a time and count your wins every time you find the courage to run away from Potiphar's wife.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Marc. This is an area of shame for many and most people don't like being made to examine the things they desperately want to keep private. I wasn't sure how this topic would be received. I truly believe that the less men pay attention to women, the more provocatively women will dress. This is not solely an issue for men. I also think that women are confused about what they want.

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I didn't know Charles wanted to take his family skiing in MO! Shall I send some brochures?

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden;

He'll probably take his chickens and ducks with him.

Charles Fry:

Is MO between CA and the Philippines? 'Cause that's the only trip I'm planning right now.

Lori Watt:

It could be, with just a tiny detour.

April 27: Job 33-34 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 17

Poetry reading for 4/27/17

Job 33 & 34

4/26 Good morning everyone! God's abundant blessings be with you as you study today. Today's reading is (Psalms . . . oh sorry! I cribbed this from Steven.

In Chapter 33, Elihu, having paid his obligatory respects and made his apologies to the three friends, all older and thus supposedly wiser than him, now conveniently forgets all that and speaks as a coeval, directing his comments to Job who seems unattentive. He makes the faux

pas of calling Job by name, unlike the three friends. This may be a mark of undue familiarity bordering on disrespect. Elihu is impatient, wanting all this to be over so he can go back to playing Oregon Trail or watching Wagon Train.

Emulating the future Pericles, he takes center stage and, after pausing for dramatic effect, says: “Job, pay attention! Any minute now I’m about to open my mouth and when I do, know that my words come from an upright heart; I speak sincerely because God has made me. So, answer me this, if you can. Argue your case before me. You and I are both mere mortals so you don’t have to fear me.

“You have said in my hearing ‘ I’m as pure as Ivory Soap and, in fact, clean and free from sin. And yet God has found fault with me.’ In this, Job, you are wrong for God is greater than any of us mortals. And why do you persist in saying that God doesn’t respond? He DOES explain himself, both before and after He punishes us. One of His avenues of communication is through dreams. Those who are contemplating a wicked action will have nightmares so as to hopefully prevent that action.

“Or you might already be suffering and near death BUT may have a Guardian Angel at your side to intercede and tell you how to be upright. The Angel may be gracious and ask God to spare you from going down into the pit; not only that, but you may even be restored to health and vigor again. Then you will go and confess your sin to others and proclaim God’s great mercy.”

You may be wondering about Elihu’s reference to “an angel at their side, a messenger, one out of a thousand, sent to tell them how to be upright”, who can intercede with God for our protection. Where did the concept of a tutelary angel come from?

The Bible itself presents angels as being ministers to carry out God’s Will and interface with men. For instance, Gabriel had to contend with “ the prince of the kingdom of Persia” for 3 weeks before appearing to Daniel. And an angel came to tell Abraham and Sarah that they were going to have a child.

Psalms 91:11 “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”

Ex 32:34” Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

Dan 6:21-22 “Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

So we see that angels are agents of the Lord. Under His direction, they guard and protect us as well as their other duties.

Elihu ends with Job 33:33 - “ . . . be silent, and I will teach you wisdom.” Elihu earlier had said that wisdom comes from the Almighty, (32:8), but now, Elihu will himself dispense wisdom. Not that he’s egotistical or anything.

Job, engrossed in the swimsuit issue of “Modern Pseudepigrapha”, hears: “Blah, blah, blah.” Job is waiting for God’s response.

In Chapter 34, Elihu begins his second speech in the same didactic manner. You will notice that Job makes no response to Elihu. Actually, nobody responds to Elihu.

He says: "Ok you three wise (snarky adjective) guys. Now listen to me because, as Job said back in 12:11, the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. Let's explore this topic together so that we can ALL learn what is good. Job stubbornly maintains his innocence, essentially calling God a liar and furthermore accuses God of denying him justice. Only an arrogant man would speak of God that way which proves his impiety. Can you believe this guy? He associates with evildoers and the wicked (present company excepted, of course) and refuses to honor God because there's no profit in doing so.

"So listen up, guys, far be it from God to do evil. God deals in retributive Justice – He repays everyone for what they have done. Does God pervert justice, as friend Bildad asked in 8:3?

The audience is overcome with a feeling of déjà entendu; they've heard or said all this before.

"Ok, Job, now that I'm in verse 16, I'm going to address myself to you. Are you awake? Please remove your earbuds and listen to what I'm telling you. God governs our world, therefore He must be just and you cannot accuse Him of injustice. Will you condemn God who passes judgement on kings and nobles? He sees everything we do; there is no place to hide your wicked deeds so He has no need to examine people further, there's no need to come before Him in court to present your case. God gets around to everyone sooner or later and it's not up to us to judge Him. He will judge us. So if God decides to remain silent, who can blame Him.

"Now suppose someone, oh . . . you perhaps . . . says to God 'I'm guilty but promise to be good from now on', he might be rewarded. But why should God do that if you won't confess your sin? It's really up to you to decide."

Job, taking an intense interest in his fingernails, hears: "Blah, blah, blah." Job is waiting for God's response.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

It's often hard to pick one FB emoticon for these, when I want 🤔👉👍🤔🤔🤔🤔 or some such.

The first time I remember studying Job in a group, in my teens, I remember the idea being put forth by another teen that it took the young guy to get it right. But of course, once you get past the window dressing and disclaimers, the younger man brings no new insights to the discussion, and like the other three insists all of this is Job's own fault, if he will only admit it.



Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

An attitude amongst the modern flash that seems to be thriving today! " If only the entrenched old guys who run things would understand how things should work . . ."

Comment:

Lori Watt:

I somehow feel a strange connections to Elihu.....

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You and he both were influenced by Horace Greeley - "Go west, young people! Get outta here! Oregon isn't far enough but it'll do."

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:

That was an enjoyable read-content, wit, vocabulary. I had to look up four words!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! From now on, I'll just include the definitions of words that you are unfamiliar with. ^-^

LuAnn Woody:

I really enjoy making the acquaintance of new-to-me words.

Kevin Crittenden:

As I explain to my ESL class, an increased vocabulary is similar to painting a picture with 100 colors of paint instead of 10. There are delicious nuances depending on the words used. However, in these lucubrations (you're welcome), I run the risk of being thought pedantic.

LuAnn Woody:

Thanks! I don't think you are pedantic- not even semipedantic. That is a good analogy about colors/words.

Kevin Crittenden:

I like to use colorful language. :-)

Charles Fry:

I was doing fine reading along until you lucubrated in broad daylight.

Kevin Crittenden:

Some people have no shame.

Steven Wright:

Didacticus!

Kevin Crittenden:

Gesundheit!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks for that brud! I too relate with Elihu. Crib on bro!

May 4: Job 35-36 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 18

Poetry reading for 5/04/17

Job 35 & 36

Good morning, evening, afternoon All! As Elihu's speeches continue in chapters 35 and 36, ponder a bit about his relationship and interaction so far with Job and the three friends. And now, in answer to a steadily diminishing number of requests, back to our story:

Pausing to take a drink of water from the glass on the lectern, Elihu now hurtles onward like a runaway freight train into his third speech where he makes the point that 1) God does not profit from our righteousness nor 2) does he suffer from our wrongdoing, a point that Job had posed in 7:20. So why does God either reward or punish us? Because of His dedication to goodness.

Elihu turns his gaze on Job, who is seated in the corner, thoughtfully stroking Bildad's beard, and says "Job, do you think it's right to ask God: 'Why should I not sin? What profit do I gain from that?'"

"Well, I want to reply to you, in fact to all of you. How does your sinning affect God? And how does your righteousness profit Him? Your actions, good or bad, only affect other people.

"People who are suffering cry out to God for relief but no one asks Where is God. God does not answer; he pays no attention to the empty cries and prayers of people who have no consciousness of their sin. How much less, then, Job, will He listen to you when you say your case is before Him with the confidence that His anger never punishes and that He takes no notice of your wickedness.

"So Job rambles on and on, endlessly, without knowing what he is talking about."

Job, inditing a letter to his lawyer in re his wife (who had advised him to curse God and die), hears: "Blah, blah, blah." Job is waiting for God's response.

I think we've all had a few people in our lives who haven't mastered the fine art of shutting up and listening. They natter on and on, mostly about themselves, while we are desperately trying to find a polite way to escape from their clutches. If anyone out there knows a good Biblical response to this situation, short of faking a seizure, I would love to hear it.

So what do you think? God is All-powerful. Do you agree with Elihu that He is unaffected by our sin? And that our righteousness does nothing for Him? Do our actions affect God? Or just other people?

Job 36

Here, Elihu presses on into his fourth speech, driven forward by the momentum of impetuous and idealistic youth, absolutely certain of his convictions. The world is much more black-and-white when you are young and it is very frustrating when others (i.e. older people) can't immediately "get it." (I'll type this slowly so you'll understand: Old = mentally feeble.)

Elihu knows that he is running overtime but asks his audience to bear with him a bit longer. As if they had a choice.

He says in 36:2 “Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said in God’s behalf.”

In this, he may conjure up images of your pedantic high school History teacher, droning on and on and on in a dry monotone about people and places that you never heard of nor cared about nor long remembered. Did you watch the clock in that class and silently will the second hand to move at faster than a glacial pace? A teacher at my high school had a sign around his classroom clock that read “Time will pass. Will you?”

Elihu says comfortingly (36:4) - “one who has perfect knowledge is with you.” His cocksure manner and self-conceit fill the arena, now that he’s undergone a personal apotheosis. He speaks for God, you know.

Elihu says, essentially, that God punishes evildoers and protects the righteous. In 36:15 he says “But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.” Sometimes God inflicts suffering on the innocent to cause them to grow by asking “What have I done to deserve this?” as Job is doing. We see this reflected in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:71 “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”

Also, we remember Paul’s famous thorn in the flesh:

2 Cor 12:6-10 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

As was mentioned back in the notes for Chapter 9, C.S. Lewis explained that pain is the chisel that God uses to shape His people into their full capacity, helping them become deeper, wiser and stronger. And indeed, through personal suffering, many unexpected blessings may come, such as the ability to feel compassion and empathy.

I am reminded of Kathleen’s father, LeRoy Munger, who underwent heart surgery. Afterwards, he volunteered with the Mended Hearts Association and visited patients in hospitals who were about to undergo similar surgeries. Who better to give comfort than someone who has been through the experience? I learned many good things about being a man, a father, a husband and a Christian from him.

Verse 16 says: “He is wooing you from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food.” Elihu makes the point that God is asking Job to submit to His discipline which will lead to restored prosperity, a significant trope in the Book of Job.

Elihu concludes Job 36 by using examples from Nature to show God’s greatness; the rainfall cycle, lightning and storms. Very often, examples from Nature are used to showcase God’s mighty power. Whirlwinds, storms, fire, clouds, earthquakes, stars, . . . Can you think of examples (other than from Nature) which showcase God’s mighty power?

Job, leafing through a glossy brochure about a gated retirement community in Harran, hears: "Blah, blah, blah." Job is waiting for God's response.

Comment:

Lori Watt:

Does our righteousness affect God? Zeph. 3:17: "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

Comment:

Lori Watt:

Something that keeps crossing my mind: if we had a friend-- a strong Christian who (from all we know) follows God's word and does all the "right things"-- tell us he had done no wrong and had not sinned against God... what would we think?

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Good point! Ask him to walk on water? Could we believe him or would we secretly think that he was deluded about his own actions. Certainly, a statement like that would point to pride. Or would he merely be stating a simple fact? Would we feel necessary to test him to indulge our own judgemental attitude? Probably best to accept him at his word and let God sort it out. And THAT would be most difficult for us.

Charles Fry:

One who does all the "right things". This puts me in mind of a man who spoke to Jesus about inheriting eternal life. Jesus told him "You know the commandments..." to which the young man replied, "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy." Now, Jesus could have contradicted him, could have argued with him, could have shown him his failures in REALLY keeping the commandments, but what Mark says happened is "Jesus looked at him and loved him." And he told him he needed to sell his stuff, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. But it's really important, that comment, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." (Mark 10:21)

Apart from Elihu saying that Job said he hadn't sinned, did Job really say that? He said, "How many wrongs and sins have I committed? Show me my offense and my sin... you write down bitter things against me and make me reap the sins of my youth..." (Job 13:23, 26). Or, "Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?" (Job 7:21) Several times Job acknowledged his own imperfections, but he worked at doing the right thing, and the idea that he was suddenly being chastised by God for some great sin didn't equate. He hadn't done anything egregiously wrong, hadn't changed his behavior, hadn't been guilty of some new heinous crime, as they all, including Elihu, insisted must have been true. Job knew of no new departure from righteousness on his own part to merit the enormous shift in his life.

Many times in my own experience I've answered someone who asked, "what did I do to deserve this?" with intended consolation that they had not likely done anything to "deserve" what they were going through. Sometimes people's suffering is self induced, but often there is no "cause and effect" equation, no easily rationalized "karma," to clarify a just and deserved reason for suffering. Broadly, it's all about sin and a fallen world, but personally, it is often difficult to discern specific reasons.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You're welcome, Butch!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
As Lori noted, our behavior does affect God in the sense that he genuinely cares about us, and he genuinely has feelings. He is not affected in the sense of needing anything from us, or being made stronger by human worship or weaker by human disobedience. Humans cannot make God bigger or smaller, stronger or weaker, smarter or more foolish, but can please him or displease him, bring joy or sadness.

May 11: Job 37-38 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 19
Poetry reading for 5/11/17
Job 37 & 38

Hello again! I'm posting this a bit early - things to do and all that.

In our reading of the book of Job, we have come now to the place where the three friends are silent, the words of Job are ended, and, in 37, Elihu makes his concluding remarks.

A question for you: In reading through Job, do you think that the author's sympathies lie with the friend's arguments (defending God) or with Job's arguments (questioning God)?

Elihu finishes up his closing arguments to the jury by again showcasing God's Omnipotence through examples from Nature. In 37:5, he says "God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding."

God's ways and thoughts are indeed beyond our understanding. We see this in Isaiah 55:8-9

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

We see it as well in the Doxology found in Romans 11:33-36:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?

35 "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"

36 For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Personally, I find it both frustrating and oddly comforting to realize that even good understanding, let alone great or perfect understanding, is not in my wheelhouse. Should we even try to increase our understanding, knowing its ultimate futility? (We will return to this in Ecclesiastes).

Back to Elihu. Who is this guy? He magically appears after Job rests his case at the end of chapter 31 and fills chapters 32 through 37 with rhetoric. Nobody responds to Elihu, neither Job nor Eliphaz nor Bildad nor Zophar. More tellingly, in Job 42:7 God says to Eliphaz "I am angry with you and your TWO friends" meaning Bildad and Zophar. Even God does not mention Elihu. Why?

One could view the Elihu chapters as being extensions of the friend's arguments. If the author of Job saw fit to end the defense of God with these chapters, he must have thought them to be the most persuasive of all the arguments. So Elihu must be defending God with arguments not presented by the other three friends.

There is another view. Perhaps you have heard of the phenomenon known as *l'esprit d'escalier*, the clever remark that occurs to one as one is leaving a gathering. You know, the thought that makes you say to yourself, "I wish I had thought of that! It would have been perfect!" So one idea is that the author of Job, later in life, thought of more arguments, so went back and reworked the character of Elihu into his masterpiece.

And thirdly, modern critics feel that Elihu is an interloper, those chapters having been added later by someone who might have thought, "Had I been there, I could have made a more persuasive case for God than did the three friends." There are great disparities of style and diction and they are deemed inferior to the rest of the Poem of Job.

Robert Gordis calls him "Elihu the intruder" and continues on to say "the effort required to understand the Elihu speeches is all out of proportion to the profundity of thought."

Robert Alter says "the plausible consensus is that it is an interpolation, the work of another poet . . . The poetry he speaks is by and large not up to the level of the poetry of the debate . . . and there is a whole series of Hebrew terms that appear only in the Elihu speeches."

And right here I need to stop and address a concern. I am concerned that bringing up this possibility may raise hackles in some of you because of the verse in 2 Tim:

2Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This would mean that Elihu is in the book of Job because God wants him there. Period. But then what shall we say about Mark 16:9-20?

Anyway, I am sorry if exploring topics like these causes any distress.

For those wishing to delve far more deeply into Elihu, see <https://www.dbts.edu/journals/1997/eliu.pdf>

Job 38 - The Storm

David, in Psalm 26, says:

- 1 Vindicate me, Lord,
for I have led a blameless life;
I have trusted in the Lord
and have not faltered.
- 2 Test me, Lord, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind;
- 3 for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.

Of course, Job did not ASK to be tested but he certainly wants God to vindicate him or at least tell him what sin he has committed.

And now that everyone's done talking, *mirabile dictu*, God manifests. This is the theophany that Job had been hoping for.

Job 38:1 "Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm."

The storm provides a sensory emphasis on God's mighty power and helpfully provides something for Job and his friends to see. Perhaps you remember this as being ". . . out of the whirlwind."

In other interactions between people and God or His representatives, often the initial reaction is fear. But no mention is made of that in Job's case. Or Moses, for that matter.

Ex 20:19 "And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!"

It may be that people who "fear God" aren't as afraid of God as people who don't fear God. Does that make sense?

Job's question to God is essentially Why do the innocent suffer and, more specifically, why am I made to suffer?

God's response is brilliant, as expected. He never disappoints.

God immediately takes control of the situation and turns the tables on Job; God will pose questions to him. Verse 3:

"Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me."

In fact, God leads off with a question to Job: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?" Job does not understand God's divine plan for the universe.

38:4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!" God is emphasizing Job's humanity and showcasing his limitations; only God could know and do the things mentioned.

Chpt 38 marks the first use of God's personal name, YHWH, in the Poem of Job. This is the name shared with Moses at the burning bush, which presaged the liberation of Israel from slavery and bringing them into a new relationship with a Redeemer God. The use of this name here in 38 may presage a new and deeper relationship between God and Job.

When Job and the friends were talking ABOUT God, they used the more abstract terms – El, Elohim, Shaddai. But when Job is talking WITH God, the relationship is a more personal one.

Martin Buber distinguishes between theology, the intellectual contemplation of the nature of God, and religion, the life-altering experience of actually being in the presence of God. It's like the difference between reading a menu and having dinner. Theology can inform and enlighten, but only religion can nourish us.

The Book of Job has turned from theology to religion.

God has not come to explain Himself or answer Job's questions. Pope says "God does not need the help or advice of impatient and ignorant mortals to control the world any more than He needed them to create it."

We remember Isaiah 45:11-12

11 "This is what the Lord says—
the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker:
Concerning things to come,
do you question me about my children,
or give me orders about the work of my hands?
12 It is I who made the earth
and created mankind on it.
My own hands stretched out the heavens;
I marshaled their starry hosts.

God is the only One who can perform such majestic works.

Job 38:8-11
8 "Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
9 when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
10 when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
11 when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt'?

God represents safety and security; He keeps the destructive and chaotic powers of the sea in check so that it may not inundate the land with its catastrophic power. The fear of destruction by water may be ingrained in racial memory due to the Flood, the most calamitous event in human history.

Jeremiah speaks to the power of God over the sea in Jer 5:22
Do you not fear me? declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it.

Note that human beings, the Crown of Creation, are not mentioned, possibly to illustrate the point that the Universe is much, much vaster than we are. (Add many more "muches" to that sentence.)

38:41 "Who provides food for the raven, when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food." This verse supports the idea that even the animals are aware of God's providence and know to trust in it. This idea came up in 12:7-10.

7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
8 or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
9 Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
10 In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

This week, let us take comfort in the knowledge that we, too, are cared for and reap the benefits of God's providence.

Matt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Have a great week!

<https://www.dbts.edu/journals/1997/elihu.pdf>

Comment:

Kimra Grantham Robinson:
Love 37:5. Humbling AND empowering!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, brother Kevin!

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Who was God speaking of when he asked, "Who is this..." in Job 38:2? Not Job, in my opinion, since v3 directly addresses Job as "you." Who had just stopped speaking when God started speaking? Elihu. Did Job apply the question to himself? Yes, in 40:4-5 and 42:1-6. However, that displays Job character and convictions, the sort of godly man he was as described in chapters 1 and 2. Nevertheless, God indicates Job survived the testing Satan put him through with his integrity intact in 42:7-9. I do not think God was rebuking Job with the question, or particularly trying to humble him, though Job readily admitted his profound ignorance in the presence of God. I do think God intended to stir a renewed sense of wonder in Job, to remind him of grace and beauty, which had been dulled in his perceptions during his recent months of suffering and loss. It seems to me that God is not so much saying to Job, "behold my power and be afraid," as saying, "consider all the beauty and grandeur of what I made and care for. I delight in it, you should too. You don't have to understand it all to see the grace and beauty."

Comment:

Charles Fry:
A comment about the writing of Job:

The book of Job gives specifics as to general location and the identities of Job and friends, but the reference points are somewhat obscure to us now. The references were surely meaningful to the original audience, but we can only surmise connections with other Biblical and historical names. The impression is that the events occurred in the days of the patriarchs, the timeframe of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but we can't determine exactly when. The general impression is that the people involved were not Hebrews, but like Melchizedek and Salem in Abraham's day, monotheism still prevailed in their worldview, and they had not forgotten the account of creation or the flood. There is no way of knowing how the story of Job was preserved for later generations, but a time did come when the events were arranged as we have them, including prologue, epilogue, the cycles of speeches, and that includes Elihu.

There is no textual evidence for an account of Job without Elihu, only subjective literary speculation. One of the most brilliant and insightful scholars of Hebrew and the Old Testament I've ever met, Professor David Noel Freedman, editor of the Anchor Bible series, concluded and wrote that the author of Job was the author of the Elihu speeches and their connective observations and comments. I would not attribute any sort of blind or narrow doctrinal faith to Professor Freedman, his conclusions were based on careful analysis, but I mention him because many of his conclusions about the Hebrew Bible do integrate very well with my own convictions.

I suspect that while Job's experiences happened hundreds of years before David and Solomon's time, it is quite likely that Job, the book in its Scriptural form as we know it, entered the sacred canon. We know from Samuel/Kings/Chronicles that there was a great deal of prophetic activity in that time frame, including much writing of both historical annals and poetry/songs for the United Kingdom and the temple liturgy, with a robust epoch of associated priestly and Levite activity. We know that Solomon actively gathered wisdom literature at that time (these things are all alluded to in the Bible), and that he kingdom of Israel was at its apex of wealth, power, and geographic extent. Job most like entered the Hebrew corpus in those days, and very likely was reworked into the memorable poetic form we know by one of the prophets associated with the royal court or temple. As to its legitimate place in scripture, including the Elihu speeches, there is no doubt of its place in the Hebrew and Greek Bibles of both Jews and Christians, and no doubt that the events of the story have always been regarded as real events involving real people, including the arguments, including Elihu. All available evidence points to the authenticity of the entire book of Job in the Jewish and Christian canon of scripture. Which, considering its nonJewish hero is really quite remarkable, and a strong hint of divine purpose in itself.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Charles! The writer of Job, most likely an Israelite himself, took great pains to portray Job as Everyman to show the timelessness and universality of the questions and struggles that all people have to some degree. The lessons of the wisdom books point to the same thing:

Job says:

Job 28:28 "And he said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

What does Proverbs tell us?

Pr 9:10-12 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

And what does Ecclesiastes conclude?

Ecc 12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

The beginning of wisdom AND the conclusion of wisdom is the same.

May 18: Job 39-40 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 20

Poetry reading for 5/18/17

Job 39 & 40

Hello again!

In Chapter 39, God continues to catechize Job with unanswerable questions, driving home the point that God's plan is unknown and unknowable by mere humans. We've seen this in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

God is in charge, He is the One who comprehends everything, the One who formed everything so we need to learn to trust in Him.

God expounds on examples from the animal kingdom in the last verses of both 38 and 39. Some of the animals that God mentions are useful to man and some are not. God's Creation extends beyond man's needs.

It is one thing to read these verses and take them in intellectually but quite another to PROCESS these words in our hearts. I look outside my window at the birds contending with each other at the bird feeders. I can marvel at their agility, their quickness, their sharp vision, their beauty, their communication through chirps and displays. The greatest joy I get from watching birds is not through trying to understand the mechanics of flight or beak and feather evolution but just to watch them and to share in the joy of their existence. God has made a beautiful Creation and it gives Him joy to share its beauty with us. So let us take time to marvel at everything around us and see its goodness.

God ends His first speech with 40:2 "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Job had wanted a chance to present his case and now his time has come. But what can he say?

Job replies, not by listing his grievances, but by apologizing.

40:4-5 "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you?

I put my hand over my mouth.

5 I spoke once, but I have no answer –

Twice, but I will say no more."

The action of covering your mouth with your hand shows that you know you are in the presence of someone much greater and more worthy than yourself. To speak in such circumstances would be presumptuous.

Job mentioned this previously in 29:7-10

7 “When I went to the gate of the city
and took my seat in the public square,
8 the young men saw me and stepped aside
and the old men rose to their feet;
9 the chief men refrained from speaking
and covered their mouths with their hands;
10 the voices of the nobles were hushed,
and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths.

Chapters 38 and 39 are a wonderfully written tribute to God’s power. But God’s power was never in question. Job and his friends all agreed that God has immense power. It is God’s fairness and goodness that are in question.

Would God let bad things happen to undeserving people because He is not constrained by issues of fairness or people’s unhappiness?

Job’s lament has been, “What can I do? It’s His Creation and He can do what He wants. I was just hoping that He would treat good people kindly. “

If the Book of Job ended here, we would be left with the answer that “Yes, the world is unfair but what can we do about it?” God would have intimidated Job into withdrawing his challenge and we would be left without an answer to his question, Why do good people suffer?

But God’s not finished with Job (or us) yet. He continues in 40:7 repeating His challenge to Job:

7 “Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.”

God will now in His second speech introduce two monsters, Behemoth (from the Hebrew behemah, “beast”) and Leviathan, both extremely powerful, impossible for humans to control, and dangerous. We’re done talking about cute does giving birth to their fawns. (39:1)

The creature God calls Behemoth is thought to be modeled after a hippopotamus; it’s an amphibious beast that eats grass and is the fiercest land animal.
40:19 “It ranks first among the works of God, yet its Maker can approach it with his sword.”

Behemoth is first, not in time but in strength and awe. Only God can subdue this monster and even HE carries a sword.

40:24 “Can anyone capture it by the eyes . . .” can be thought of as “can anyone capture it when it is looking at you.”

We will meet Leviathan next week.

The point is: both these beasts are representative of the Creation, which Job has no ability to control, direct or manage.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Indeed, "God has made a beautiful Creation and it gives him joy to share its beauty with us."
And, "God's Creation extends beyond man's needs." Amen brother! And thank you for this fine study today!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, St. Eve. Next week's post will be bigger and bolder, with added words, and comes with a new look! I'm adding bleach, borax and brighteners.
And, by the way, your new word is the noun "hendiadys." That should keep you nice and warm.

Marc Hermon:

I crossed off the "possibly hippopotamus or elephant" note on this chapter and "possibly crocodile" note for chapter 41. They sound an awful lot like what men use to call dragons and what we have called dinosaurs since the year 1842. I've never seen a hippopotamus's tail swing like a cedar.



Kevin Crittenden:

Actually, come to think of it, I've never seen a cedar swing. The identities of Behemoth and Leviathan as hippo and croc come from the notes in my NIV Zondervan Study Bible (the printed notes, not my scrawls). Behemoth is the fiercest land animal; Leviathan the most awesome water creature. Whatever they are or whatever they represent, the point is that Job cannot control them. He cannot subdue these forces.
Also, even a mighty cedar starts out as a sapling, tiny like the hippo's tail.

Steven Wright:
Who is St. Eve?

Steve Wright:
Just tell me plain and simple!

Kevin Crittenden:
That would be Chrissy: Plain and Simple

May 25: Job 41-42 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 21

Poetry reading for 5/25/17

Job 41 & 42

Hello All!

This will be our final week in Job, as we read the last chapters of the book, which we find we won't be able to put down until we're done. So leave those dirty dishes in the sink, let the grass grow a little longer, and get comfy with your Bible as you turn with me to the book of Job, chapter 41.

Last week, we met the fierce creature known as Behemoth; this week, God continues his questioning of Job by introducing a second monster, Leviathan, a powerful and dangerous water creature.

Leviathan seems, by some, to represent a fearsome crocodile on steroids. As Behemoth is the fiercest land creature, Leviathan is the most fearsome water creature. Both these brutes are chthonic creatures that only God can subdue. Job has no control over these nightmare beasts, a point that God drives solidly home through His series of questions. I can almost visualize Job shrinking back.

I do wonder, though, if Behemoth and Leviathan could possibly represent those dark, damaging, psychological forces lurking in the shadows within us, a deontologopathy that drives our worldly desires and furtive actions; damnable forces which breach our defences and to which we capitulate from time to time.

Is this, then, what Paul is alluding to in Romans?

Rom 7:15-20 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

We've met Leviathan before, described as a dragon, in Isaiah 27:1

"In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea."

Sometimes Leviathan is used as a symbol of the wicked one who opposes God, as in Psalm 74:14. "You crushed the heads of Leviathan; You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness."

We remember the reference in Gen 3:15 where God pronounces judgement on Satan, saying that "he [man] will crush your head."

Note the plural form of “heads” in Psalms which reminds us of Hydra, the many-headed serpentine water monster in Greek mythology. Whether Crocodile, Dragon, Hydra or Satan, Job has no control over it.

Even earlier, though, we have met Leviathan.

Gen 1:21 (JPS) “And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good.”

Both Behemoth and Leviathan were created by God as a necessary part of His Creation. And His Creation was good. Why were (are) they necessary?

God asks Job:

41:5 “Can you make a pet out of it like a bird or put it on a leash for the young women in your house?”

Who says God doesn’t have a sense of humor? But can we easily discount this question?

God’s question may seem innocuous enough but it puts me in mind of the great forces that we want to control today without sufficient knowledge or wisdom or guidance. Nuclear power. Biological agents. CRISPR/Cas-9. GMOs. More stuff you don’t know about. We may think we are holding the reins on Leviathan but it is going where it wants to go. And sometimes it goes on a rampage. (Fukushima Daiichi)

God says:

41:11 “Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.”

Job has implied that God owes him something and God refutes him by reminding Job that since everything belongs to God, God makes the rules. He is in charge.

This point is made in the Doxology of Romans 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?”

36 For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

It is good to remember that whatever blessings we have, whatever luxuries we enjoy, whatever comforts us and gives joy to our lives – all that comes from God.

But God wants to address Job’s question, essentially “Why do good people suffer?”

God’s world needs His constant attention – his involvement and intervention. God is telling Job to behold His two creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, who are responsible for the bad things that happen, the misery that good people encounter.

But God needed both of these creatures to be a part of His world.

You can think of Behemoth as the Primal Life Force that gives people the impetus to do things, whether for good or evil. It is Eros, the force that brings people to seek their mates and

produce children. It is the drive to do better and be competitive. Part of this Force is the human ability to choose an action over instinct. People can choose to go hungry, they can choose to employ their conscience to act according to a sense of right and wrong over instinct.

To have the power to choose good, we also need the power to choose evil, thus harming or destroying others. Without Behemoth, without the freedom to act selfishly and choose wickedness, you might have obedience but not goodness. Behemoth is necessary for free will.

You can think of Leviathan as the Force of Chaos. Chaos, randomness, plays a part in our world. You decide to drive a different way to work and experience a flat tire whereupon the tow-truck driver later becomes your husband. Many crucial events in our lives came about through randomness.

Leviathan, Chaos, shows up in natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis and the like. They are (so far) unpredictable and are responsible for the suffering of many, many good people. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. Some people preached that this disaster was a punishment from God because of gay pride events. But I personally don't agree. Many innocents were lost; Chaos is an element of the world we live in.

The world we live in, the world that God had in mind, needs to have both Behemoth and Leviathan, ambition and randomness and all the harm that those can cause.

God has given us the freedom to choose between good and evil, the freedom to choose, as we will see in Proverbs, between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. Our ability to choose is precious in God's sight; He wants us to freely and joyfully align to His will and be willing and conscious participants in our own salvation.

In 42, the final chapter of Job, Job replies to God's second speech by acknowledging his submission and concession to the overwhelming power of God.

Job 42:1-6

Then Job answered the Lord and said:

2 "I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;

6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

Job has proven himself worthy of God's confidence in him. Job's knowledge is adequate, he doesn't need to know everything about the universe or God's Creation, he just needs to know that God is the Lord of the universe who can do all things.

42:5 “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” Theology has given over to Religion.

Job concludes his remarks in 42:6 “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

This concluding remark of the Poem of Job, the key to understanding the book, is given in 7 Hebrew words, which are untranslatable with any degree of certainty.

Al ken em’as v’nihamti al afar v’efer. (42:6)

King James translation renders it: “Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
The Revised Standard Version: “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
My NIV Version: “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

These translations imply that Job was admitting that God was right and Job was a sinner for doubting Him.

But there are issues with this. “Dust and ashes” never refers to a location (firepit) but rather is a synonym for human frailty and mortality.

Al ken means “therefore.”

Afar v’efer means “dust and ashes.”

The verb em’as: can mean to refuse, to reject, to deem worthless.

What is Job rejecting? Perhaps the answer is in the second verb, nihamti.

Nihamti – To be sorry, to console oneself, to have compassion for others, to repent for what one has done, and to be comforted.

Stephen Mitchell takes the first half of the verse to mean “Therefore I consider worthless [everything I have said to this point].” It is Job’s uninformed arguments, not Job himself, that deserve to be rejected.

For the second half of the verse, Mitchell notes that the verb nahem is used ten times in the book of Job, and in every one of them without exception, it means “to comfort or console,” never “to repent”.

6:10 Then I would still have this consolation

7:13 When I think my bed will comfort me

16:2 you are miserable comforters, all of you

21:34 So how can you console me with your nonsense?

He translates that last line as “I am comforted about being mortal.”

Harold Kushner would translate 42:6, then, as

“I reject [everything that has been said to this point by me and my visitors] and [having met God and been reassured that I am not alone and abandoned in this world] I am comforted, vulnerable human being that I am.”

God now expresses His anger towards Eliphaz and his two friends because they have not spoken the truth about Him as Job has. They are to go to Job and offer a hefty sacrifice. God is doing this partly as a means of mending fences between Job and his friends. They were friends before this experience but the experience has created a major rift between them. Hopefully, that rift can be healed.

Matt 5:23-24 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

To finish off the book, Job's fortunes are restored, his siblings come and comfort him with gifts of silver and gold rings. His flocks swell greatly and he has seven sons and three daughters, who are named and described as beautiful. The daughters also receive an inheritance, along with their brothers. Job lived a full life, reaching the age of 140, surrounded by his family.

What we have been doing is conducting a Biblical exegesis of the Book of Job. The Book of Job is written in such a way as to invite you into the discussion and I invite you to continue pondering its meanings.

I have learned a lot in leading this study, THANK YOU, and it is my hope that you, having pondered the book, are not the same person you were when you started. I'm hoping that at least once you've said to yourself "I've never thought of it that way before."

Next week we will (finally!) move on to our next book, Proverbs.

Job 28:28 "And he said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

The words of Kevin are ended.

Soli Deo gloria!

Now for those of you with time on their hands, I want to leave you and Job with one last thought which I find intriguing.

In Genesis 22, we have the story of the near-sacrifice of Abraham's son, Isaac. This is a story that you are all familiar with. God stays Abraham's hand at the last second; Isaac is saved to become the progenitor of nations; and Abraham is found to be God-fearing. The story has a good ending but we may be troubled by God's unethical demand to slaughter Abraham's son and Abraham's seemingly unquestioning compliance with this morally perplexing decree.

Like Elihu said, bear with me, I'm getting there.

Right after the story about the binding of Isaac, Genesis 22:20-23 talks about Nahor's sons:

20 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milkah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor:

21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram),

22 Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel."

23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milkah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor.

Some of these names are links to the Book of Job where they appear as place names.

Job lived in Uz.

Elihu was the son of Barachel the Buzite.

Kesed (Cesed) also gets a nod in Job 1:17 "This one was still speaking when another came and said 'A Chaldean formation, Casdim (plural of Cesed), of three columns made a raid on the camels and carried them off and put the boys to the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.'"

In the account of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham is deemed God-fearing at the END of the story. In the Book of Job, Job is described as God-fearing at the BEGINNING of the story.

Therefore, in a sense, the Book of Job is a sequel to the story of Abraham and Isaac. In the story of Isaac, no children were harmed. The sequel, Job, concerns itself with the "what if". What if – as often happens in the real world – the decree is not miraculously repealed at the last moment and the innocent actually suffer? What might Abraham had said if he was forced to go through with the act of sacrificing his son? Would he protest the injustice? Would God tolerate his objections? Might God reverse or apologize for this undeserved human anguish?

The Book of Job addresses these issues; Job losing not one but ten children.

Shalom.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

We have all been blessed by your willingness to take on this good mission.

Comment:

Denise Waits:

Excellent, Kevin. Thank you so much.

Comment:

Sandy Buchanan:

One of the things that really stands out from today's verses is the importance God saw in choice. We see government trying to enforce morality, but it really comes down to each individual being responsible for their choices and decisions, regardless of what is currently legislated as "legal" where we live. Government is necessary, but the higher authority asks each of us to make our choices that may or may not align with politics. Jesus taught to help and serve each other, to love each other...the greatest of these is love. So, each day we have many choices of how we can love and put someone else's needs first.

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Poetry

June 1: Proverbs 1 (Kevin Crittenden)

PROVERBS STUDY

Week 22

Poetry Reading for 6/1/17

Proverbs 1

1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .”

9:4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

Hello and welcome to the reading of Proverbs! For my comments, I am leaning on the wisdom in the book by Raymond C. Orland Jr. entitled “Proverbs: Wisdom that Works.”

By the way, most of the proverbs that I cite are from the NIV and ESV, except when they aren't.

Many of you have read Proverbs, perhaps several times and maybe there are some bits of wisdom that really resonate with you. Other proverbs seem “odd” or don't make much sense. Certainly, they read like a grocery shopping list, items listed as the person thought of them, with no particular direction or association to the ones around them.

Why Proverbs?

The Law and the Prophets are two of the ways that God speaks to us in the Old Testament, laying out the general patterns of the righteous life. But our lives are filled with daily concerns and decisions that must be made.

Who should I marry?

What kinds of friends should I make and which kinds of people should I avoid? Which would be the better job offer to accept?

How shall I invest my money?

How do I treat my neighbor?

And this is what Proverbs is about – God's Wisdom given to us to act as principles to follow in our daily lives. God knows that we need help and guidance in our day-to-day existence and He provides for His children.

You will not, however, find the knowledge necessary to build a fence in Proverbs. But you WILL find the wisdom not to build your fence at 7 in the morning when the neighbors are still asleep.

Prov 27:14 “If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.”

We need to know these things. Our neighbors want us to know these things.

James 3:13-18 reminds us that there are two kinds of wisdom, one that leads to Life and other down to death.

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Peter was using the wrong kind of wisdom in Matthew 16:21-23 and was sharply rebuked by Jesus for it.

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Our natural wisdom of self-preservation points to the survival of the ego but the wisdom of the Cross frees us from the distortions of our pride and points the way to resurrection and new life. We look to Proverbs for this wisdom.

The collections of proverbs began as a teaching tool for the training of leaders in ancient Israel and were written by kings and sages in the royal court for young men whose future was to be part of the nobility. You and I may not be destined to hobnob with the aristocracy but we can ascend to that level of greatness and leadership, not by our own efforts and earthly wisdom, but through God’s way, through the Cross, through humility.

An old poem reads:

When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man
And skill a man
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part

When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!

How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into shapes and forms of clay
Which only God can understand

How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes

How He uses whom He chooses
And with mighty power infuses him
With every act induces him
To try His splendor out –
God knows what He's about.

Wisdom is the gospel of Christ reshaping even us for royalty, as God places us on his anvil and we trust Him enough to stay there until His work is done.

Royalty, you say? Me? Yes.

1 Pet 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

With your kind permission, I’ll skip the Who Wrote What in Proverbs – mostly they’re written by Solomon but all represent God’s wisdom to enhance our lives.

Vv 1:1-7 present us with the purpose and the theme of Proverbs.

A proverb is a short saying of practical truth, which is a bit of wisdom, easily remembered. “He who hesitates is lost”, “Look before you leap.” We all know these.

Biblical proverbs are also sound-biteish, but offer something more. The Hebrew noun “proverb” is related to a verb that means “to represent, to be like.” A Biblical proverb, then, represents a little model of reality, which is reflected in our daily lives. By pondering the proverbs, we can learn something about our lives BEFORE stepping out into our day.

The world says “Live and learn.”
God is saying “Learn and live.”

The goals of the Book of Proverb are stated in 1:2,
“To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight.”
The first goal – to know wisdom and instruction – is to develop deep character.
The second – to understand words of insight – is how to think straight.

No one reaches the end of wisdom as stated in 1:5.
“Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.
Let those with understanding receive guidance”

We all continue to grow in the Lord – the simple, the youthful and the wise.

To develop deep character, we need to know WHAT wisdom is. Memorizing the Bible will make you impressive but will it make you wise? Knowledge without application is reminiscent of the Pharisee on the street corner, very versed in Scripture but ignorant in application. Wisdom is skill, expertise, competence that understands how life really works, how to achieve successful and even beautiful works that align with the will of God.

What is wisdom?

Perceiving wisdom – This type of wisdom asks the hard questions about life and understands God’s answers.

Acting wisdom – This type of wisdom guides us in our practical conduct on a daily basis.

Communicating wisdom – We attend the school of the sages, learning from the best and brightest.

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But the word "instruction" in 1:2 is also translated as "discipline." We often need to be chastened and corrected. Oops. That's no fun. But if we are teachable, then we can progress and grow in wisdom.

When he described his conversion to faith in Christ, the Reformer John Calvin said that God subdued his mind and brought it to "a teachable frame."

A Christian, then, is a teachable follower of Christ.

"I'm a proud man pursuing humility by the grace of God." – C. J. Mahaney

We remember that Job asked (Job 28:12) "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?" and answered (28:28) "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding."

Verse 1:7 is the theme of Proverbs. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

What is the fear of the Lord?

It is not a cowering dread of His fearsome anger, as you await some dire punishment for your guilty behavior. Rather, the fear of the Lord is:
Prov 15:33 - an openness to Him, an eagerness to please Him and the humility to be instructed by Him.

Job 28:28 - a willingness to turn from evil and change.

Gen 22:12 – surrender to His will

Deut 6:2,5 – one way we love Him

Eph. 5:21 – meekly fitting in with one another.

The fear of the Lord changes our mindset from "I am the measure of all things" to "I am being measured."

The fear of the Lord matures us so we no longer need lists of do's and don'ts to tell us how to behave but rather, our motivation comes from deep within. We know what is right and what we love because it is of God.

"In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." – C. S. Lewis

Back to Proverbs:

In 1:8 we see a father speaking through his wisdom to his son. Sons (and daughters) need (and want) this kind of guidance and course-correction in their lives, especially in the teen-age years. Children need the comfort and security of limits, so they push boundaries, just to satisfy themselves that Someone is in control and cares about them.

The dad says "Son, I love you. Listen to your mother and I. Here is what you will find, out in the world. And here's what you should do about it." Unlike a helicopter parent, who mistakenly hovers and protects, this wise dad PREPARES his son for the realities of life.

To me, this scenario is like a Kodak moment – one of those ideal situations that in real life, rarely occur. How many of us fathers have sat down with our sons and daughters, as they are about to launch into the world, and passed on our wisdom, our experience, our concerns, our hearts and our enduring love?

1:9 “They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” The father explains that wisdom makes us attractive. God, through wisdom, made us for glory, not mediocrity. We beautify ourselves by removing the rags of ego and putting on the humility of Christ.

Rom 13:14 “ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh”

Vv 1:10-19 are the father’s warning against sinful men. He knows that his son WILL encounter these kinds of people and tells him what to do. OUR children WILL encounter these people someday, sooner or later, whether in school or at work or wherever. And we need to prepare them.

But these verses seem to be talking about murderers. That seems rather extreme. How does that pertain to us? The father, in 1:19, says “Such are the paths of ALL who go after ill-gotten gain . . .”

The father is talking about ALL those who take advantage of others for their own personal gain. You and I have met some of these people: Bullies, racists, unethical Wall Street insiders, terrorists, hackers, abusers, bent politicians, gossipers . . .

Are we ourselves like this? Are we happy when others succeed? Or are we happy when they get what’s coming to them? Do we pray for our persecutors to be blessed or to be punished? When we are driving and some reckless fool cuts us off, do we wish a policeman would pull him over? And put him in jail? Where he can rot for all we care? Envy and resentment is where violence begins. Our hearts are lying in wait for blood.

Rather, accept the promise of Wisdom by accepting the peace of Christ.

Col 3:15 “ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

We now pass from the wisdom of the father to Lady Wisdom who debuts spectacularly in v. 1:20. You don’t have to travel to an ashram in India to find her. You don’t have to climb a mountain to consult a guru living on the top to find her. You don’t need to drop acid or smoke peyote to find her. So where is she?

Well, right in front of you!

Lady Wisdom stands at the crossroads of culture, where business, government, education, the arts, athletics, all intersect. She stands right here in the bustle of our daily lives like a street preacher and shouts loudly to all who will listen. Why does she go to the public square (shopping mall)? Because that’s where the people are. Many of us just walk right by, intent on getting the chores done on our endless list of Things To Do. But God has time for you right now. He makes Himself free for your benefit.

“Unbelief says: Some other time, but not now; some other place but not here; some other people, but not us. Faith says: Anything He did anywhere else He will do here; anything He did any other time He is willing to do now; anything He ever did for other people he is willing to do for us! . . . God wants to work through you!” – A. W. Tozer

Lady Wisdom's rebuke covers the rest of chapter 1.

"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

Rev 3:20 "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

Lady Wisdom comes with a warning. Jesus is knocking but if you continue saying "I'll get that later," you are playing Russian roulette.

V 1:28 "Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me."

If we are too busy for God now, He will judge us later and He will not apologize.

Who are the simple? Well, me, for one, for the longest time. Uncommitted, lackadaisical about God, not sure of my beliefs, conformist, whatever, tending to procrastinate . . . But Lady Wisdom calls to the simple. They still have a chance.

James 1:6-8 "6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Hence the warning. Do we want to receive something from the Lord? Well, yeah!!! I thank God that He nudged me into the direction of finally sitting myself down in the corner and really thinking about my beliefs – what I actually did believe in, what direction I wanted to go, and what I was going to do about it.

To adopt the attitude that "I'm OK as I am" is to miss the instruction of Wisdom. Wisdom is purifying – a method of refining us by ridding us of the dross and increasing the purity of what remains. It's not always a comfortable process.

The mockers and scoffers and fools cited in 1:22 are more hardened cases than the simple. Fools are thickheaded and stubborn, with their eyes shut tightly and their hands covering their ears. They always know better and have an endless supply of excuses. Scoffers are aggressively confident, sometimes impressive in their arguments and actively hostile to God. We've met both scoffers and fools. There is no happily-ever-after for them.

"How long?" Lady Wisdom asks. How many sermons will it take before you take the better path? How many pits must you fall into before being led by the Spirit?

1:23 "If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you."

The word "turn" is the Biblical word for repentance. If you turn to Jesus, He will make the Bible come alive for you. That is His promise.

1:27 "when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you."

Not “if” but “when.” The storm is coming. And the perfect storm is when you succeed and get your perfect life with you at the center of it. It is the calamity of YOUR kingdom coming and YOUR will being done.

C. S. Lewis reminds us of the danger of Hell: “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, “Thy will be done.””

The storm is coming. But if your house is built upon the rock of the wisdom of Christ, you will be prepared.

Matt 7:24-27 “24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Is your foundation secure?

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:
Excellent, Kevin! Thank you!

Comment:

Michael Babb:
Lots of good thought here Kevin. One I wanted to ask about was your section of fear of the Lord.

“What is the fear of the Lord?

It is not a cowering dread of His fearsome anger, as you await some dire punishment for your guilty behavior. Rather, the fear of the Lord is:
Prov 15:33 - an openness to Him, an eagerness to please Him and the humility to be instructed by Him.
Job 28:28 - a willingness to turn from evil and change.
Gen 22:12 – surrender to His will
Deut 6:2,5 – one way we love Him
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The fear of the Lord changes our mindset from “I am the measure of all things” to “I am being measured.”

The fear of the Lord matures us so we no longer need lists of do’s and don’ts to tell us how to behave but rather, our motivation comes from deep within. We know what is right and what we love because it is of God.”

I always struggle some with the idea of fearing God. Do you think God wants us to fear him, or does he simply understand that is one natural response to the relationship we have? To put it in perspective: Since I am the source of authority, punishment and consequence in my children’s lives, they do fear me on some level. Do I want them to fear me?

Since we are talking about learning and wisdom, do I want my teaching them to have a basis in fear? In the conversations I have had before a lot of times people end up equating this kind of fear between children and their parents as a healthy respect, but it always sticks in my craw just a little bit.

I ask because fear does have such a negative connotation. The list of examples you gave and the reasoning, would the words humility or humbleness work the same? The idea of acting out of fear never sits right with me, because it doesn't sound, well, wise.

To quote an author no where near as smart as C.S. Lewis, "Fear is the mind-killer." It does seem that God wants us to fear him because it is referred to as a choice at different times. How would you describe that fear that would make it different than humility or deference?

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you so much for this question. Indeed, it would seem that the word "fear" really is misleading and detracts from the relationship that the Lord wants us to have with him.. With your kind indulgence, I'm going to ponder this overnight; I don't want to just give a knee-jerk response.

Michael Babb:

Take all the time you need.

Charles Fry:

I can't wait till tomorrow to see Kevin's comments (literally, I probably won't have a chance to see them), and he can give a more balanced answer, which I hope to read before long. Meanwhile, two quick things.

Regarding the father illustration, it is true that as a youngster I had some fear of my father's wrath, fear of punishment. I don't really remember trembling in fear too much though. Maybe I did, but it isn't what I remember. I do remember the last time Dad spanked me, how I clung to his legs as I cried, desiring his comfort, even though he had given me a deserved (and I knew it) punishment. In the course of time my fear of Dad really became a fear, not of the man or his hand of discipline, but a fear of disappointing him, letting him down, embarrassing him. That continued even after he died.

And then there is fire. God is illustrated as "consuming fire" more than once, for multiple reasons. I am delighted by fire. It warms my house, cooks my food, makes my car go. It lights my world. It is pleasant to sit by a fire and watch it, hear it, fuel it, and so forth. And I fear fire. I've seen fire raging through structures, I've had an engine fire, a bbq ablaze, a grass fire started by the muffler on my mower, a toaster afire in the kitchen.... Such events are terrifying in the moment, demanding action, potentially disastrous. It would be a mistake in dealing with fire to ever completely forget the reality of its nature, its power, to lose all fear of the flame. Without fire, we'd be in the dark, cold, dead. It provides life and light, and pleasure, but it is also a fearful thing. Our God is a consuming fire.

Kevin Crittenden:

Good morning!

You ask: "Does God want us to fear him?" in the sense that we use the word "fear" today or is it our natural response to the relationship that we have.

I posit that fear is our natural response. God often manifested Himself in the form of destructive natural forces – whirlwinds, pillars of fire, smoke, earthquakes. This showed His mighty power and acted to chasten those whom He addressed. How much attention would you pay to a Deity who manifested as a cute little mouse? Also, whenever angels would visit people, they often had to say "Fear not." You and I and most people react with fear at the unknown. We have grown accustomed to and are comfortable with the world as we know it. Anything that disturbs the predictable world that we know is a cause for alarm. Our first reaction is "Is this a threat to me?"

Fear is a negative emotion and I hear that you don't wish to inflict that on your children. You might have to accept that the very fact of your adult bodily size may cause a bit of awe in the littles. They have to look way up to you and all adults. They live in a sea of legs.

Yes, you are the source of authority. Children need this structure; families need this structure. This structure is Biblical and good. It is comforting to know that somebody is there for protection and guidance. Authority is not a basis for resentment and fear (unless you are a teenager), but rather a source of great comfort. It shows that you CARE about your family, that you LOVE your family enough to provide the guidance that they need.

Quite honestly, if the main emotion that your children felt when seeing you was fear, then they would avoid you. Don't mean to beat a dead horse but my brother and I avoided any interaction with my father until he left us. So I know. I suspect that I and Samantha know something that you may be a bit clueless about – how much of a good father you are.

As a father, you do need to inflict punishment and levy consequences on your children. Again, this is Biblical and good.

Prov 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Prov 1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction,
and forsake not your mother's teaching,

Certainly, there are NATURAL consequences, which act as good teaching tools. If a child is going on a field trip and you remind her to take along a jacket but she ignores that advice because she is comfortable at the moment, then don't nag or force her to take one, rather let her be cold. That is a natural consequence. I use this example because our son was like this. NATURAL consequences take you out of the "bad guy" role.

And, of course, there are times when your children will push the boundaries of your parental authority. Rather than nag, which children quickly learn to ignore, calmly state a consequence (as befitting the circumstance) and end the discussion. Don't fall into the trap of trying to justify the consequence. You are the authority. By justifying, you put them on an equal basis with you. Children push the boundaries because they need the comfort of knowing that they are still cared about.

Do you want them to be afraid of you? Well, no. Our job as parents is, over the course of their childhood, to teach them how to be good adults and valued members of

society. So we carefully allow them to grow from complete dependence on us to independence by the time they launch from the parental nest.

Will you make mistakes along the way? Sadly yes. I did. You will. We stumble but we get back on track. One of the greatest gifts you can give your child when you stumble is to show her respect by apologizing to her. It actually is a good lesson – that parents sometimes make mistakes and are not perfect.

Do humility and humbleness have a negative connotation; that they are fear-based? No. We learn to humble ourselves before Christ because it becomes our deepest desire to do so. Have I done this? No. I struggle with my desire to be in charge and change God's timing to suit my own agenda.

I remember that quote about fear from Frank Herbert's epic novel "Dune."

"I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

How would I describe the fear that God wants us to have of Him that differentiates it from humility or deference? I would say that the "fear" that God wants us to have includes living in accordance to His will. Our daily choices, the actions that we take go towards this idea. Humility and deference are attitudes but not actions. We put aside our own egos, our own need to hold the reins and allow Him to guide us.

Hopefully this helps. Always good to talk with you.

Michael Babb:

Thank you both for the responses, I genuinely appreciate the effort. Some really good things for me to ponder when the idea of fearing the Lord comes up.

The basis of God's relationship with us is love and when fear comes into the conversation it always gives me pause.

I understand that fear of God is a normal reaction, given His position and power, not to mention the possible consequences of failing to follow his word, but I always get stuck when it seems that He wants us to fear him.

Just one more thing to consider I suppose.

And thank you for the kind words about my parenting Kevin, but there are witnesses that can attest that I am fair to midland most days. Sam is amazing though and she pulls up our average.

Kevin Crittenden:

I wanted to give you a full-body jerk reaction rather than just a knee-jerk reaction. So, Sam does the heavy lifting?

Michael Babb:

I lift all the heavy things, because that's the easiest part.

Kevin Crittenden:

Ah, well, stitch that on a sampler and then, in a few years from now, when you're all in family therapy and everyone is looking accusingly at you, then you can haul that out and show everyone. They'll be so impressed!
By the way, on a completely different subject, how much do you enjoy making a fool of yourself in public? Have you ever acted in a play? Or during a job interview?

Michael Babb:

Hrm, the closest I ever came to acting was Mock Trial, and I am certain I made a fool of myself a few times during that.

And though I wouldn't call it acting, I have occasionally been "extra me" while out with friends. With mixed results.

Kevin Crittenden:

Good enough.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! I enjoyed your excellent thoughts! You really need to consider writing a book.

😊 1:7 is truly the theme of this book. Fear of the Lord is a loving reverence for God that includes submission to His Lordship and commands of His Word. Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:7

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger. If I were to write anything, it would be a description of my own journey - what helped me, what I found to be a hindrance, why I persevered, why I sometimes gave up, and certainly the presence of the Holy Spirit which, as you know, is really beyond our ability to describe in mere language.

And, by the way, I once wrote a book of cigarette papers. I'm also good at blank verse.

^_^

Joanne Caffie:

Books that show others how we gave up being apprehensive and submitted our lives to the Lord is what the world could use more of. I'd definitely read it.

June 8: Proverbs 2-3 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 23

Poetry Reading for 6/08/17

Proverbs 2-3

Hopefully you like poetry, 'cause this week's certainly a long fellow.

2:10 "For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."

In Proverbs 2, the father continues teaching his son, giving him the keys to the kingdom, in a sense, by guiding him through the process of growth. These verses offer an explanation of HOW to move forward in our walk with God and avoid the many pitfalls of the world along the way.

Although, on the face of it, we are sinners and undeserving of God's mercy, yet God is willing to work with us. 2:1-4 tell us the attitude that is best for us to adopt. We come to a place where we want to change, we then call out for insight, we cry aloud for understanding, and finally we see His wisdom as more precious than silver. Perhaps the hardest step to take in today's world is this first one – realizing that we need to change. And then realizing that we want to change. And finally, doing something about it; all the while being distracted by friends and family who are often pulling in the opposite direction.

Who will not benefit from wisdom? 1:32 tells us “. . . the complacency of fools will destroy them.” Complacency. Being content with oneself. You don't have to be an atheist to lose out. Or even an agnostic who is searching. You merely have to be satisfied with the way things are – I'm ok, my life's ok, so no need to add Christ to my busy life – to lose out. And perhaps it's a mistake to reason that since you've been saved by obedience to the Cross, that it is now ok to act as if you haven't. Is complacency in our Christian walk a bad thing?

Proverbs 2 flows like this:

1. You can be renewed in God (vv. 1-11)
 - a. Get real with God (vv. 1-4)
 - b. And God will get real with you (vv. 5-8)
 - c. And you will change (vv. 9-11)

2. You can be protected in this world (vv. 12-22)
 - a. Safe from devious men (vv. 12-15)
 - b. Safe from deadly women (vv. 16-19)
 - c. Safe forever in God's place of blessing (vv. 20-22)

Note that vv 1-4 have a couple of “if” statements, followed by the “then” statement. Computer programmers use this construct liberally in their software. IF (some condition is met) THEN (this will happen). We use this in our lives all the time: “Michael, IF you get your room cleaned up, THEN you will be able to have some of this delicious raisin pie.”

Ah, but now I see you raising your hand to offer a demurrer. Your point is that God's grace is unconditional. He doesn't say “IF.” We don't deserve His grace nor can we earn it by our meritorious behavior. So what about these “ifs?” Well, vv 1-4 give an answer. There is a condition. His grace is freely given BUT we have to ask for it. We have to want it. We have to reach out for it decisively and forcefully. If God's grace is unconditionally given to everybody because they are nice people, then where is the need for baptism? (I wrestled with this one for a while.)

Are we willing to trade in the comfort of our status quo, our complacency, for a closer walk with God?

“God cannot bless us, unless he has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, God claims all. There's no bargaining with him.” - C. S. Lewis

Verses 5-8 explain what God's promise is to those who earnestly seek Him. God loves us all, but . . . is He saying “If you seek me, I'll love you even more?” No. He is saying, “If you seek Me, you will find Me, for all that I am worth.”

Vv. 9-11 start with another THEN which says that, when you abide by the IFs, you can become a better person, leading a more upright life, letting your light shine a little brighter, able to be more of a blessing to those in your circle of influence.

It's a shifting of attitude from "Do I have to?" to "I really want to."

Matt 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

So what is God saying in Proverbs 2?

"If you will seek newness in life in Christ (vv. 1-4),
you will go deep with Him (vv. 5-8), and
you will change within yourself (vv. 9-11).
Then you'll be prepared for life in the real world (vv. 12-22).
That is how grace works.

We WILL encounter at least two temptations in life. Chocolate is a close third.

Vv. 12-15 describe the first temptation "the ways of wicked men." Such men are often in positions of power and you may secretly envy their status and success. Evil tends to want to e-x-p-a-n-d, so you might be invited to become a part of their circle. This would include a little "bending of the rules" from time to time or little "white lies." Maybe done just to nudge the company's bottom line into a more favorable light. All for the good, you see. No skin off your nose. Each time, though, that you go along with such behavior, you back away further and further from the Cross until, one day, you've lost sight of it entirely. But, you remind yourself, you'll get back to it once this push is over at work. Right?

You WILL live and work among such men. Use the wisdom that God has put into your heart and which offers lasting protection.

The second temptation, wicked women, is described in vv. 16-19

The adulterous woman uses seductive words uttered in her mellifluous voice to get her way. She's bored with her own husband and her static life and wants to feel the giddy excitement of new love again. She has mastered the tremendous power of her sexuality and wields it unstintingly. She may be the young shapely woman at work in the tight clothing who smiles often, holds your gaze and listens attentively and sympathetically as you describe the problems you have with your own wife.

But if the wisdom of God has entered your heart, you will know what to do in that moment of temptation. You will run. You will go home and mend that relationship with your wife. SHE, after all, is the one that once made you feel giddy with excitement. Go relive that. We will revisit this later in Songs.

If you are a single man in thrall to a married woman, go home, kneel in prayer and give yourself, body and soul, all over again to your Savior and Lord.

But wisdom is more than just avoiding sin. In vv 20-22 we find that we're in good company if we walk in the ways of the good. We mingle with the good, the righteous, the upright and those with integrity. And, we are all together in "the land", which is to say "in Christ." When we "inhabit the land," we "abide in Christ."

John 15:7 "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Christ is telling us “Come to me. Deal with me. I am able to restore you out of your past failings and defend you for the future. Hurl yourself at me in all your need and I will give myself to you in all my grace. My wisdom will enter your heart in ways you’ve never known before.”

Proverbs 3

3:5 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

In 3, the third parental lecture, the father explains how wisdom bestows well-being. God’s wisdom helps us to come more alive as we learn to deal with life’s difficulties.

Wouldn’t we like to be fully alive?

“The glory of God is man fully alive.” – Irenaeus

This chapter of Proverbs educates us in how to live well in every area of our lives. However, it does seem to have overtones of the prosperity gospel. “They will prolong your life many years”, “This will bring health to your body”, “your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.” A brief skim through these passages makes it sound like if you have enough faith, then a good worldly life can be had here. (Another IF . . . THEN . . .)

But the prosperity gospel, Crass Materialism in sheep’s clothing, is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Phil 3:7-11 says:

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

And - I’m not sure if the prosperity gospel showcases these verses from Proverbs:
Pr 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof,
12 for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Sure, God may bless us with overflowing barns and brimming vats in this life (I’d prefer ovens overflowing with pizza) but vv. 11-12 tell us that we will be disciplined as well. God sends us both earthly blessings and earthly sorrows. Set your hearts on the Giver, not the gift. The gift will surely fail but the Giver will never fail you. The first (setting your hearts on the Giver) emphasizes loving Him; the second (setting your hearts on the gift) is an attitude of entitlement; What’s in it for me? (Free pizza with every Baptism? No.)

The structure of this paternal lecture is not “Do what I tell you to do because I’m your father and I said so” (which rarely works), but rather “Do this and it will benefit you this way.” The Father offers us inducements for following his advice. Note the aspect of control here. In the first case, the son has no control, no free will. In the second, the son (us) has control, he has free will to make choices. Which would be more appealing to you; being told what you have to do or having some say in the matter? Again, one of the challenges of raising children – ceding control to them little-by-little as they mature. And letting them make wrong choices.

God is telling us that in this world of cacophony and competing distractions, that we should listen to Him. Only He can offer us lasting peace. In our culture, marketing forces whine, wheedle and pander, offering us a glimpse of how glamorous our lives could be if only we

bought their products. But how lasting will that new Tesla be? How lasting will that new diamond necklace be? Politics is a major and depressing distraction – if only THOSE people who voted for HER or voted for HIM would grow a brain, then things would be great again! Have you noticed how this issue has helped to create division within the church? Render unto Caesar what belongs to him but otherwise, let's keep our thoughts on things above. I read this somewhere.

What are you being distracted by today?

Vv 3:1-2

1 My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
2 for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.

What brings us lasting peace? The Word of God and the centrality of Christ in our lives.

Sooner or later, as it must to all men, cessation of labor comes into our lives. In our culture, some think we have “arrived” when we reach retirement. Then we can do what we want. Life is good. I’m retired and life is indeed good but I’m busier than ever. That “cessation of labor” clause hasn’t kicked in yet.

If, however, you think that the apex of a successful career means you’ve “arrived,” then your work has become a false idol and you can never relax because you are literally working for your salvation.

Thirdly, if you believe that having a Norman Rockwell family filled with Kodak Moments is having “arrived,” then you can never quite relax, because our children or our spouse can do things which will break our hearts. (Present company excepted, of course.)

Whatever your definition of having “arrived” is, if Christ is not at the center of it, then you are chasing a false idol which can never give you peace. Our beliefs are subject to dynamic change, always attracted by the latest fad and fashion. This is why the Proverbs father says “Keep my commands in your heart” so you may test your beliefs daily. Only God’s wisdom can enable you to lie down in green pastures and beside still waters.

V 3:3 “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; . . .”

God is faithful and steadfast in His love for us. He is Who He is and we can count on Him, as we learn through reading our Bible. We know what we can expect from Him and what He wants from us. Should God’s expectations change with the times? Should we expect God to change for us? Perhaps much of religion in this country is not so much about God as He IS, but how we think God should be “modified” to support our needs. God Version 2.0. It’s about a God who helps us feel good about ourselves without the need for examining ourselves and repenting or the pesky necessity to change our lives. Actually, this message is quite appealing for many.

“You have been taught that there is something wrong with you and that you are imperfect, but there isn't and you're not.” – Cheri Huber

But God, as He is, is the model of love and steadfastness – and we want to change to become more like that. We can trust Him but can He trust us?

So how do we change ourselves and move to that place of peace in God? Verses 5 and 6 point the way.

“ 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”

Our confidence is not based on some impersonal theory of ethics but on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Solomon, probably wiser than you or me or even my wife, leaned on his own understanding in the end and look where that got him.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Matt 22:37 “Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

A. W. Tozer said “Pseudo-faith always arranges a way out to serve in case God fails it. Real faith knows only one way and gladly allows itself to be stripped of any second way or makeshift substitutes. For true faith, it is either God or total collapse. And not since Adam stood up on the earth has God failed a single man or woman who trusted him.”

With God, no Plan B is needed.

The instructing father talks about Wealth and Suffering, two cusps of our lives.

Anybody over the age of 2 knows that sometimes life is good and sometimes life is difficult. When things are going great and everything is coming up roses, then – hey! – we can put God aside for awhile. We don’t need Him right now. And when life turns bitter, trusting God with all our hearts seems impossible.

Of course, God is with us always, no matter how our life is going. In vv. 3:9-12, He guides us in how to trust Him in both extremes of our lives.

9 “Honor the Lord with your wealth,
with the first fruits of all your crops;
10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

The LORD says “Do this and here’s your incentive.” The Hebrew verb translated “honor” means “to treat the Lord as weighty”, much as we mean “a person carries much weight in the community”. Prestige. Rank. Importance.

If we merely honor ourselves with our money (“Look upon my fancy car, my Rolex watch, my hilltop mansion, my trophy wife – here’s my business card embossed in gilt lettering”) then we just come across as pompous and somewhat pitiable.

1 Tim 6:10 “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

But wisdom says “Make the Lord famous and prominent by means of your wealth.” If you spend more time fussing over your stock portfolio than in the Word, perhaps a bit of course-correction is needed. The glory of God is the central theme of the Bible. Let us not obscure His light by casting the shadow of Self.

“Then your barns will be filled to overflowing. . .”

Luke 6:38 “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

He does NOT mean that if you give money to Him, He will make you rich. That would not be HONORING God but, instead, USING God.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Matthew Henry said “God will bless you with an increase of that which is for use, not for show, for giving away, not for hoarding. Those who do good with what they have shall have more to do more good with.”

Vv 3:11-12

11 My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.

On the other cusp of life, across from the horn of plenty, lies the area of pain and suffering. And this is the time when we wonder where God is and why isn’t He helping us. After all, doesn’t God love us?

What is God telling us in these verses?

First, when we suffer, it’s not because God is taking something from us, rather it is God lovingly reinvesting in us.

Hebrews 12:7 “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?”

Loving parents guide their children through discipline so that they may develop their full potential.

The second thing that God is telling us is that our wisest course of action when we are being disciplined is to accept it and wait until God fulfills His purpose. When you are being disciplined you have a choice:

1 - despise the Lord’s discipline (react in anger or take the passive response of despair) OR
2 - be trained by it.

Heb. 12:11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

In Phil 3:10, Paul says: “ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”

Paul looked beyond himself to the Cross where Jesus shed his precious life’s blood for sinners and Paul’s heart said “THERE is the wealth I want. THERE is the suffering I trust.”

We come now to why wisdom matters in vv. 13-26 and what wisdom creates in vv. 27-35. Wisdom matters because it is how life works best. And wisdom creates new life in the midst of the worldly culture of death that we inhabit.

In vv. 13-18, we are told that wisdom enriches everyone who finds it. But “enriches” doesn’t mean making a solomonic pile of money. As v14 points out, wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. Acquiring wisdom means increasing your skill at living life well, something that money cannot do. Money will put food on your table but wisdom will put laughter around that table.

Too often, - far too often - I hear of fathers who leave for work before the children awake and return home after the children are asleep. Surely our culture can seek God’s wisdom to find a better balance by encouraging companies to elevate the importance of family over profit.

In vv. 19-20 we see that God uses wisdom in forming and maintaining His Creation as well as His ongoing providence.

Here is an example, written by Dr. John Piper, about the wisdom of God’s providence:

“Picture yourself as a farmer in the Near East, far from any lake or stream. A few wells keep the family and animals supplied with water. But if the crops are to grow and the family is to be fed from month to month, water has to come on the fields from another source. From where?

Well, the sky. The sky? Water will come out of the clear blue sky? Well, not exactly. Water will have to be carried in the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, over several hundred miles and then be poured out from the sky onto the fields. Carried? How much does it weigh? Well, if one inch of rain falls on one square mile of farmland during the night, that would be 27,878,400 cubic feet of water, which is 206,300,160 gallons, which is 1,650,501,280 pounds of water.

That’s heavy. So how does it get up in the sky and stay up there if it’s so heavy? Well, it gets there by evaporation. Really? That’s a nice word. What’s it mean? It means that the water sort of stops being water for a while so it can go up and not down. I see. Then how does it get down? Well, condensation happens. What’s that? The water starts becoming water again by gathering around little dust particles between .00001 and .0001 centimeters wide. That’s small.

What about the salt? Salt? Yes, the Mediterranean Sea is salt water. That would kill the crops. What about the salt? Well, the salt has to be taken out. Oh. So the sky picks up a billion pounds of water from the sea and takes out the salt and then carries it for three hundred miles and then dumps it on the farm?

Well, it doesn’t dump it. If it dumped a billion pounds of water on the farm, the wheat would be crushed. So the sky dribbles the billion pounds of water down in little drops. . .”

If God, by His wisdom, can work this marvel in nature, then what can He accomplish by His wisdom in you?

In vv. 21-26, we are told that God’s wisdom protects us from the snares of sin. Christ is always by our side, strengthening us.

2 Tim 4:16-17 “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.”

In vv. 27-35 we come to what wisdom creates, which is a culture of life in opposition to the world’s culture of death.

First, the verses talk about our neighbors and how we treat them in our new life. We are to:

- help our needy neighbors. After all, Jesus withheld nothing good from us.
- protect our innocent neighbors. Do you feel God’s protection?
- avoid our violent neighbors. God’s retribution awaits. Not ours.

Matt 22:37-39 “Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Does this mean that we can be critical of others, looking for faults in them and gleefully pointing them out? After all, it's for their own good, right? But that is not what Jesus did for us. He defended us, even with all our faults. So let us defend our innocent neighbors.

3:34 “He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.”
God knows how to deal with arrogant people while simultaneously building you up. So humble yourself and trust in Him with all your heart.

We see this sentiment echoed in James as well as 1 Peter 5:5

James 4:6 “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

V 3:35 “The wise inherit honor, but fools get only shame.”

Who, in your opinion, are the wise and who are the fools?

Comment:

Steven Wright:

A most excellent study brother Kevin! Thank You! And I Kant (ok he was a philosopher, not a poet -I guess) see why there should be anything wrong with it's length ;) but what I can say is Colin read this!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I'll leave off tending my Bacon long enough to comment that in this day and age (a favorite expression throughout history) most people prefer sound-biteish bits of information. "I'll take my info in small bytes, please." This is how commercials are. So when people see a long posting, they may shy away from it, saying, "I'll get back to this when I have more time. Like when I'm retired."

Comment:

Charles Fry:

But rain is such a simple and obvious thing..... 🤔

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

As with everything else in Creation, the simplest-seeming things turn out to be really complex. I think we can have a much better appreciation for rain, now, knowing a bit about its complexity.

The idea that "Man is the measure of all things" presumes a simplicity to the world that just isn't borne out by examination. It is my contention that the pursuit of science, engaged in honestly, reveals the complexity of our existence and thus points us in the direction of our Creator.

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:
Appreciate all of your work. Thank you.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Thank you, Yvonna! It's a blessing to be in this position, I'm learning a whole lot!

Yvonna Hartman:
You sure are blessing me!

Kevin Crittenden:
That's a two-way street!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin! This is a great post.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Wow, Kevin Crittenden! You put so much effort into every week's study. Thank you for blessing us with great take-aways. It's also been nice to hear your perspective and history in becoming a Christian.

Comment:

Lori Watt:
So, Michael Babb, did you clean your room?

June 15: Proverbs 4 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 24
Poetry Reading for 6/15/17
Proverbs 4

Good whatever!

4:7 "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

In Chapter 4, the father continues his frank talk with his (probably teenaged) son and mentions that he, too, was the recipient of his father's wisdom. Thus, we learn that wisdom is a tradition, passed from generation to generation. Someday, hopefully, the son will pass this wisdom down to his own children.

I must admit to you that writing about these poignant father-son talks is bittersweet for me. It is a reminder of what I have missed, an experience that I never had. The wisdom passed to me from my father came in the form of negative space and the silence of abandonment.

But Proverbs 4 is filled with hope and tells us how we can live fully.

We see this sentiment echoed in the gospel of John:

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Jesus came so that we may have life! And not only life, but life lived abundantly! Fully! THIS is the gift that Christ gives us, not because we earned it or deserved it or because we're nice people, but through the eternal love of His saving grace.

James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

In a sermon on James 1:17, Gardiner Spring said “Other sources of enjoyment there are, but He is the great Source; other givers there are, but He is the great Giver. The sun gives its light, the clouds their rain, the earth its fruits, the sea its treasures; angels give, men are givers; yet of all givers in the universe, God is the greatest – the Father of lights and of mercies, Himself the source, the contriver, the dispenser of every ‘good gift and every perfect gift.’ . . . God is the greatest of givers.”

Proverbs 4 reminds us of the value of tradition and the authority of those who have gone before. Many in this current generation are tempted to seek wisdom only from the horizontal structure of others in their age group and come up empty. They seek guidance through text messages, Twitter, WhatsApp, FaceBook and New Age signs and wonders. Better for them to look to the vertical structure of generations long past, the wisdom they gained in the living of their lives, their triumphs, their failures and their dogged determination to enter the arena even though they often get knocked down to their knees only to rise once again and try once more.

Heb 13:7 “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Those who have gone before have made our path just a little bit straighter, a little bit easier – wouldn't it be foolish to leave that path, ignore that wisdom and plunge off into the dark woods on our own?

What do the previous generations tell us? They shout: “Jesus didn't fail us, and He won't fail you. Go for it!”

V 4:7 “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

If you want God's wisdom, it will cost you. You will have to forfeit all your preconceived ideas about how life works, what success means, what your duties are and where your loyalties lie. Why pay that price? What will wisdom do for us? We are told in v 4 “. . .and you will live.” V 6 “. . . and she will protect you . . . and watch over you.” V 8 “. . . and she will exalt you . . . and honor you.” V 9 “. . . and present you with a glorious crown.”

Contrast this to what society wants us to be: Young, slim, the top dog, sexually active, rich, uncommitted, hedonistic, materialistic and married to the Home Shopping Network. Above all, society wants us to be consumers. Poor people can't buy much so they're relegated to the bottom rungs of society. This formula for “success” filled with empty promises and piles of empty shopping bags is a recipe for disaster and death.

Can you think of even ONE person who has given themselves fully to that consumerist lifestyle and grown into the type of person you would want to be?

Anyone?

Naturally, as a red-blooded American male, I immediately thought of Hugh Hefner, surrounded by a bevy of Playboy bunnies in various stages of dishabille. He was (is?) the epitome of success for men, yes? Richer than King Croesus, luxuriating in the Playboy mansion, lounging all day long in his pajamas, hobnobbing with the rich and famous, evaluating shapely and naked young women for his magazine and . . . lessee, what else did he do? Would I want to be him? Would you?

Now think of 2,000 years of peoples from diverse cultures and all walks of life who set their hearts on Christ, turned to His wisdom in the Bible, and found fullness of life. Think of your church family.

Which camp would you rather be in?

In vv 10-19 note the use of the metaphor “the way”. We have 11: . . .the way of wisdom . . . straight paths. 14: . . .path of the wicked . . . the way of evildoers. 18: the path of the righteous . . . the way of the wicked.

How many paths do you see? Two, right? Now perhaps you and I and Fred over there might like to have a compromise, a third choice:

Path 1: The way of wickedness, a terrible life of folly and self-gratification.

Path 2: The way of righteousness and wisdom which gives glory to God

Path 3: The middle road of mediocrity that we don’t mind settling for.

But, gee whiz, God gives us only two choices. God’s wisdom is not just an add-on feature, an accessory that we can tack on to our indecision.

In vv 14-17 we are given both a warning and hope. If evil is our choice, then evil becomes compulsive, and none of us are above it as it is the nature of our depraved hearts.

John 8:34 “ Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

In Milton’s Paradise Lost, when Satan gave up on God, he thought:

“So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,

Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost;

Evil, be thou my good.”

But there is hope.

V 18: “The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

The light of Christ within you may only be a glimmer on the horizon now but you may have confidence and hope in the expectation that His light will increasingly illuminate your life as you learn to trust Him.

Phil 1:6 “ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

The final verses in chapter 4 tell us how not to get lost along the way. We need to keep ourselves focused on Christ.

23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."

The counsel of our culture and our age stresses the importance of Numero Uno. So you buy the big exclusive house that you deserve, the expensive car that advertises your importance, the trophy wife who engenders envy in your colleagues, a stock portfolio that would choke a hippopotamus . . . (I keep a hippopotamus in the bathtub for the purposes of demonstration.)

Having all these things tells others that you are more successful than they are, that you are higher on the social ladder than they are and therefore should be envied and adored. Maybe even worshipped a bit. You also have the added perk of looking down on others.

But, sadly, the people who have all that are still depressed because those baubles, those idols of happiness that they worship, only mock the sadness within. There is always the lure of "more." In only one year, your brand spanking new car will be last year's model, needing a carwash.

Life does not flow from the outside in; it flows from the inside out. From our heart. And what we carry in our hearts colors the way we live our lives.

We need our hearts continuously filled with the nourishing life of Christ through faith in the gospel.

John 37:39 "On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says."

Geneen Roth, in her book *Women, Food and God* says "Women turn to food when they are not hungry because they ARE hungry for something they can't name; a connection to what is beyond the concerns of daily life. Something deathless, something sacred. But replacing the hunger for divine connection with Double Stuf Oreos is like giving a glass of sand to a person dying of thirst. It creates more thirst, more panic."

Men, too, need to be wary. What are we taking into our hearts through our eyes from what we look at on our computer screens and video games? Remember the cautionary tale of Medusa; anyone who gazed upon her turned to stone.

Alexander Pope writes about the process of embracing evil within our hearts:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Getting back to Proverbs, note the references to the parts of our bodies that the sage references in vv 24-27. Your mouth . . ., your lips, your eyes, your feet, your foot. Jesus claims you from the top of your head to your tippy-toes.

Rom 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

It is easy to misstep and be distracted by the constant seductions of this world. But if we are receiving by faith the outpouring of Christ's love in constant supply from His Throne of Grace, we cannot lose our way.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Medusa as a metaphor. 😏 Never thought if that before. Thanks for your thoughts on the Word and life.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I usually mix up a batch of metaphors in the kitchen before posting these musings.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

A most excellent treatise brother! Thank you! Thanks especially for including (James 1:17) it has always been a favorite verse of mine! The supporting quote from Gardiner Spring, is spot on! Milton quote speaks to the mind and actions of so many today! I am truly sorry for your poor (non-existent) paternal example! The longer I live the more I know how blessed I was and am by my own earthly father. I know that your bad experience was probably the leading factor in your resistance all those years to our heavenly father, but I am So very glad you yielded! You are a great blessing to the body of Christ!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Steven. You are right about the father reference. I did have to pace back and forth along the edge of the chasm for the longest time before making the leap of faith. Trust - the most difficult thing for me. But, with God, all things are possible. I am hoping that my experience will encourage others who are pacing back and forth to come to know that a safe landing is assured, that a precious family awaits them and that, in this case, the grass is definitely greener on the other side.

Matt 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Father's Day is nigh and you are so right to honor your dad. I'll honor him as well from over here. And you, and all the other dads who are such blessings to their families, more than they know.

Ginger Hermon:

Yes, thank you, Kevin, for sharing your experience with us. You've been a great blessing to the family of Christ. Think on Christ's response to his family that was looking for Him, "who are my family?" Those who follow me. I know there are Christian brothers who think of you as a son. Heed their fellowship and love. And ultimately continue to hear God's wisdom and instruction to you, a beloved son, in whom He's well pleased. ❤️

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

I was a day late reading this... good excuse... it's been a week of studies with John Lee at Dean Avenue. I stayed home tonight to catch up on today and last night's 7 bible study. While

reading chapter 4:23 I thought on Matt. 12:34, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Truly we need to guard our hearts & store it up with good things.

June 22: Proverbs 5-6 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 25

Poetry Reading for 6/22/17

Proverbs 5-6

To make up for Steven posting late, I'll post early.

5:18 "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth."

In Chapter 5, the father has the frank talk about sex with his sons. This isn't about the nuts and bolts of sexuality but rather about the extremely important wisdom necessary for men to glorify God in the steadfastness of their covenantal commitment to their wives and avoid destruction by seeking comfort and pleasure in the arms of other women.

We may feel squeamish when the subject of sex arises and may have difficulties in broaching the subject with our children, but the Bible has no such difficulties. Sex within the covenantal relationship of marriage is a good and perfect gift from above. God knows that we need sexual wisdom and He has provided us with what we need.

Proverbs 5 is divided into three parts:

1 – vv. 1-6 God the Father says "It's time we had a talk"

2 – vv. 7-19 He says "Here is what I want you to know"

3 – vv. 20-23 He continues "Now you have a decision to make"

We can treat our sexuality foolishly – which leads to folly and destruction - or we can treat it wisely - which leads to satisfaction and fulfillment.

Sex is like a fire. In the fireplace, it keeps us warm. Outside the fireplace, it burns our house down. V 5 tells us to keep our fire in the fireplace and keep it stoked up.

The wise father tells his son that he WILL be tempted. The word "honey" in v3 is the attractant (who doesn't like honey?) but in v4 we see that the result is "bitter as gall." The pleasures of the moment, the instant gratification, are very compelling to our fleshly selves but wisdom wants us to rein in our unbridled desires and look beyond to the end results. Is the game worth the candle?

Note: Proverbs details the minefield of sex from the male viewpoint but I'm trusting that women can make the necessary adjustments to fit their circumstances. Fortunately for women, I don't think that they are so visually driven as men are. But what do I know. If, as a man, I say this while walking through a forest alone, I'm still wrong.

Who is the adulterous (forbidden) woman introduced in v. 3? Is she your co-worker who flatters your ego with her words and draws attention to her body with her gestures?

We once had a DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation) sales rep who was interested in selling our department some VAX cluster systems; she would come to talk with us and idly play with the hem of her short dress as she sat across from us. Such fabulous legs! You can imagine the effect she had on a cishet man like myself. We called her Miss Flippy-Skirt. But as everyone

knows, Sex Sells. Were we influenced? Of course we were! Did we know we were being played? Of course we did! Did we care? No! We (a bunch of nerds) enjoyed the attention.

Perhaps you feel that you are above such things now, that your maturity protects you from sexual misconduct or wrongful desires. Think again. There is a book by Mark Driscoll called Porn-Again Christian, available as a free download from relit.org.

So, in a nutshell, in words that even a testosterone-crazed young man can understand:
Vv 7-14 "Keep your mitts OFF every other woman."
Vv. 15-19 "Keep your hands ON your wife."

Verse 8 tells us "Keep to a path FAR from her, do not go near the door of her house."

Don't tell yourself, "Well, I'll get involved a little bit; it's just a harmless flirtation. I can stop anytime. Nobody will know."

Martin Lloyd-Jones says "Be careful how you treat God, my friends. You may say to yourself, 'I can sin against God and then, of course, I can repent and go back and find God whenever I want him.' You try it. And you will sometimes find that not only can you not find God but that you do not even want to. You will be aware of a terrible hardness in your heart. And you can do nothing about it. And then you suddenly realize that it is God punishing you in order to reveal your sinfulness and your vileness to you. And there is only one thing to do. You turn back to him and you say, 'O God, do not go on dealing with me judicially, though I deserve it. Soften my heart. Melt me. I cannot do it myself.' You cast yourself utterly upon his mercy and upon his compassion."

Be careful if you think you can flirt with sexual sin and keep it under your control.

V 11 says "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent."

Lord Byron was the playboy of the nineteenth century who was secretly admired for his free lifestyle. On his 36th birthday, in Greece, all alone, he wrote:

My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone.

He's 36. All alone on his birthday, feeling old and at the end of his days. Which he was. In place of friends, he has, as harvest from his sexual proclivities, venereal disease and depression. From Wiki: "He died in 1824 at the age of 36 from a fever contracted while in Greece. Often described as the most flamboyant and notorious of the major Romantics, Byron was both celebrated and castigated in life for his aristocratic excesses, including huge debts, numerous love affairs – with men as well as women, as well as rumors of a scandalous liaison with his half-sister – and self-imposed exile."

So now you've messed up and, like misusing your Android phone as a shim to level your refrigerator, you have misused God's gift of sexuality. Unlike Lord Byron, though, you still have a friend – His name is Jesus Christ. Through humility, you can be healed as seen in vv. 12-14 where you realize your mistakes.

12 You will say, "How I hated discipline!
How my heart spurned correction!
13 I would not obey my teachers

or turn my ear to my instructors.
14 And I was soon in serious trouble
in the assembly of God's people."

The sexual fool finally confronts himself and makes the decision to return home like the prodigal son described in Luke 15:11-24. Are you ready to come home to your loving Father who will rejoice at your return? Do you not know that He will receive you and exclaim over you and restore you? Why do you tarry?

2 Cor 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

1 Cor 6:11 " And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

God renews us.

In vv. 15-17, God, knowing how strong lust can be, addresses our sexual desires by saying "Satisfy your lust with your own wife." Paul addressed this as well – his preference would be for people not to marry but in some (most) people, lust will be a problem. Therefore, he says:

1 Cor 7 1:2 "Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.

Note that God does NOT say, "Are you feeling horny with all that temptation out there? Well, what YOU need is a will of iron so you can suppress all that nonsense. Take a cold shower. That's for animals anyway and I made you better than that."

Of course we are expected to have some degree of discipline (v. 23) but negation of our sexual desire is NOT what God has in mind. God's remedy for our thirst for sex is . . . sex. An overflowing sexual joy with our wives.

On another note, I realize that many couples are unable to have an overflowing sexual joy because of body shame or impotence or whatever. And that is an area for another study group. And isn't it difficult to even imagine such a group? God isn't ashamed or horrified by our sexual life within the covenant of marriage. But we seem to be. Why do we spurn His gift to us?

But there is still the elephant in the room that hasn't been mentioned. In the days when Proverbs was penned, marriages were (often?) arranged so that (I'm guessing) everybody was married at a fairly young age. However, in our Oh So Sophisticated Modern Culture, where people treat marriage as a DIY project, expect to marry for love despite the divorce rate standing at 50% (and climbing?), the question stands:

How do single people handle their sexual urges? Or rather, what is the Godly way for unmarried people to handle their sexual urges?

What is your answer? What advice would you give a single man or woman who is experiencing a sexual crisis and living in the throes of shame and guilt?

In our society, people find their answers in "hookups", porn, "one-night stands", "affairs", porn, "date-rape", alcohol, drugs, and porn. A veritable pornucopia of erotica.

The young man or woman, not wishing the commitment of marriage, says “Why buy a book when there’s a free lending library in town?”

Just FYI, I’ve had several women in my ESL groups whose weddings were arranged for them. Every one of them is in a happy relationship. The parents and elders have the wisdom to know what qualities in a spouse will complement their child. And the child respects and honors the wisdom of their elders. Of course, if we had widespread pre-marital and Godly counseling, then that would go far to ensuring lasting marriage. When Kathleen and I tell people that we have been married for 41 years, they often look at us as if we were a rare specimen of an endangered species. However, many young couples (aren’t they precious!) tell themselves that “Love conquers all” and their marriage vows say something like “as long as love shall last.”

The internet tells me: The phrase "love conquers all" is derived from the following phrase in the Latin poet Virgil's Eclogues X.69: "Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori." It means "love conquers all, let us all yield to love." The beginning of the phrase was subsequently translated as "love conquers all" by Geoffrey Chaucer, an English poet of the Middle Ages, and thereafter passed into popular usage.

Look how that turned out for Romeo and Juliet.

In vv. 18-20, the wise father raises his hands in blessing and prays over the marriage bed of his son and daughter-in-law. He says be happy with your own wife, enjoy her often, find ways to keep that spark alive between you. When you have your own Eve in your own Eden, why throw it away for another woman?

And finally, in vv. 21-23, the father says “Now decide! Will you stay a sexual sinner immersed in shame and regret or will you accept the liberation offered by Christ?”

Another thought for you to ponder: The author of Collection I (1:8 – 9:18) is Solomon. He is the one writing this scenario of Godly wisdom between father and son, the wisdom being “stick with your own wife, the wife of your youth.” But Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. How do you reconcile these facts?

Proverbs 6

6:16-19

- 16 There are six things the Lord hates,
seven that are detestable to him:
17 haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
18 a heart that devises wicked schemes,
feet that are quick to rush into evil,
19 a false witness who pours out lies
and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

In Proverbs 6:1-19, God gives us advice for three areas of our lives:

vv. 1-5 How we handle money (using a bad example)

vv. 6-11 How we discipline ourselves (using a worse example)

vv. 12-19 How we build community (using the worst example)

In the first area, the father speaks to his son. In the second area the father speaks to the sluggard (doesn't call him "son"). In the third area, the father speaks about a disruptive person. (doesn't even talk to him).

vv. 1-5 speaks to the son who is acting as a surety for his neighbor's debt. This is like cosigning a loan; you put yourself up as collateral.

There is a danger in doing this and God is warning us about it. He tells us that if we have acted as a surety, then we have already become ensnared.

Even the Federal Trade Commission says this about cosigning "You are being asked to guarantee this debt. Think carefully before you do."

The Bible tells us that we are to be generous, however, we are not supposed to gamble.

Deut 15:7-8 " If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need."

If you throw your financial future in with someone the bank already considers a bad risk, then you are acting irresponsibly towards yourself and your family and encouraging irresponsibility in the other person.

God thinks this is urgent as seen in vv. 3-5. Do everything you can to get out of this situation.

Jesus, through His immeasurable love, acted as our surety. We were a bad risk and could never pay off our debt. So it fell to Him and He bore the crushing weight of our debt on His bleeding back to Calvary where He wrote "Paid in Full" across the record of our debts, then tore up the Book of Death in which our future debts could be written and nailed it to the Cross.

Col 2:13-14 " When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

In area two, vv. 6-11, the father speaks to the sluggard, the lazy one, the one always choosing the easy way, the procrastinator, the one who lets other people do the work. The sluggard lies on the couch with the TV remote, day after day, year after year. If you ask him to mow the lawn, he'll say "Mañana." He probably has a wonderful knowledge of TV culture but is that what you want to be known for at the end of your life?

There are three things that Proverbs says about the sluggard. First, the sluggard will not make up his mind.

Verse 9 "How long will you lie there, sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?" This is a direct challenge to the sluggardly way of life. But he cannot give a definite answer to the question, choosing instead to equivocate.

Secondly, the sluggard will not finish things. Seeing a task through to completion is not his thing. "Like I told you, mañana. I'll finish it tomorrow."

Prov 26:15 "A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth."

Thirdly, the sluggard will not face things as they are. Rather than face the realities of life, he makes up excuses not to live fully.

Prov 22:13 “The sluggard says, ‘There's a lion outside! I'll be killed in the public square!’”

Obviously, he's been watching too much TV. What's REALLY out there in the public square is a life, a job and a mission aligning to God's will.

What should the sluggard do? Observe the ways of the industrious ant. We all remember Aesop's Fable about the Ant and the Grasshopper. The ants worked hard and had food to eat while the grasshopper fiddled about and so went hungry.

How do you apply this lesson to our world today? Do you see those on food stamps or welfare as being sluggards who now need to be bailed out by the hard-working ants who are forced into supporting them?

And isn't it easier for us sluggards to talk with our friends about things, debate those things, speculate on other things, speechify about really important things . . . than to humble ourselves, be an ant and “Just Do It.” But nowadays, we (men) are adopting a wait-and-see attitude, a laissez faire mindset. We hang back to see what someone else might do. Can you imagine a church filled with men who are energized, men who are working, men who are engaged, men who are filled with intensity, men of conviction and action? Ants are like that.

What can ants teach us?

First, inner motivation. V 7 Ants do what they do on their own without the need for a supervisor ant standing over them. There are no foot-dragging ants.

Second, hard work. V 8 Ants are industrious. They don't stop until the job is done. I don't even know if they sleep or not.

Third, they prepare for the future. V 8. The ant works today to meet the needs of tomorrow.

Let us learn from the ant. There is a storm coming our way. It will find us. Are we preparing ourselves today with God's Word to prepare for hardship tomorrow?

In the third area, community, vv 12-15, the Bible calls a disruptive person “worthless”, a “troublemaker”. Some people sin aggressively, through little acts of disharmony which add up over time. V13 outlines these – winking maliciously, signaling with his feet, motioning with his fingers, all to sow discord.

God indicates in v15 that He will punish that sort of behavior. He feels rather intense about it as shown in vv. 16-19.

16 “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable.”

So which is it, six or seven? When the Old Testament uses this literary device (x // x+1), as in “three//four” (Prov. 30:18-19, 29-31) or “six//seven”, it is the last item in the list that matters most.

The last item in our list, “ a person who stirs up conflict in the community,” is pointed to by the previous items. The arrogance of haughty eyes stirs up discord among the brethren, a lying tongue gossips and slanders, sowing discord among the brethren etc.

God loves unity and this is what Jesus does. He gathers His flock together and, if even one errant sheep goes astray, Jesus is there to welcome it back.

Psalms 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

In the rest of 6, the father once again counsels the son in sexual matters. But why should our insignificant personal lives matter to God?

Augustine asked God "What am I to you that you command me to love you, and that, if I fail to love you, you are angry with me and threaten me with vast miseries?"

But our sexual lives DO matter to God because romance stems from God and reveals Who He is. God's love for us is not merely a platonic love but a love filled with passion.

Marriage, then, is a divine creation, pointing to something beyond us, to the romance of Christ and the church. What better love story than the Son of God coming down to win, at great suffering, a bride not worthy of Him.

In vv 20-35, the father warns about the consequences of sexual folly. The point in these verses is that there is a very high penalty for committing adultery. The wise man will notice that a woman is beautiful and then go about his business. But sin is not always ugly. Sometimes it can be very tempting.

2 Cor 11:14 "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."

The point of these verses is that there is a high price for committing adultery. These are real-life arguments, not so much about the rightness or wrongness of the act. There are two practical consequences to sexual folly.

First, you WILL experience pain.

27: "Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?"

Nobody I know has ever come up to me and said "Kevin, I committed adultery and I'm so glad I did. My whole life has gotten better." Do you know anybody like that?

Secondly, adultery is an offence that incurs a debt that cannot be paid off.

34: "For jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge."

YOU: "Hi Fred. Look, I slept with your wife. Here's a hundred bucks. Are we good?"

FRED: <You can fill in this blank.>

The blot of adultery can never be wiped clean.

V33: "Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away."

He will forever be known and whispered about. He will be set apart (and not in a good way) at family gatherings and people will be nervous if he is around their daughters or nieces. Nobody will talk much about whatever business success he has achieved or his social status. Nope, he'll forever be the guy who couldn't keep his pants on.

Sexual folly is demonstrated as a good thing and perfectly acceptable on the TV shows that we see and the movies that we watch. But in real life, it WILL always cause us pain. Consider the businessman who was sent to another city. Away from his wife, he hires a call girl over the

phone. Subsequently, when the knock on the door came, what should he see when he answered the door but his own daughter. He immediately had an apparent heart attack.

Note v 26: "For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife preys on your very life."

Do you think that visiting a prostitute is less of a sin than adultery? We remember Jesus' words to the prostitute: Jn 8:11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

How do we, as sexual sinners to some extent or other, know how we stand with God?

"The difference between an unconverted man and a converted man is not that one has sins and the other has none; but that the one takes part with his cherished sins against a dreaded God, and the other takes part with a reconciled God against his hated sins." - William Arnot

Have a great week!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Good comments, very important perspective in our times. I use the fidelity/promiscuity passages in these chapters whenever I do premarital counseling or teach on marriage (which I did last week in Manila). I really like the poetic depiction of the wife as a chosen source of satisfaction and devotion, chosen and chosen again, and again.

I also very much like the 1984 NIV take on 6:[26] for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread,
and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

The sense I think Solomon had in mind here isn't that a prostitute is cheap, but the parallelism that illicit sex reduces a person to a consumable commodity or to prey. Illicit sex turns humans into objects to be used and used up/discarded.

Really important life concepts here! Thank, fellow man.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Indeed, a great breakdown! Thank you, Kevin!!!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

For two nights straight John has boldly preached, "sexual relations outside of marriage is an abomination to God!" The kingdom needs to hear and adhere to this Biblical teaching! Thank you, Kevin, for covering this passage. Much to consider. As well, chpt 6. Always easy to remember where the 6 things the Lord hates- proverbs 6. I appreciate you putting in so much time for this study.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger, and thank you, John!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

For me, the injunction against adultery comes not only from Biblical teachings but from personal experience. My own father chose the Adulterous Woman and didn't even look back to his wife and children. So I am well aware of the destruction that lies in the path of sexual sin; unfortunately it was my mother, my brother and myself that were left in darkness, gnashing our teeth.

I'm a bit strident on the subject.

I think that the concept of "politeness" has morphed since my youth into including the thought that one should keep one's mouth shut when other people are misbehaving in social situations. "Live and let live" is the generally accepted standard. "Follow your dreams" is another.

We live in an era of entitlement, coddled by our parents, pandered to by marketing, kowtowed to by school districts and politicians. Bumper stickers that elevate our children above the other children. Where is the bumper sticker that says "My child is loved by me and by God?" Every high place in our society has a temple dedicated to the worship of us. And we respond to that by rampant disrespect for Him who gave us His only Son to die on the Cross for the remission of our uncountable sins. We tear down the sacred place in our hearts where He resides, evict Him to the gutter and attempt to fill the vacuum with technological baubles. How dare we! There is a place within us that only He can fill and don't I know it.

Sorry about the rant.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

LOVE YOU, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Love you as well, Brother Butch!

June 29: Proverbs 7 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 26

Poetry Reading for 6/29/17

Proverbs 7

Top o' th' mornin', to you! (I'm keeping the bottom part.) Today, we move along to Chapter 7 in Proverbs.

7:21 "With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk."

Vv 1-5 again show us the father continuing the counsel of his son, emphasizing the importance of keeping Wisdom uppermost in his thoughts as the son goes through his daily life.

And how does the son do this? How does he keep Wisdom in the forefront of his thoughts in this fallen world? He becomes born again of the Holy Spirit as delineated in John 3:1-8.

John 3:1-8:

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

When we are born again of the Holy Spirit, the innermost depths of our being transform and we begin to treasure God's commands from our heart. We no longer rely on an intellectual list of things that God wants us to do and begin to LIVE as God wants us to live, nurtured by His life-giving water.

Proverbs vv 7:6-9 describe the fallen world we live in. The father sees danger there and wants his son (on the brink of adulthood) to see it as well. He spends the rest of chapter 7 talking to his son about the three strategies of sexual temptation:

Vv 6-13 The approach of temptation

Vv 14-20 The speech of temptation

Vv 21-27 The impact of giving in to temptation

This section of Proverbs needs to have a Romance Novel cover featuring Fabio ensnared in the eight-fold embrace of OctoPauline.

The father singles out one of the simple as an illustration. The simple man is uncommitted, keeping his options open, accepting of everything. He has plenty of time later on (he thinks) to sharpen his focus about what he believes and what he'll choose to give up. He is young and strong, you see, and is able to handle anything that comes his way. We men believed ourselves to be immortal once, didn't we? Right now, the simple man is just curious. He's never been with a woman. He wants to see for himself the bad part of town where the adulterous woman lives. He's heard rumors. So he takes a walk.

And there she is! Whoa, Mama! The young man comes to rigid attention, eyes front and grown as large as saucers, drawn like a magnet to her. She is "dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent."

How do prostitutes dress? Like any seller of goods and services, she needs to market her wares. Make them irresistible to the consumer. How often do you need to admonish your daughters not to wear such revealing clothes, only to be met with the rejoinder “But, Mom, this is the fashion. ALL my friends wear this style and THEIR parents let them. I don’t want to look all straight-laced and fuddy-duddy - like you.”

You may be wondering why the woman has to be described as adulterous – certainly men can force their unwanted attentions on virtuous women as well. (Tamar). But I think that the force of the father’s argument has to do with something larger. I’ll get to that in a minute.

So, our naïve young Everyman stands there, transfixed, with his bare face hanging out and, being crafty, that Fallen Hussy takes charge immediately and kisses him in v. 13. Oh look - a dead man walking.

In v 14, she tells him: “Today I have fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home.”

She has offered a sacrifice, a fellowship offering, which binds the deity and worshiper by a shared meal. (Lev. 7:11-21) The meal that fulfilled the vow had to be eaten on the same or following day. Her invitation to sex might have been a way for her to have a partner in some Canaanite religious fertility rite.

In vv 16-17, she alludes to her rich lifestyle – hardly anyone could afford these luxuries. And she’s willing to share them with this tongue-tied fool.

And then, just in case his light bulb has completely gone out, she plainly states in v18: “Come, let’s drink deeply of love till morning; let’s enjoy ourselves with love!” In other words, “Come on in, we’ll do Kinsey from cover to cover.”

She has made her bed and she wants him to lie in it.

However, as one commentator says: “To have a full sexual relationship with somebody is to give physical expression to what is meant to be a covenanted relationship – that is, stable, faithful, permanent. To say physically, ‘I am giving myself to you,’ while emotionally and spiritually holding back from covenanted commitment is in fact to live a lie – a split in the personality which is ultimately stressful and destructive.” - David Atkinson

But try explaining THAT to a smitten 18-year old male leaking testosterone all over the driveway. Naturally, this statement precludes any readers of this material; you are all made of sterner stuff.

In vv 19-20, we learn that the husband isn’t home. Nope, he won’t be back until the full moon. He’s such a tedious, tiresome doofus anyway. Nobody will be the wiser, so . . . Carpe diem! Seize the day! Strike while the iron’s hot Go for it! Go for the Gusto! Nike’s wisdom? Just do it! What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Make hay while the sun shines!

In the movie “City Slickers,” two guys are talking about a hypothetical situation, namely: “If you could have sex with a most beautiful woman and no one whatsoever would ever find out about it, especially your wife, would you do so?”

We men may well find ourselves in this situation, which is why the wise father wants to pound into his son’s head the notion of holding fast to Wisdom.

But the Adulterous Woman's offer of sin with no regrets is much like Satan's offer in Eden. Try it, you'll like it.

The young man (being simple, uncommitted, unable to rely on God's support) falls for it and trots off behind his mistress, like a lamb to the slaughter. For he will die.

Rom 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our victim is not alone.

V 7:26: "Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng."

We remember the warning given by Matthew:

Matt 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Proverbs is written from the viewpoint of a father advising his son and so the choices a young man needs to make are couched in the form of women, Lady Wisdom and the Adulterous woman (Lady Sin. Or Lady Folly).

These two women compete for the attention (and loyalty) of the simple man. They are both present within us.

Lady Sin:

She is the one that immediately appeals to our animal senses; our knee-jerk desire for hedonism. She seduces us with her smooth talk of instant gratification and is employed overtime by marketing forces in this country. She has her own temples with all the trappings of luxury, wealth and status. Her temple is never hidden from our sight, beckoning to us with promises of untold physical pleasure.

"All this I will give you," she purrs, "if you will bow down and worship me."

What does her smooth talk sound like?

"You'll miss the playoffs if you go to church; the guy doing the sermon is boring anyway."

"Sure, I'll join you guys for one more drink before I hit the road."

"Look how she's dressed. She's just asking for it. Go ahead, she's drunk anyway."

"If you buy that new truck, the woman in the commercial will think you're a stud."

"Ashley Madison – Life is short, have an affair."

"Don't think about that bad situation now, you deserve to relax with a drink."

"Hey, go ahead and do it. Nobody will ever know."

"Why feel guilty about THAT? Everybody looks at porn. It means you're normal."

She coos: "You deserve."

She looks intensely into our eyes, "You are entitled."

Her perfect face is inches away from ours, "You are numero uno."

Her carmine lips part ever so slightly, "You should have more."

Her sensuous hands draw us even closer, "You are mine."

People who worship the sensuality of Lady Sin live on the Me-me planet. We are becoming a society of entitlement. How long before we, as a society, move from feeling entitled to pleasure

to feeling entitled to God's forgiveness? If, indeed, we remember God at all. I don't see any commercials for Lady Wisdom on the TV. Her appeal is focused far above the belt.

We know more about Lady Sin than we do about Lady Wisdom; indeed how could we not?

Lady Wisdom puts Jesus Christ at the center of her being. He is the cornerstone and the foundation of a wisdom-filled life. And she invites us to join her there. Oddly enough, the more we get to know her, the more attractive she becomes. We may not have the same quick gonadal response to her as we do to Ms. Bimbo but, over time, we can form a lasting and permanent bond with Lady Wisdom, which affords us a greater amount of lasting pleasure and satisfaction than the quick liaison with Lady Sin, which leads to the downward path of servitude, weeping, gnashing of teeth and destruction.

Which of these women would we like for a wife? Which one would we prefer to be the mother of our children? The one that will cheat on us, fill our ears with empty promises and introduce spiritual disease into our lives? Or the one who partners with us on the road to Salvation with lasting grace, beauty and the solid support of God's Wisdom?

July 6: Proverbs 8-9 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 27

Poetry Reading for 7/06/17

Proverbs 8-9

Hello All –

Today we will soldier on through chapters 8 and 9 of Proverbs. Buckle up.

In Chapter 8, Wisdom calls out and says this about her birth at the beginning of Creation, when she was at the Lord's side:

Prov 8:30-31 "Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, 31 rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind."

If I happen to wake up and glance at the newspaper, then I rarely feel the joy expressed in these verses nor do I tend to delight in mankind. Solution? Don't start my day out reading the newspaper. Rather, start my day out in prayer with a heart of gratitude for the opportunity to do His will and hopefully be a blessing to somebody. Actually, we stopped taking the physical newspaper because they wanted a King's ransom for the leaflet filled with ads that they delivered. But we can read it now online for a dowager's ransom.

Leaving Lady Sin to fester in her faux fur chamber of pleasurable death, we now come back to the brighter and life-affirming aspects of Lady Wisdom. She's beginning to develop a patina of allure, now, don't you think? Something that, perhaps, you didn't notice when you first met her.

The father has given his son some sage advice about behaving in moments of temptation, but now we are being given a Weltanschauung, a particular worldview. This is what Proverbs 8 is about: the joy of a Christ-centered life, offering us rewards far greater than silver, more precious than gold, more brilliant than diamonds and rubies. Those physical treasures are merely transient anyway.

James 5:3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

I'm sure that you already have experienced the joy of helping out a brother or sister in need, so you are aware of the kind of joy that is being expressed here in Proverbs. Imagine a life filled with that joy!

Do you not know that God is the Author of Everything? That He created all to the praise of His glory?

Rev 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

And yet, perversely, we often live our lives more attuned to T.S. Eliot's description of modern culture in his 1925 poem "The Hollow Men:"

"Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;"

Why do we allow our paths to spiral down into this joyless place? Because we place our trust and our hope in worthless idols, things that we pin our hopes on but which let us down. We concentrate on our family, or our career, or making money, or achieving success, or attaining social status with the expectation that we will, with enough personal grit and determination, succeed. Certainly, we need to take care of business in order to support ourselves and our families. But some of us focus primarily on success in these areas and if we don't measure up, we are deemed failures, so must be shamed by society.

I didn't pursue my PhD, so I'm a failure. (My cheeks are getting hot.) I didn't rise very far up at Lockheed so I'm a failure. I don't hobnob with Mayors or Governors or CEOs or other Important People, so I'm a failure. (I'm turning bright red now.) I don't vacation in Bora Bora at \$1,000 a night or at Dubai's best hotel at \$20,000 a night, sailing around on the ruby yacht of Omar Khayyam, so I'm a failure.

Well, boo hoo.

But here is God to the rescue with the wisdom of His Creation that exalts Christ and revitalizes our lives.

Proverbs 8 describes this wisdom in 4 sections:

vv. 1-11 Wisdom commands us to prize her above rubies

vv. 12-21 Wisdom is powerful

vv. 22-31 Wisdom is profound

vv. 32-36 Wisdom is the one necessity for true life; without her, we embrace death

In vv. 1-3, we see again that wisdom does not wait for us on the top of some lofty Tibetan mountain or in some windowless carrel in a forgotten corner of a mouldering monastery awaiting us to find her. She is right out there, where we go about our daily lives.

How does she speak to us? Softly and tenderly like in the hymn?

"Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,

Watching for you and for me.”

Nope. Not so much. Lady Wisdom is standing in the middle of the thoroughfare, RAISING her voice, she cries ALOUD like a costermonger, so her message can be heard over the ceaseless din of our culture.

4 “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.”

Jesus is inclusive. He issues His invitation to the simple as well as the fools. However, scoffers are a special case.

V 9:7 says “Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse.”

Scoffers not only refuse to listen respectfully, they can be rather rude and distasteful in their abuse. We’ve seen this attitude on Facebook as well as in our daily lives.

What do you think? Should we continue reaching out to scoffers or stop offering pearls to swine? Is it our duty to bring a scoffer to Christ or shake the dust from our sandals and move on? I think Wisdom is telling us to let sleeping dogs lie, lest we get bitten.

To the rest of us, God offers the gifts in vv. 8:6-9

In v 6, He says “Listen!” Everything God says to us is trustworthy and true. And also, sometimes, very difficult to hear. He gets to the point quickly and tells us what we need to hear without a lot of sugar-coating or beating around the bush. I can just imagine the O.T. prophets equivocating, saying things like “Um . . . have you thought of doing it this other way instead?” or “You might want to reconsider . . .”

V 9: “To the discerning all of them [Wisdom’s words] are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge.”

How the Words of God are received says a lot about you. Are you open to them? If we are bound up in Self, we might resent or misunderstand His teachings and admonitions.

James 1:21 “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

In v 10, Wisdom says “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold.”

You have to make a choice (and delaying a choice IS making a choice). Whom will you serve? You cannot serve two masters.

Vv. 12-31 tell us why Wisdom is the better choice.

James 3:13-18 tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom, natural wisdom and spiritual wisdom:

“13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

Lady Wisdom is spiritual wisdom. She is a councilor who gives practical advice. She is resourceful, insightful and gives us the courage not to quit in the face of hardships. But we must humble ourselves to accept her teaching because (v 13) she “hates pride and arrogance.”

In vv. 17-21 we hear Christ’s voice through Lady Wisdom showing His love for us.

V 17 “I love those who love me. . .”

Who does He love? Geniuses? Wise men? Observant Christians? Nice people? Republicans? Wall St. moguls? The Joneses that we’re always trying to keep up with?

No. Jesus loves those who love Him enough to seek Him out.

V 17 “. . . those who seek me find me.”

And where do we look for Him? Behind our swelling Pride, underneath our expansive Ego, beyond our greedy Self, inside our hardened Hearts, above our superior Intellect. Behind the mirror where we are admiring ourselves.

vv. 22-31 go back to the beginning of Creation where Wisdom was formed as “the first of his works.”

What do we learn from this?

First, wisdom comes from OUTSIDE of ourselves; it is not something that WE create. Our senses are attuned to the outside world, not the inside. So let us spend less time gazing inward at our navels and less time listening to ourselves babble, and less time making ourselves feel good about ourselves and less time enjoying the sweet smell of our success and less time relishing in the taste of our own victories and less time resting on our laurels. Less of self and more of Thee.

Instead, let’s turn more of our attention outward. “Love one another.” That’s what God tells us. His commandment wasn’t “Love yourself first and then, in your spare time, love your neighbor”. He already loves us. And His love is beyond measure.

Secondly, v. 31 tells us that wisdom is joyous over us. Wisdom was God’s first tool to help shape the chaotic mess when things were without form and void. She was indispensable to God and now she is indispensable to you. Christ tells us to offer ourselves to wisdom and let her recreate us. We were created in God’s image but sin has disfigured us. Wouldn’t we like to be made beautiful again?

Let us be joyous in the experience of Creation along with Lady Wisdom. Enjoy a beautiful sunset or the mist rising from a lake in the still morning or new life springing forth through a crack in the sidewalk. It is good for the soul.

Prov. 17:22 “A cheerful heart is good medicine. . .”

vv. 32-36 tell us how to guard our cheerful heart and deepen it, for the glory of God.

To do this, you must embrace wisdom. How? By accepting the invitation of Christ, who promises a truly meaningful life, a life well-lived and worth living.

1 John 5:12 “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Proverbs 9

9:4 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” – Lady Wisdom

9:16 “Let all who are simple come to my house!” – Lady Folly

As stated before, the simple are the uncommitted ones, the procrastinators, reeds which bend in whatever direction the wind takes them. Without deep roots, they are easily moved and will dry up at the first signs of trouble.

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

There is hope for such as these, which is why Wisdom calls out to them. Folly also calls to them with her siren song – the uncommitted **MUST** make a choice.

Do you really have to make a choice? Can't it wait?

The Valley of Indecisiveness (aka The Valley of the Shadow of Death, see Psalm 23), where I spent a goodly number of years, is a land lacking in nourishment or sustenance. It is a land lacking in light, so the future is only dimly perceived. One cannot easily see further than one foot in front of the other. You can make progress, to be sure, but the goal is lost in the mist. One cannot (I could not) find comfort in setting up a permanent residence there, even though there is a bustling populace abiding in that place. They (we) spent our time seeking for the nourishment that is lacking and groping for the light. Many trinkets and baubles claimed to be the prize we were looking for but all were miserable disappointments, pulling us further into spiritual despair. We were unaware of, or chose to ignore, the words of the psalmist:

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

It's no good to try to live with one foot in Wisdom's door and the other foot firmly planted on a banana peel in Folly's door. “Hedging your bets” is really not a viable option.

Sure, you might have a million questions. I did. And I thank God for the people in my life that helped me patiently with the answers to those questions. But what does Wisdom say?

V 9: “Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning.”

Wisdom is the best teacher you will ever have. She is patient, She is kind. She does not envy nor boast. She is not proud. She does not dishonor others, she is not self-seeking, she is not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. Wisdom does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. She always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The wise father wraps it up in Proverbs 9. He has patiently explained much to his son and now it is up to the son to make a decision. The son cannot just stand in the middle of the road nor continue on, bypassing both Wisdom's house and Folly's house. He must choose to turn into one OR the other.

In this day and age (I love this phrase; it's so ambiguous), if I want to know something, I'll Google it.

So I just did. I asked, "Why should I turn into Folly's house?" And Google gave me a link to a historic house in Kernersville, NC called Körner's Folly. So now we know that Folly lives in North Carolina. (And here I was thinking it was Washington, D.C.)

And now I asked, "Why should I turn into Wisdom's house?" And Google gave me (at the top of the list) a link to Proverbs 24:3. "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established"

So even Google knows that it is best to build your house (your life) on the wisdom (rock) of Christ.

Meanwhile, you and I are probably scurrying back and forth between Wisdom's house and Folly's house with our "Yes, but"s and "I'll get to that in a moment"s, and our endless "I just have this one more thing to do"s.

Matt 8:21-22 Another of His disciples requested, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

The invitation to Wisdom is a wide-open door for all. With the exception of scoffers (mockers) who stand at Folly's side and throw stones at the windows of Wisdom's house. How easy it is to stand back and criticize what another has built without building anything substantial of your own.

V 2: "She [Wisdom] has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table." Mixed wine is wine mixed with spices to enhance its flavor.

What is Wisdom offering you at this sumptuous feast?

Chapter 1 – Wisdom preserves us from violent people

Chapter 2 – Wisdom enters our hearts with peace of conscience

Chapter 3 – Wisdom improves us financially

Chapter 4 – Wisdom elevates our status in society

Chapter 5 – Wisdom makes sex better

Chapter 6 – Wisdom gets us off the sofa and successfully accomplishing worthy goals.

Chapter 7 – Wisdom protects us in temptation

Chapter 8 – Wisdom opens our eyes to the joyous creation in which we live.

Christ has set a good table for us and He invites us to partake.

V 3 "She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city."

Christ has sent his workers into the world to issue invitations to his banquet. And we are his workers.

Is the banquet free for us? Not quite. V 6 says we must leave our simple (uncommitted) ways. We have to stop procrastinating, think deeply about our lives, and then make a choice. Will we choose life (wisdom) or death (sin)? Are we willing to make the necessary changes in our lives that the gentle yoke of Christ demands? Are you unaware that you already labor under the heavy yoke of sin?

We are social creatures and, therefore, need to be in community with others. Christ is building a new community for us. A community built on wisdom for those who are able to tap into the power of sharing Him together. Your old community of the simple cannot offer you that. Love them but leave them for a new life in the Light of His Presence.

vv. 7-8 are a warning against the scoffers and mockers which abound in our society. They love to be seen in the marketplace, in their flowing intellectual robes, throwing stones at the elegant structures that others build and yet building nothing for themselves. Sometimes they go out of their way to denigrate the beliefs of others. They are the people who always know best, don't know how to listen, always pooh-pooh the ideas of others, and believe they are God's gift to humanity. Which is rather ironic, don't you think?

William McKane says: "No man earns more universal detestation or deserves it more than he who wears a perpetual sneer, who is himself incapable of deep loyalty and reverence and supposes that it is his mission in life to promote the corrosion of the values by which individuals and society live. He is the person with the knowing wink and the clever phrase who has seen through the hollowness of everything."

Scoffers are dangerous and they are legion. And there just aren't that many herds of pigs around.

Mockery is the mood of our culture. Paul Vischer, creator of Veggie Tales, in a speech at Yale in 2005 explained: "For me and many others in my generation, the real root [of our cynicism] is . . . personal. When we were very young, our parents broke their promises. Their promises to each other, and their promises to us. And millions of American kids in a very short period of time learned that the world isn't a safe place; that there isn't anyone that won't let you down; that their hearts were much too fragile to leave exposed."

And sarcasm, as C.S. Lewis put it, "builds up around a man the finest armor-plating . . . that I know."

As human beings, we let God down. A lot. But He is different from us in that He always keeps his word.

Hosea 11:9 "I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man-- the Holy One among you. . . ."

In vv. 13-18, we have Folly's invitation to worldly pleasure. There is a parallel structure with the description of Wisdom's invitation in vv. 1-6. They both issue the same invitation, "Turn in here and I will change your life." Both are situated at the top of the hill. But whereas Wisdom offers a sumptuous feast that she has prepared herself, Folly has stolen some bread and water. Folly says that the stolen water tastes sweet. And she is right about that.

Have you ever stolen something, not because you needed it but because it was an exciting thing to do? I have. When I was around 11, I stole a pack of Salem cigarettes from the grocery store. I should probably make amends by going back and paying for it. What were they, about 2 bits a pack back then? Oh well, confess your sins to one another. So – your turn.

Augustine, that old reprobate, wrote in his autobiography that he once stole something BECAUSE it was the wrong thing to do. He was getting his jollies because it was exciting. He later wrote: "Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart. You had pity on it when it was at the bottom of the abyss."

Lady Folly wantonly displays her wares of worldly distractions like a red-light hooker – and we become passionate about our status, our belongings, our power, our wealth, our many idols. None of us is spared; we’ve all peeked in (or gawked) at her door.

And if our passion for these lesser and fugacious things, which lead to Death, occupies our souls, how then can we be passionate for Christ – the one who offers true and everlasting Life?

By hearing the Gospel again.

Charles Spurgeon helps us see this when he says: “The gate of Mercy is opened, and over the door it is written, ‘This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ Between that word ‘save’ and the next word ‘sinners,’ there is no adjective. It does not say, ‘penitent sinners,’ ‘awakened sinners,’ ‘sensible sinners,’ ‘grieving sinners,’ or ‘alarmed sinners.’ No, it only says, ‘sinners.’ And I know this, that when I come, I come to Christ today . . . I dare not come as a conscious sinner or an awakened sinner, but I have to come still as a sinner with nothing in my hands.”

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Kevin Crittenden: Wisdom or Folly? Most excellent, interesting, thought-provoking post on this week’s poetry reading on wisdom and folly. Missed being able to read everyone’s posts this week on the assigned day but thankful we can now. Wisdom’s gifts to mankind are a great banquet.

Comment:

Lori Watt:
I stole a small glass bird when I was a kid. I took it back and left it at the store several years later, as I recall... someone at the store probably found it and thought someone had accidentally left it-- never realizing it had actually belonged there at one time. My life of crime.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
And now you lie awake at night, terrified that the police will fingerprint it and roust you out of bed in the middle of the night, never to be heard from again. Why is it that we remember forever the things we are not proud of but forget almost immediately the good that we do?

Lori Watt:
That is a question for someone far wiser than I.

Kevin Crittenden:
Ask your mother?

Lori Watt:
Yes, she would definitely meet the qualification.

July 13: Proverbs 10 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 28

Poetry Reading for 7/13/17

Proverbs 10

Prov 10:16 “The wages of the righteous is life, but the earnings of the wicked are sin and death.” And you can take THAT to the bank!

Hello again!

We come now to Collection II of the proverbs of Solomon, beginning in Chapter 10.

This chapter was written by Solomon when he had some downtime; a moment of relative quiet in his palace when only 847 of his wimminfolk were clamoring for his undivided attention. I’m sure he’s the first guy on the planet to have a man cave.

There are 31 chapters in Proverbs and we have gone through the first 9 of them. Chpts 10 – 31 are collections of bits of wisdom, somewhat like a grocery list. All are things you need at the store but there isn’t an obvious connecting thread between one item and the next.

So – how to lead any kind of a meaningful study on this? Not that I’m supposed to lead a study; I’m merely here to remind you to read such and so on a particular Thursday.

I could just say “Today’s reading is Chapter 10. Read, enjoy, go forth and be wise” and call it a day.

Howsomever, Marc’s not paying me the big bucks to be a sluggard. So here is how the rest of Proverbs is going to go. Please adhere to Marc’s reading schedule: one chapter this week, two chapters the following week, repeat as needed until the end. (Not the end of time but the end of Proverbs. Or the 2nd Coming, whichever occurs first.) Meanwhile, my notes will follow the example of Dr. Ortlund, Jr. and will be topical, covering:

The Tongue
Humility
Family
Emotions
Friendship
Money
Life and Death

These topics will be spread out over this week and the next 14 weeks. On the last week, we’ll have the midterm which I’ve decided will be open book and open notes.

THE TONGUE (PART I)

The tongue is a mighty weapon in our hands and we can use it not only to build up but to tear down. We have expressions in our language about the tongue: honey-tongued, sharp-tongued, loose lips sink ships, speaking with a forked tongue, speaking out of both sides of the mouth at once, nagging women (who ever heard of a nagging man?), tongue-lashing, slip of the tongue, wagging tongues, cat got your tongue?, bite your tongue, and, most parents of

teenagers belong to the Short Tongue Club because we have to bite our tongues in order not to say something taken amiss by our precious darlings.

“The pen is mightier than the sword, but the tongue is mightier than them both put together.” – Marcus Garvey

The tongue is extremely important and, as Christians, it is important that we recognize that when we arose from the waters of Baptism, we ceded certain of our rights under the First Amendment (Free Speech) to say whatever comes into our head. It matters to God what comes out of our mouths.

Mark 7:20-23 “He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21 For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”

Saying or writing something that promotes these negative things is offensive to God. And His laws trump our First Amendment rights.

Perhaps you remember being taunted by others in school and you may have replied “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.”

But, of course, their words DID hurt. A lot. They detracted from your self-image and made you feel badly about yourself. More than that, their cruel words may have helped shape your ideas about who you are. Ideas which still define you today. “I’m the ugly one. I’m the fat one. I’m the stupid one. I can’t do anything right. Everyone else is better than me. Nobody wants me.”

Words penetrate to the heart. Derek Kidner writes, “What is done TO you is of little account beside what is done IN you . . . for good or ill.”

Gossip is a particularly nasty piece of work exercised by the tongue. And we love to hear it and we love to pass it on. The more malicious, the better. Because it takes attention away from our own shortcomings and focuses the spotlight of blame on someone else. Has gossip within the church ever brought harmony to the members? Or edification? Or has it ever been used to build each other up?

Prov. 29:11 “ A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

And James tells us:

James 3:5 “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”

Studies show that we speak about 16,000 words in a day; obviously some speak much more than others. Our many words matter and we are to use them to glorify God.

1 Cor 6:20 “you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”

Prov 20:15 “Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.”

As listeners, we can tell when somebody is babbling on and on about something about which they have no knowledge. We encounter this a lot. But, on rare occasions, a person of good reputation and slow to speak, will begin to say something and everyone falls silent so they can

hear him. Such a person never babbles; his words are edifying and helpful. He can use speech much as an artist uses his brush to create a work of art which is pleasing to others as well as God.

Prov 12:22 “The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in people that are trustworthy”

We say, “Well, I’m not a liar!” and then we immediately share untruths and pass along libel through Facebook. (One might argue that passing on false information is different than lying – it goes to the issue of whether it was consciously done or not. Much like drunk drivers not being held responsible for the havoc they cause because they weren’t in control. They will have their day in Court.)

John 8:44 “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

That’s pretty harsh. But truth can be harsh. As well it should be. Lying is repulsive to God.

But consider the story in 1 Samuel 21:

1 Sam. 21:1-3 “[a]David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

2 David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

David flat-out lied to Ahimelek. So what do you think about this situation? Is this a case where lying was justified and acceptable in God’s sight?

Since the term “lying” seems pretty bad, society prettifies it by calling lies: whoppers, little white lies, fibs, slips-of-the-tongues, taradiddles, etc. All are euphemisms. But they’re just window dressing. You in the Midwest might call it putting lipstick on a pig. Does God merely wink at these minor infractions?

Is withholding the truth the same as lying? What do you think? If somebody asks you how you are doing and you answer Fine, even though you’ve had a rough morning, is that acceptable? We’ve all done this, it’s part of our culture to answer “fine” because we don’t want to cause concern in others nor do we always have (or want) the sympathy of others.

Is lying the entirety of this problem? Not really. If a man is walking alone through the forest and telling lies, who cares? What’s lacking is a listener. Listening to lies and gossip is a moral problem.

Prov 17:4 “A wicked person listens to deceitful lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.”

By listening to gossip, lies and slander, you participate in that sin. We tell ourselves that we are only listening but what we tell ourselves is a lie. And gossips flock to good listeners, don’t they? So pretty soon, you, the good listener, are filled with malicious information. How can you not be affected by that?

What should you do?

So imagine that I come to church, make a beeline over to where you are standing (near the end of the fourth pew towards the left), and eagerly start to share my juicy gossip.

Me: "Guess what I saw?!! (And before you can open your mouth, I barrel onwards) I think I saw one of the elders come out of a liquor store! Can you believe that?" I'm looking very gleeful at this point.

You: "Whoa there! Rather than tell me what you think you saw, there's Elder Berry right over there. Let's go over and then you can tell him to his face what you're telling me behind his back. Alright?"

Could we all develop the courage to disentangle ourselves from the snares of gossip?

Prov 18:8 "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts."

And let's be honest. We love gossip. We love to hear negative information about others. We love the controversy it ignites. But as we take in these corrupt words through our ears, they sink down deep inside us to our inmost parts and make an impression.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
I like it ! Thanks!

Comment:

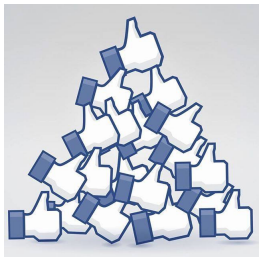
Marc Hermon:
Elder Berry was just probably selling his wine to the liquor store.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thanks, Kevin!

Comment:

Denise Waits:



Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Excellent verses, Kevin! Thanks for edifying & giving me laughs this evening.

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

Over the years I've tried to associate myself more with those who can find a rainbow on any given day to help prevent me from falling victim to scenarios such as these. For the past 24 years people like Ginger and Sue Reddy have shined a light tremendously for me in this area. I often pray that I can someday be that same light for others. Thanks Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

One of the hardest skills we need to learn along our path is the art of pruning. At some time, we realize that certain friends or relatives are toxic to our growth and well-being. They drain us by demanding our emotional investment in their issues without reciprocation.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Joanne, I do believe you are "that light" for others. Keep on praying, God is working in you and through you.

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:

Ditto what Charles says!

Kevin Crittenden:

Ditto what Butch says!

Ginger Hermon:

Joanne Caffie: YOU ARE A BRIGHT LIGHT TO SO MANY!!! Because of YOU there are children who have obeyed the gospel. Because of YOU others have seen how to deeply love and care for their parents in their old age. BECAUSE OF YOU SO MANY WALK CLOSER TO OUR LORD!!! You are living testimony of pure religion. I've witnessed your constant love and service to all men. You're truly an inspiration and glorify HIM.

Galatians 6:9-10 "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." I know you do these things, Joanne. May God continue to bless you, strengthen you, and supply all your needs, as you have blessed me and others. <3

Comment:

Lori Watt:

Taradiddles???

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Yup. Would I lie to you?

July 20: Proverbs 11-12 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 29

Poetry Reading for 7/20/17

Proverbs 11-12

My apologies for posting this early 'cause I'm leavin' on a jet plane. Don't know when I'll be back again. Oh babe, I hate to go. But, Kathleen and I will be swanning around San Diego, showing Katelyn the sights (The zoo, Legoland) and I wanted to remove this tremendous burden from my shoulders before we left.

THE TONGUE (PART II)

You have a tongue. And you can use it for good.

Prov 31:8-9 “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9 Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Somebody who is being gossiped about is not there to defend themselves. God is telling us to speak up when others are being put down. “Speak up!” He commands. Because with every unkind word that goes unchallenged, a reputation dies.

Prov 18:21 “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Who has not heard the tragic stories of teens who commit suicide after being bullied on social media? Words can literally kill. Propaganda has been used to this purpose in wartime. Tokyo Rose comes to mind, a fictional name given to a group of female Japanese broadcasters whose job it was to undermine the morale of U.S. troops during WW II.

How we speak and what we say IS important. And words that we utter which harm others will need to be justified. Again, scoffers come to mind. Those that belittle the cherished beliefs of others.

Matt 12:36 “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”

Is it best to remain silent? No, because the tongue also has the power of life. Our carefully chosen words can bring peace to a troubled heart. Here are three little words that, said in a truly contrite manner, can bring healing to a relationship: “I am sorry.”

In his book, “The Mark of the Christian,” Francis Schaeffer teaches us how to love one another in healing ways:

“What does this love mean? How can it be made visible? First, it means a very simple thing. It means that when . . . I have failed to love my Christian brother, I go to him and say, ‘I’m sorry.’ . . . It may sound simplistic to start with saying we are sorry and asking forgiveness, but it is not. This is the way of renewed fellowship, whether it is between a husband and wife, a parent and child, within a Christian community, or between groups. When we have shown a lack of love toward the other, we are called by God to go and say, ‘I’m sorry . . . I really am sorry.’ If I am not willing to say, ‘I’m sorry,’ when I have wronged somebody else – especially when I have not loved him – I have not even started to think about the meaning of a Christian oneness which the world can see. The world has a right to question whether I am a Christian.

And more than that . . . if I am not willing to do this very simple thing, the world has a right to question whether Jesus was sent from God and whether Christianity is true.”

Prov 12:18 “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Have you been hurt by cruel words? Rhetorical question, right? We’ve all suffered from this. But even if those people never get around to saying they are sorry, you can rely on Jesus to be your Comforter. As we are told in Romans, we are God’s children.

Rom 8:16 “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

Therefore, the indwelling Holy Spirit will whisper, with wise lips, healing words to us. Let us listen to Him.

Prov 12:25 “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.”

Let’s suppose we are anxious about something. Perhaps, like Kathleen and me, you have a son in the military who is being sent into combat in a war zone. You worry. Had we just kept to ourselves, stewing and fretting, we would have descended even further into anxiety. In such times, we need to seek the company of trusted others who can supply us with kind words. We need to share our concerns.

This country treats self-reliance as a virtue. We love the lone hero who rides into town, saves the day, and then disappears before anyone can learn his name. The pretty girl sighs and thinks “Now THERE’S a man!” Even if we admire such a man, this is not God’s ideal for us. He tells us to love one another. Not to ride off into the sunset by ourselves. So this idea of “Grin and bear it” all alone in the face of adversity may be an American ideal but is not God’s ideal.

Let us look for opportunities to speak a kind word to others. Whether they are weighed down with anxiety or not. Let us build one another up.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. . . The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.”

Prov 10:11 “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

Prov 10:21 “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.”

Have you ever been a caregiver to someone who is unable to do anything for themselves? It’s very tiring, right? You give and you give of yourself so that this person’s life is made possible. But you only have so much water in the well and, over time, it is natural that you begin to burn out. Unless you find a way to refresh yourself.

Our words can be (should be) nourishing to others but what is nourishing to us? By walking more closely with Christ. In doing so, we replenish our inner reservoirs and are then able to reflect His light into nourishment for others.

Eph 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

But our words need substance. "Empty talk" is of little use; it may make promises but delivers little. Certain people are skilled at rhetoric, which stirs the people up, but then their rhetoric falls flat in the face of reality.

Prov 14:23 "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."

Our subsequent excuses and spin doctoring don't impress God.

Prov 24:12 If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

Gen 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Are you your brother's keeper? Well, yes, you are. Who, among your circle of friends, is suffering or anxious or depressed? Do you merely talk about helping them or are you actively doing something about it? (Sending a card of support, maybe, delivering a casserole (I can give you my address), buying some groceries to tide them over. . .)

There's another aspect of our words. By expressing ourselves openly, we may become targets for our enemies.

Prov 13:3 "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

There are stories, perhaps you've heard them, of people who express their views (and thus their character) openly on Facebook and subsequently go in for a job interview. The candidate looks promising up to the point when the employer researches that candidate's Facebook posts, which run contrary to the company's ideals. Would you, as a Christ-centered hiring manager, want to employ somebody who boasts about being a Wiccan on their Facebook page?

I suppose it can't be helped. We have the right and responsibility to let people know where we stand. Just be aware that whatever you say may be held against you, in life as well as a court of law.

Jesus is THE example of how we should speak. He also knew when to remain silent.

John 7:46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards replied.

However, Jesus' guarded mouth did not preserve His life. He stepped up to the plate and took upon himself the sin of our unguarded words, our lies, our slander, our guilty silences, our braggadocio, our gossip, our mockery and griping, our angry words and empty excuses – all these He took upon Himself and, without glancing at them, hit the Delete button.

Words, of course, are a form of communication.

Matthew 27:46 says "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

What happened here? At this point, the true horror of the crucifixion, the separation from God, took place. This was done for a purpose. God stopped communicating acceptance to his

Son, so that Jesus would never stop communicating acceptance to us. Jesus IS the Word and the model of how we should speak: To Him, through Him, and about Him.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:
Excellent. Thanks!

Comment:

Lori Watt:
Another wonderful post... I'm just a "bit" behind...

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
It doesn't help that I write too much.

Lori Watt:
You do write a lot, but no "too much". You put a lot of work and thoughts and effort into your writings, and that is a good thing. :-)

July 27: Proverbs 13 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 30

Poetry Reading for 7/27/17

Proverbs 13 (And, no, this is NOT a collection of unlucky proverbs)

Prov 22:4 "Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life."

HUMILITY (PART I)

This week, we begin the topic of Humility on which, as you should already know, I am an expert.

Wouldn't it be great, though, if I could just say, "As far as humility goes, just follow my example, okay?"

Umm. Not so much. There is still a lot of pride in that statement. Saying "I'm more humble than you are" is an oxymoron.

So I'm a bad example. But Jesus is a perfect example. So, while I'm eating a large serving of humble pie, let's learn from Proverbs together how to be more like Him.

"Get off your high horse!" - That's not in proverbs but maybe it should be. Most people didn't have horses in those days.

Anyway, a proud (arrogant) person is hardly amenable to accepting the teachings of others. They are the ones that have their answer running in any conversation so do not really listen to others. How can we learn and grow in wisdom if we are not teachable?

When we are baptized, we are saying clearly, "Lord, I want newness of life. I want to turn my life over to You. I want to learn from You as we walk together. Please show me your Glory." This is a radical change for us and it requires humility. The Bible is clear about this:

Matt 23:12 "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Matt 18:4 "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Isa 40:4 "Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

Etc., etc.

So we see that pride humiliates us whereas humility exalts us. This is God's message, not the message of the society that we live in. Dog eat dog. Top dog. Climbing the ladder. Pushing our way to the top of the heap. Success at any cost. Second place is the first loser.

I mention the disparities between our culture and God's wisdom to keep us cognizant of the conflicting forces that live without us and within us. We ARE in conflict and again, I recommend spending some time revisiting your long-standing ideas of what success means. AND what you might have to give up to live successfully.

What is humility?

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding

Prov 22:4 Humility is the fear of the Lord;
its wages are riches and honor and life.

Now, I'm a big believer and adherent of the concept of self-esteem. So how can we feel better about ourselves? How do we grab hold of the happy life that we want? And deserve? The many (really many) published self-help books out there give us tools to build up our self-esteem, make us feel better about ourselves. And who wouldn't want that?

However, here is an article by Lauren Slater citing studies about self-esteem that point us in a different direction:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/the-trouble-with-self-esteem.html>

"The fact is," Emler (one of the researchers) says, "we've put antisocial men through every self-esteem test we have, and there's no evidence for the old psychodynamic concept that they secretly feel bad about themselves. These men are racist or violent because they don't feel bad enough about themselves."

Slater goes on to say: "Perhaps, as these researchers are saying, pride really is dangerous, and too few of us know how to be humble. "

But we can learn to be humble. We don't come to Christ because we are humble but because we are proud. He accepts us and helps us with our issue of pride. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Matt 22:4 Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

Jesus doesn't say that WE have to be ready to come to the feast. It's is the feast that has been prepared. We just need to show up and partake.

Prov 28:14 Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble.

It seems odd to juxtapose being blessed (happiness) and trembling (fear). But this is in opposition to the B-line of the proverb, having a hard heart. Thus, trembling before God means approaching Him with an open heart, nothing held back, nothing hidden (as if you could), but being aware of your own limitations and failings and coming to Him anyway for forgiveness. Which, as you know, brings true happiness.

We will continue this next week. Stay tuned!

<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2002/02/03/magazine/the-trouble-with-self-esteem.html?referer=http://m.facebook.com>
"The Trouble with Self-Esteem"

Comment:

Charles Fry:
Good thoughts, good article too.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Kevin! I hope you are edifying your local congregation with sermons. The Lord has blessed you with talents. :-) There were some popular verses in chapter 13 - for example - verses 22 & 24. A good man leaves an inheritance and discipline rooted in love.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Actually, I have yet to give a sermon. What can I tell people that have been walking with the Lord far longer than I have?

Craig Hensley:

Kevin Crittenden this sure sounded like a sermon. And a good one at that. Thanks for the spiritual edification.

Janet Gordon Gentry:

There will always be those who have walked with the Lord longer than you, and always will be those that have come in behind you. I have learned many lessons from the young (in spirit and/or age). Please use your gift to teach and encourage others in your group. This was a great lesson! Thanks for teaching me today!

Joanne Caffie:

You could share with them how you yourself came to know the Lord, the importance of following him and the commitment you now have towards obedience. The Apostle Paul constantly used where his background to bring others to the Lord and I think that your history could help others too.

It is very easy for us to hide behind FB rather than help our brethren face-to-face (which is needed more). I find myself doing the same thing from time to time. But the Lily white field is right in front of you waiting for you to step out of that comfort zone. We all know you can do it and so does HE. Sometimes you just gotta step out on faith. We believe in you brother now all you gotta do is believe in you too.

Kevin Crittenden:

Joanne Caffie - Thank you, and others, for the encouragement! I will start writing up my first sermon, speaking about the greatest sermon ever given - The Sermon on the Mount.

Joanne Caffie:

Please have someone record it so that I can be uplifted by it too.

Kevin Crittenden:

It will say "Blessed are the encouragers of this world for their light shines forth to glorify God in the hearts of the timid."

Ginger Hermon:

Kevin Crittenden - this decision brings great joy! Thank you for glorifying Him & teaching others.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Ditto what Craig said, Kevin!

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

This was a VERY uplifting "sermon" Kevin. Thank you for your continued diligence in searching the scriptures and sharing them with us.

Comment:

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Kevin, your thoughts have always been appreciated - both in class and private studies. A sermon is nothing more than an extension of that. We, at 7th street, would love to have you "sermonize" from the pulpit. Finding your voice and the right audience is tough. As a woman, even harder in some respects. There are a couple of men in our group that I would love to hear more from in the pulpit. You are one of them. Thanks for a great start to my morning! Now I'll go and be awesome - hahahhaa! BTW - clothes went into can. 😊

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I should explain that the remark about clothes going into the can does not mean that Kim has become a naturist but rather somebody left trashbags of clothing at the church. People seem to think that they can dump stuff in our parking lot, maybe thinking that as a church, we can find a "use" for their unwanted stuff.

Kevin Crittenden:

P.S. Kim is awesome 24/7

August 3: Proverbs 14-15 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 31

Poetry Reading for 8/03/17

Proverbs 14-15

Hello again –

This week, we continue on with the topic of humility.

HUMILITY (PART II)

Prov 15:33 Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor.

Prov 18:12 Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

Prov 29:23 Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.

The value of humility is exhorted throughout the Bible. The least shall be the greatest. We should, nay, we must strive to follow this pattern in our lives by slowly deflating our pampered egos, chipping away at the imprisoning walls of our hardened pride, abdicating with grace our nominal position as Number One, and, through Baptism in Jesus Christ, submitting ourselves to our Lord and Savior. How HARD it is to cede our authority, to bend our knee to Him, to abdicate our accustomed position of control; not by giving lip service, showing up to church on Sunday and merely going through the motions but REALLY, TRULY draining the swamp within. But ONLY when we have made room in our souls for HIM by clearing out the excess of US, can we then be built up into MAGNIFICENCE, reflections of HIS GLORY. And what better honor is there than that.

I must admit that I play a game of Tug-of-War with God, not willing to let go of my fantasy of control. Sometimes I'm more inclined to give in, other times I dig in my heels and say "Just this once (meaning lots of times), let me do what I think is best."

Rom 8:30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Notice it says “glorified.” Not “made mediocre.” He glorifies us! We are able to transcend our mundane lives through His justification. First humility. Then honor.

If you are a child of God and your life still seems rather mundane, then don’t worry about it. You are significant in His eyes and He keeps His promises.

Perhaps you remember Bob Dylan’s lyrics:

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slowest now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is rapidly fading
And the first one now will later be last
Cause the times they are a-changing

Here are more proverbs for consideration:

Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Prov 28:26 Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.

Prov 30:12 There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.

Prov 16:2 All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Prov 14:12 There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Pride is natural to me and perhaps to you as well. It feels like the right thing. We are “lifted up” by pride. The Hebrew words translated “pride” and “haughty” both have to do with height, of being lifted up.

We remember that in the Book of Daniel, Daniel tells King Belshazzar that Belshazzar’s father, King Nebuchadnezzar, was given glory and majesty by God. But when his heart became hardened from putting on airs, down he tumbled like Humpty-Dumpty. All the way to the ground, a shattered man eating grass like an ox.

Dan 5:18-20 “Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:7 “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”

Our brains are, au fond, wired to follow pleasure and avoid pain. They help us survive in the natural world (see bear → run screaming) but they (our brains, not the bears) are not dependable as good moral compasses.

What can we do to overcome our natural leanings? Follow the Instruction Manual and ingest its Wisdom like an infant being nourished by its mother's milk. Got Wisdom?

How do the humble behave?

Prov 13:13 Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.

Prov 15:31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Prov 28:13 Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

The humble behave by revering, by listening and by confessing.

Humility REVERES the Word of God but pride scoffs at it. Humility treats each verse as a blessing from God but Arrogance tramples them into the mud.

Humility LISTENS to reproof, which keeps us on the path with Him. Reproof which is abusive, though, should be ignored and perhaps that relationship should be questioned. But we do need loving correction.

Humility CONFESSES and forsakes sin. Let us confess our sins to one another but NEVER in a shaming environment. Let us not be like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11 who concentrated on the shortcomings of others: "The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector.'"

In his work "Thoughts on the Revival," Jonathan Edwards says: "Spiritual pride tends to speak of other persons' sins with bitterness or with laughter and an air of contempt. But pure Christian humility rather tends either to be silent about these problems or to speak of them with grief and pity. Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others, but a humble Christian is most guarded about himself. He is as suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The proud person is apt to find fault with other believers, that they are low in grace, and to be quick to note their deficiencies. But the humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own heart and is so concerned about it that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. He is apt to esteem others better than himself. "

I know I have a long way to go. Perhaps I'll see you on that road too. But we have an example and a guide for how to get from wherever we are to there.

Phillipians 2:6-11 tells us:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Next week we will begin talking about the Family.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

August 10: Proverbs 16 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 32
Poetry Reading for 8/10/17
Proverbs 16

FAMILY (PART I)

Good morning, Family! Remember that we only have one bathroom so stop hogging it!

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

And if he does depart from it, it's probably his mom's fault. ^-^

All of us are part of some kind of family, so we know that **SOMETIMES**, family relationships can be difficult. Not because of us, certainly, but because of that other family member. Each of our families probably has a "black sheep," you know, the one that doesn't really "fit" in. Who that black sheep is depends on which family member you ask. Anyway, sometimes it's hard to maintain that Norman Rockwell illusion of Happy Families.

Proverbs offers practical wisdom on making family relationships work in a way that is pleasing to God. For instance, what kind of woman is ideal to take as a wife?

Prov 31:10-11 [a] An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.

The climax of the book of Proverbs is a description of this ideal woman who fears God. The phrase "an excellent wife" is more literally translated as "a woman of strength." The ideal woman is strong – she is a hard worker, earns money, is kind to the poor, is fearless about the future, enhances her husband's reputation, speaks with wisdom etc. Her strength is not meant to be in competition with her husband, but rather to augment his strength.

A husband and a wife each have their own strengths, which ideally are brought to bear within a marriage to overcome the difficulties that beset every life. Difficulties, like sin, lie crouching at the door, but with the confluence of strengths present in a good marriage, those difficulties can

more easily be borne. And there are many difficulties in every marriage; it can be a rocky ride sometimes.

Malcolm Turnbull, current P.M. of Australia says:

“Let us be honest with each other. The threat to marriage is not the gays. It is a lack of loving commitment - whether it is found in the form of neglect, indifference, cruelty or adultery, to name just a few manifestations of the loveless desert in which too many marriages come to grief.”

In Prov 31:11, the word “gain” means “loot, plunder, the spoils of war.” So is the virtuous wife also a buccaneer?

“Oh, Honey, I’m heading out with some quilting friends for a little looting and plundering but I’ll stop by the store on the way home and pick up dinner.”

As enticing as that fantasy might be, this wording is used to indicate the realities of our lives. Life is a struggle, sometimes a war. And this “excellent wife” is up to the challenge. She has donned the full armor of God and can stride into the maelstrom of life with confidence. She’s got her husband’s six and he loves her deeply for that. This beautiful woman, this precious gift from God, is her husband’s greatest earthly treasure and he cherishes her deeply.

If you, as a woman, are thinking, “I’m sure not THAT woman. Sometimes I’m afraid of life, sometimes I need to be held, sometimes I lack confidence, and, if I’m honest, sometimes I wonder if my husband secretly thinks he could have done better.”

(Just between you, me and that fly on the wall, I’ll share that men sometimes have similar thoughts. “Whatever does my wife see in me? She could have done so much better.”)

If you are feeling that way, then remember that your wedding, performed in the presence of God, means that He approves of your union. That you are the right woman for your husband and that he is the right man for you. We will talk more about marriage in Song of Songs, coming soon to a FB posting near you!

[And just to be clear, I know that some of you might be a bit skittish, knowing that I’m a native Californian, now living within a stoned throw of Berserkely, and therefore possibly subscribing to certain regnant social mores including: “If it feels good, do it” and “if you can't be with the one you love, honey, love the one you're with” and “Love your neighbor but don't get caught.”

So, again, to clarify, when I’m talking about marriage, I’m talking about a man and a woman. I’m not talking about a union between Not Sure and Undecided.]

By the way, did you notice that there is no line in Proverbs 31 that says: And she is eternally 25 and looks smokin’ hot in a low-cut blouse and stiletto heels? That is the ideal promoted in our culture but has no place in God’s culture.

You may be wondering why there isn’t a Proverbs 32 man. (No doubt it is because I hadn’t been born yet so there wasn’t a model.) Remember, Proverbs was written (mostly) for the education of men and boys, most likely for budding royal officials but narrowing in on young men of marriageable age. At that time and in that culture, women didn’t enjoy the full equality, equal pay, heartfelt gratitude, praiseworthy respect and lauded honor that they now enjoy everywhere in our current culture.

If you, as a man, are thinking “I haven’t trusted and valued and affirmed my wife as she deserves,” ah well, then, you’re probably right. Go make it up to her right now. (Sorry, couldn’t resist.)

The word “husbandry”, as you know, has to do with cultivation. You tend your crops to maximize your yield. You, as a husband, are to cultivate, encourage, support and nurture your wife so she may develop her potential and grow into the person that God intended she be.

How do we husbands do that? By nitpicking and browbeating and pointing out areas where she should improve? “Louise! I sure wish that someday when I come home from work that the cooking pots and pans are as warm as the TV set!”

No. Definitely not. Proverbs 31 tells us.

31:28-31 Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:

29 “Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”

30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Honor her for all that her hands have done,
and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Guys, note that the word “praise” appears three times in these verses. You, as a husband, need to praise your wife at home where the children can see and learn from your example. Put-downs and bickering, fault-finding and angry silences are also examples that your children will absorb like a sponge.

Perhaps you are focusing angrily on your wife’s wasteful spending habits or the fact that she doesn’t cook as well as your mother (yes, I’ve heard of this) or . . . Can you find something praiseworthy about the woman you married? Surely you can! What qualities attracted you to her in the first place? Tell her tonight. The Gospel is speaking to you.

Men, how you see God will inevitably show up in how you treat your family. A.W. Tozer wrote, “The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.” If your concept of God is less than who He really is, then you will think unworthy thoughts about your wife and say unworthy words to her. God is not wanting you and your wife to live in silent, sullen, dejected and defeated mediocrity. Take time to affirm one another every day and watch your marital life bloom.

Prov 15:20 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

Prov 20:20 If someone curses their father or mother, their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

Prov 23:25 Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice.

Since, at last count, all of us have parents, these bits of wisdom apply to all of us. How are we to grow in wisdom towards our parents? Note the words “despises” and “curses.” Those are opposite of what is required.

What is required of us?

Ex 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

You might be asking yourself, Who would do such a thing as to hurl swear words at their parents? Nobody I know, certainly.

To despise someone is to treat them as worthless; to curse them is similar to despising them – you treat them as beneath you.

To honor our parents means to treat them as worthy. Just because they are our parents. Not only if they have earned our respect.

How can we honor our parents?

First, by thanking them. Stop blaming them for their failures and thank them for their successes. Stop blaming them for YOUR failures, take responsibility for your own choices and then move forward in the direction you want to go using the tools that your parents (and God) gave you.

Secondly, if your parents are or were Christians, then imitate them.

Heb 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

On a personal note, my father left our family, preferring the pleasures of the Adulterous Woman to the responsibilities of family. I was 4 and my brother was 7. My father was a non-presence in our lives – I didn't even realize he had left. He didn't say goodbye to us, never visited, never wrote, never sent presents, never taught his sons how to be worthy men.

So why should I honor him?

My mother was the strong one who put herself through college so she could shoulder the responsibility of supporting us. She is the embodiment of the Finnish word "Sisu." But my father – how should I think about him? Charles gave me helpful insight into this – namely, to honor my father by being the best father I could be to my own children; by being the best husband I could be to my wife; by modeling the Christian life to everyone I meet.

THAT, I can work with.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Excellent!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Kevin. Another interesting read. I liked Charles Fry advice. I'm storing that away for future reference with others who have had a painful experience. Once again good thoughts on the family. Also a good reading in Proverbs 16. Commit your works to the Lord & your thoughts will be established!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Ginger! I hope that you never have occasion to need Charles' advice. (By that I mean his advice on THIS particular matter; not ALL of his advice.)

And thank you for being a cheerleader for Christ! Your encouragement is a blessing to me and others. People wonder about the role of women in the church but your role shines brightly as an example to all.

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:
Good proverbosity!

August 17: Proverbs 17-18 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 33
Poetry Reading for 8/17/17
Proverbs 17-18

FAMILY (PART II)

Good morning!

Today, we will continue with the wisdom that Proverbs has to offer on the subject of families and why your children are well-mannered but misunderstood while other people's children are often ill-mannered brats.

22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Raising kids is a tough job and, if you have children, you don't need me to tell you that. Kathleen once asked her Uncle Chet about children: "Which age is the most difficult?" His answer: "Whatever age they are."

How hard it is to train a child in the way he or she should go when they think you are possibly the most irritating and stupid person on the planet.

So what IS "the way he should go"? Are the following your thoughts? My son needs the best education so he can get a really good-paying job! You can't make it in this world without a lot of money. And how can he afford to get married if he doesn't have a college degree? My daughter needs the best education she can get so she can support herself because you just can't depend on men anymore. And it is really important that I caution her away from the wrong kind of men, men who don't have good prospects. My kids need me every step of the way, otherwise they will make mistakes.

We might be thinking along these lines but the American Dream is not from God. There is no Eleventh Commandment that says "Wealth Equals Success." The "way your child should go" is along the path that leads to Heaven. How do you help your child to find THAT path?

The word translated "train up" means "dedicate." We remember that Samuel was dedicated to the LORD.

1 Sam 1:28 Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

I'm not suggesting that you bundle your children into the back of your pickup truck and drop them off at the nearest church for them to raise (although it may seem tempting), but rather that you model for them what it means to be a Christian dedicated to the LORD. If you are enthusiastic about Christ, then your children will see that and remember.

Please keep in mind, though, that you do not have total control over your children – they are unique individuals who will either follow your example or go their own way. In other words,

there is no guarantee that your good example will cause your kids to follow in your footsteps. Some people, knowing this, attempt to limit their children's interaction with the world so they won't stray from God. Let me know how that works for you.

Francis Schaeffer wrote: "One of the greatest injustices we do to our young people is to ask them to be conservative. Christianity today is not conservative, but revolutionary. To be conservative today is to miss the whole point, for conservatism means standing in the flow of the status quo. . . [W]e must teach the young to be revolutionaries, revolutionaries against the status quo."

And here is an article about effective communication with your children: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_communicate_more_effectively_with_children

22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Foolishness is the willful refusal to make moral choices. Because to do so is a major step in becoming an adult and our young folks are often resistant to cross that bridge. We live in a world increasingly filled with half-adults. They often still live with their parents, don't have a purpose, don't have a career, don't want marriage, don't have kids, have only a nebulous idea of what they stand for, and don't contribute. They have been brought up to feel entitled, but that feeling isn't shared by the world beyond the doorstep of their parent's house.

A recent article by Tatiana Sanchez in the San Jose Mercury, (April 20), says "Meanwhile, a majority of young people in the nation have ditched the centuries long tradition of marrying and having kids early in life to pursue educational and professional goals. More than half of Americans believe marrying and having children are not as important for becoming an adult. In the 1970s, 8 in 10 people married by the time they turned 30, according to the report. In 2015, 8 in 10 people married by age 45. 'If one theme describes how adulthood has changed over the last 40 years, it is growing complexity,' the report said. In 1975, there was one predominant adult milestone—family formation— that people largely experienced during their 20's. Today, while the milestones have remained the same, the pathways are more diverse."

Robert Bly addresses this topic in his book "The Sibling Society," where the word "sibling" is used as a metaphor. He says: "Adults regress toward adolescence; and adolescents – seeing that – have no desire to become adults. Few are able to imagine any genuine life coming from the vertical plane – tradition, religion, devotion." He then goes on to quote the neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky: "My students usually come with ego boundaries like exoskeletons. Most have no use for religion, precedents, or tradition. They want their rituals newly minted and shared horizontally within their age group, not vertically over time. The ones I train to become scientists go at it like warriors, overturning reigning paradigms, each discovery a murder of their scientific ancestors."

Young folks today ask their same-age friends (horizontal plane) for advice. Elders (vertical plane) are ignored and left feeling useless, unnecessary and in the way.

Typical exchange on Facebook (Names unchanged to lay blame):

WorrydGirl: I think my boyfriend cheated on me.

SexxyThang12: He an ass.

SheRulesAll: men R pigs.

As parents, part of our job is to prepare our children to launch, thus avoiding perpetual puerility. We help them emerge from their immaturity and set them on the road to greatness in Christ using the rod of discipline. This does NOT mean beating them into submission or breaking their spirit. Gentle correction can sometimes be achieved by a look. Most husbands recognize that look when their wives use it. And inwardly quail.

Some people feel that a child should never be spanked – but it’s hard to get that concept from a reading of the Bible. As parents, you know your family best and can work out a system of coaching, punishments and rewards that help your children grow up to become worthy men and women.

Prov 14:26 Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge.

The fear of the Lord is the greatest legacy that we can leave our children. It will be a place of refuge for them when the trials of life seem more than they can bear. And our children WILL suffer. In those times, they need to know how to draw strength from God. Will you show them how?

And do you remember that we are all as children to the Lord?

Heb 12:5-7 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”a] 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Nowhere in the Bible is there a mention of a money-back guarantee that our lives will be trouble-free once we adopt the mantle of Christianity. The wise Father continues to guide and discipline his children; His will is for our own good whether we think it is or not. Yes, we suffer but we come through that Valley of Death a stronger people, wiser than before. He refines His people. Us. And nowhere in the Bible have I read God saying, “Oh, they’ve had enough. I’ll ease up now.” God, the wise parent, gives us what we need. Whether we like it or agree with it or not.

God does not take half-measures. Jesus lived fully as a man, suffered fully during his brief life, was fully rejected by the ruling authorities, suffered fully on the cross, endured fully an agonizing separation from God. Why? Because He fully loves us.

Have a great week! Next time, we begin to look at Emotions.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_parents_can_communicate_more_effectively_with_children
“How Parents Can Communicate Effectively to Their Children”

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Joanne Caffie:

Another great sermon Kevin. Thx for sharing

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Joanne! Does it count as a sermon if not delivered orally?

Joanne Caffie:

I believe that anything that helps draw someone closer to God can be a sermon. In my humble opinion, a sermon is nothing more than someone adding their thoughts to help the audience better understand the Word. And not to lift you up too high but I think you do a most excellent job in this area.

Because you came into the Body much later than most affords you an opportunity to reach those that others can't. Beware, if you don't use that talent the Lord will surely take it back (Matt 25:27-28). #luvubrother

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Joanne! I am blessed to be a part of this community which, indeed, lifts me up. As far as I know, this group is limited to those in the Body; therefore I like to write things on my personal page which hopefully are seen by those who need it. In my experience, people see the word "Christ" or "religion" and immediately stop reading because they've seen it all before, etc. etc. My challenge is to find a way through that. Once I complete my notes for the 7 Bibles Study (in early September), I want to reach out to people like myself. Seekers, not satisfied with their life, knowing that Something is out there but not sure what it is.

Comment:

Joshua Riggins:

Good points well made on these passages.

What are your thoughts on the second half of 22:6, "when he is old, he will not depart from it."?

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you!

22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Wise people, when they plant a sapling, anchor the new tree to a sturdy support to protect the tree from winds, or from things that might hit it. Like soccer balls or wayward children. The support keeps the trunk from bending because the trunk is not yet strong enough to rebuff the strong forces that might bend or even break it.

Children are not strong enough to withstand the forces of the world without support. Thus, we parents don't allow our 2-year olds to play in the street, nor do we allow our 15-year old daughters to dress in a suggestive manner. A person's mind doesn't fully develop until about 25 years of age. This, of course, is the physical world.

As you know, there are forces at work in the spiritual realm as well. As we physically protect our children in the physical world, it behooves us as parents to also bolster our children in the spiritual realm.

It does no good, however, to keep our kids in a spiritual straightjacket as I've heard some people try to do. (Example: if you stop attending church, you'll be kicked out of the house.) As parents we guide, we provide examples, we make resources available, we communicate with our children which means that we LISTEN to them.

If church is not their "thing" right now, it may be that they are exploring internally what they DO believe. As all men must, we have to, at some point, really tease out the differences between what WE believe against what others have told us and what society has told us and what teachers have told us. It's not easy to do.

The sapling, once it reaches a certain size, no longer needs its training wheels. It will continue to grow straight and true, as long as it continues to be nourished.

Our children, once they reach a certain age, will outgrow us. But they will never outgrow the memory of our good teaching in which we stressed the encouragement of Christ in their lives and lived ourselves as Godly people, without hypocrisy, without gossip, without judgement, humbly, in service to others and always compassionate. And loving our children always as Christ loves us always.

Yes, our children have free will and can exercise choices. We cannot make their choices for them. But we can help them to see the Beauty of and hear the voice of Lady Wisdom over the distracting cacophony of this fallen world.

Like the tree, our children need constant nourishment, the living water that Christ provides. Let us partake of that nourishment along with our children so they may see and learn.

Charles Fry:

Solomon's proverbs are collected wise sayings, general truths, observational conclusions, principles to live by, but not divine promises or guarantees.

When Solomon concluded "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Proverbs 10:4 NIV) we hopefully recognize that there is a correlation between persistent work and having enough, but not every lazy person is poor, and not every industrious person is rich. This isn't a promise, it is a principle that encourages being a diligent worker, which is much better than being lazy.

Likewise, there is the principle that proper preparation of children by parents produces lifetime benefits, but this is not at all a guarantee that diligent parenting will always produce godly children. Children can be taught, guided, disciplined, and it is in their best interest to have such parental guidance, but ultimately they do accept or reject what they are taught, in whole or in part, including faith. They can't be "programmed" for inevitable success. Generally, those good things learned in childhood provide benefits for life, and perhaps good return eventually if not immediately, but free will is real, and Ezekiel 18 dramatically and explicitly affirms that we each answer for our own choices, not parents for children nor children for parents.

Joanne Caffie:

Kevin Crittenden I had that rule at my house but to me it didn't quite sound like that. It was a house rule... It was MY rule... and it went something like this... "In this house we

worship God on Sundays. I can't tell you which church to go to but it is required for you to attend somewhere in order to continue staying here."

This rule was established for those who thought they could move in & out with no boundaries. As for the younger, they did not have a choice in the matter because I was/ am training them up in the way they "should" go.

Joshua Riggins:

Thank you for the commentary. I agree, Charles, that these proverbs are presented as general truths. (22:11 is another good example)

That said, it would seem that even a child who rebels against their upbringing cannot depart from that upbringing. Once knowledge and practice have been established by the parents, there cannot be a time when the child is ignorant of the right way. (Hebrews 6:4-6 for instance)

Joanne Caffie:
Amen

Charles Fry:

Joanne Caffie I think it is reasonable to have "house rules" for adult children or others who may seek shelter under our roof. Those rules might include various things, such as moral behavior, sobriety, efforts at productivity, and yes, church attendance. Not everyone will necessarily have the same set of rules in such a case, or maybe the same needs or situation to address, but it is reasonable to attach requirements for tolerable behavior and/or good effort when providing room and board to someone, and perhaps even moreso if there are young ones still in the home who might be influenced.

Joanne Caffie:

If I have or ever offend someone by my posts here on FB please, Please, PLEASE forgive me. Sometimes I get caught up in my emotions when replying but I never mean any harm.

I wrote a post to my niece the other day & she called me to tell me that it was funny AND firm all at the same time. I know that words can be misinterpreted so I'm asking for forgiveness early should my comments be taken out of context. #thatisall. LOL

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! That was an alarming statistic.

August 24: Proverbs 19 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 34

Poetry Reading for 8/24/17

Proverbs 19

Well, I see by the clock on the wall that the little hand is on the 5 and the big hand is on the floor, so you know what THAT means. Yup. Time to buy a new clock!

EMOTIONS (PART I)

Grab your hankies, because we are about to get emotional.

Prov 15:30 Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.

In our culture, the expression of emotions might be regarded as an activity that Makes Others Uncomfortable, so generally should be avoided. After all, who knows what Strangers Might Think. Women are regarded as being more in touch with their emotions, and are therefore freer to express them than men. Men, not wanting to appear epicene, are expected to quash all their emotions. Except anger. So, if you men in the audience and your wives are sharing a box of Kleenex at the movies while watching Richard Gere ascend the escalator in the movie, "Shall We Dance?," then you will be expected to turn in your Man Card at the front desk. And you'll forevermore be thought of as the kid who was chosen last for football during P.E.

Tough-as-nails, surly, taciturn John Wayne wouldn't cry. Nor would his horse. But what does the Bible say?

John 11:35 Jesus wept.

Was He alone where nobody could see? No. Was He embarrassed? No. He was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." Does this mean that God is showing us that it is okay for all of us (men included) to be in touch with all our emotions? Well, yes.

God is emotional. Jesus is emotional. Emotion is part of humility. Jesus didn't just stand on the sidelines taking notes about humanity like some cold, bespectacled, dispassionate, objective scientific researcher. No, He got into the trenches WITH us and got all sweaty and stinky and bloody. He was knocked about in the mud and verbally reviled. "Pearls before swine" describes Jesus before the Pharisees.

In her book, "Rising Strong," author Brené Brown quotes from Theodore Roosevelt's famous 1910 "Man in the Arena" speech:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; . . . who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

It's no good criticizing others from your safe seat in the bleachers. You need to get into the arena. Jesus was that example for us.

Isa 53:4-5 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

What emotion do we see in Christ? Primarily, we see compassion.

Mk 10:21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

If you are a man, would it be awkward to tell another man that you love him? How can men today develop and express deep bonds of affection without seeming effeminate?

Mk 1:40-41 And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."

Luke 19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it

Paul wrote:

Phil 1:8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Emotions are an important part of creating a gospel culture within the church so that people can experience the compassion that flows from God.

Have you ever felt less than thrilled about going to church? I have. I admit it. Some days, we may resist getting out of bed, the megrims have settled in and going to church seems like an effort. We trot out all the rationalizations: the singing is terrible, this guy's lessons are insipid, my mind wanders during class, it's raining and I feel tired. My wife's wisdom imparted to me is BE the spark that you wish to see, BE the encourager that you wish to hear.

Beyond compassion, Jesus also felt anger.

Mark 3:4-5 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

He was indignant (Mk 10:14), offended (Jn 11:33), hostile (John 2:13-17), called people "pigs" (Matt 7:6), "hypocrites" (Matt 15:7), "wolves" (Matt 7:15). Jesus wasn't much into euphemisms or political correctness nor did He feel the necessity of employing spin doctors to make His message palatable to everybody to the extent that it said essentially nothing.

His emotions also caused Him suffering.

Isa 53:3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

But Jesus endured the cross for a reason.

Heb. 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Ps 45:7 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

Why did Jesus come?

John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus came, among other things, to offer us the fullness of His joy and serve as an example of living a fully human life in close fellowship with God.

And in the Book of Proverbs, we have His wisdom for dealing with our own emotions.

Our own emotions are often fueled by desire. Our desires may seem harmless enough, often good, but what does James say?

James 1:14-15 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James warns us that we cannot trust in the goodness of our desires; our feelings about them are tainted by our wants and perceived needs.

“I know that God wants me to be happy, so I’m going to commit adultery with my secretary; why else would God have crossed our paths? “

“I think a sparkling wine would really set off this dinner party. I know that Alvin used to be an alcoholic but I think he’s over that now.”

“I really want that promotion and raise but it would mean taking a position in which I would be expected to misrepresent our product (just a little) to our customers in order to make the sales.”

So are we supposed to suppress all our desires? By no means! But let us measure our desires against the standard of the Word given to us by God and see if our desires align with His Will for us. And it might be a good idea to use a trusted person (like your spouse) as a sounding board.

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Prov 28:1 The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

If you are like I am, then you worry too much about what others think. I might make a comment on Facebook or in these studies and then worry if I’ve offended someone or said something erroneous or come across as arrogant or . . . We ALL want, indeed need, to belong to social groups. There is little worse than feeling socially left out. Or shunned. Which is a tool the Amish use to great effectiveness. (I, personally, have never been shunned by the Amish and I hope to keep it that way.)

But the wisdom of Proverbs redirects our hunger for acceptance and approval by men to Him who loves us. God may correct us as a loving Father would but He will never shun us (like my earthly father did). And when we have THAT assurance, are we not drawn closer to Him in trust? And when we are filled with spiritual wisdom, guess what? Our desires, our goals – change! We WANT to be pleasing to Him.

Col 1:9-10 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Yes, we would like other people to like and accept us. They may or they may not. But we must be pleasing to God. That is the fear of the Lord.

Personally, I have a problem with this issue. I do put too much emphasis on people liking me. If people indicate that I've done well, then I feel successful and accepted. If I hear a note of criticism, then I feel down and guilty, that I did something wrong. And even if there's approval, I feel like a fraud, thinking If they only knew what I was REALLY like – my mother called it Showing My True Colors – then they wouldn't like me. And I think I translate this behavior over to my relationship with God. He'll like me IF . . . He'll accept me IF . . .

Perhaps some of you understand this feeling.

Let us remember Psalm 23:6 - Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

It doesn't end with “. . . but only if He likes you.”

Have a great week! Next time, we'll continue on with the subject of emotions.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! You inspire me to think deep!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

God gave us reasoning abilities, my friend. He wants us to use our brain - no matter how deeply you think, you'll find Jesus waiting. Jesus the byeman.

Byeman - a worker underground in a mine

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Good job, Kevin! (See, I want to make you feel good. Appropriately good, not arrogantly inflated, of course.)

And blind guides, and hypocrites, and white washed tombs, and snakes and vipers. (Jeopardy answer: What else did Jesus call people? -- Matt 23) And sheep, and goats...

I recently saw a little boy, a very little boy, fall down hard. It clearly hurt. He rolled over to hide his face, curled up, but didn't make a whimper of complaint. I went to him to ask if he was alright, and with a not quite suppressed tear in the corner of his eye he nodded that he was okay. I'm sure if he'd spoken he would have cried, and this little boy was determined not to cry. It made me want to cry. I'm very sorry little boys get such an idea, however they get it, that displaying feelings of pain or sadness or tenderness is bad. There is a place, for not only feeling but also showing feelings.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

The gender messages come very early in life. "Big boys don't cry." "Don't be such a baby (or girl or wimp)", "Put on your big boy pants", "Oh that didn't hurt", "Stop whining!", "Make your mommy proud", "Come on, you can do better than that!" "Why can't you be more like Charles?" (Not to inflate you, either, you understand.)

For girls, the praises come in the form of appearance. "She looks so pretty", "Come in right now! You'll get your dress dirty."
Etc. after dreary etc.

I can't remember the last time I cried.

Charles Fry:

Kevin Crittenden, don't make me make you cry. 😬

Some of those type casting comments come rather easily and even "naturally."

Kevin Crittenden:

Now that you come to mention it, the last time I cried was when you didn't inflate my ego enough. 😬

Kevin Crittenden:

http://www.nyparenting.com/stories/2015/6/sc-gender-rules-hines-2015-spring_2015_6.html

"Do You Typecast Your Kids?"

LuAnn Woody:

Thanks guys, it really fills a void in my life when I hear these discussions. Just enough back and forth on Scriptural topics with occasional witty repartee. You are modern day Bible Inklings. Also, thanks to those who host each day and those who comment.

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen brother! Tears of grateful,appreciating are flowing!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Like a river of tears your love pours upon us;
like a sunshine of blessing your grace will sustain us;
like a star-studded sky your spirit shines o'er us,
renewing our spirits with courage and faith.

Like a bird in free flight by windows around us;
like a wind in the forest that breathes life among us;
like a phoenix that's rising from ashes around us,
renewing our spirits with vision and grace.

Like a pillar of cloud you promise to guide us;
like a bright fire bush you come to speak to us;
like a calm cooling breeze your spirit breathes in us,
renewing our spirits with loving embrace.

Like a lover's caress your spirit revives us;
like a song of the soul you come to be with us;
like a prayer of the heart you heal and restore us,
renewing our spirits, the future to face.

- John Oldham

August 31: Proverbs 20-21 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 35

Poetry Reading for 8/31/17

Proverbs 20-21

I'm sorry that this is a bit late for me to be posting. But (and when I say "but," it means I'm not really sorry a bit), Kathleen and I were off the grid, ensconced in a small crab fishing village just north of Topeka, no bars (the signal kind), no phone, no TV, no computer, no safety nets. Just love that 'ol Midwest corn-fed crab!

So here we go. . .

Good morning, All, and welcome to: EMOTIONS (PART DEUX)

Since we're supposed to be looking at Proverbs, lets list a few of them that relate to anger:

Prov 10:12 Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

Prov 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Prov 29:22 An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

Prov 14:29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Prov 16:32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Are you now, or have you ever been, hot-blooded, hot-tempered, hot under the collar, hot headed? No? Even when that jerk almost side-swiped you on the freeway? Even when you are in a long line to exit the freeway and 3 or 4 dive-bombers cut their way in? For some reason, incidents while driving generate a lot of anger within us.

Anyway, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that most of us (and when I say "most," I mean "all") get angry from time to time.

Is all anger bad, then? Are we supposed to suppress our anger? Indeed, it's my understanding (experience) that underneath depression, you'll likely discover layers of unexpressed anger. The woman who cannot express her own anger without an angry, abusive tirade from her husband comes to mind.

Some anger is justified – anger at sin, for example. If hubby cheats on you, you bet you're going to be justifiably angry. He'll have a special spot on the Wall of Hooks.

The anger, however, that is to be avoided is anger that "stirs up conflict." Proverbs 10:12 has to do with gossip and its daughters: judgments and opinions. Would you like an example? Can you imagine anything that has stirred up more conflict among the brethren than the last presidential election? All that political claptrap that appeared on Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, etc. was posted. Why? To promote harmony? To be edifying? To turn our minds to Things Above? And even now, there are STILL political postings with the express purpose of turning our thoughts away from God to things below. All this intentional strife makes my blood boil! I just get SO angry!!!

So what are we supposed to do with our anger then? What's the wise thing to do? Not feel it? No.
No.
Stuff it down deep inside us? No.
Instead, Wisdom asks, WHY should I feel intensely about that issue? And does anybody really NEED my opinion about it?"

What does God want us to be stirred up about?

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,

Politicians come and thankfully go but the Word is everlasting. Our need to love one another is everlasting. Our duty and desire to put God first is everlasting. Our eventual home in Heaven, our prize at the end of the race, our crown bestowed upon those good and faithful servants – let us be mindful of those and less worried about worldly slights.

Prov 19:11 says that it is a glory to overlook a personal offense. Somebody spreads malicious gossip about us. Shall we get even? Take her out behind the toolshed and beat the living daylight out of her? She deserves it right? Justice will be served, right? She's got it coming, right?

But we are called to a higher standard than getting even. Our standard is glory because God is glorious. Jesus didn't go to the Cross to "get even" with us for our sins. He forgave us.

The word "glory" in v. 19:11 can be translated as "beauty." This word is used to describe beautiful garments (Isa 52:1), beautiful jewels (Ezek 16:17), a beautiful city (Isa 28:1) and the beauty of God Himself (1 Chron 29:11).

God makes beautiful things.
We are his creation.
We are beautiful people who know how to ignore a slight.
We judge ourselves instead.

Matt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Anger is an emotion that involves judgment, and, whereas we are prone to direct that anger instantly, Godly wisdom asks us to first look at the judgment involved. Fools are in a hurry and don't do this. "but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." (V 14:29) In doing so, they display their own lack of discretion.

Is it easy to conquer our anger? V 16:32 implies that it is more difficult than conquering a city – which takes a day or so. Dealing with our anger can be a life-long process.

The gospel tells us that Christ is coming again in wrath to punish all evil with terrible finality. You may find comfort in this – as a resource to exercise patience and tolerance right now.

Miroslav Volf said, "The certainty of God's just judgment at the end of history is the presupposition for the renunciation of violence in the middle of it."

Christ is coming with His winnowing fork and a lighter and He isn't pleased with sin. Therefore, YOU don't need to be anybody's judge right now.

Prov 27:4 Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

Why would jealousy be worse than anger? Because anger is a response to sinful behavior and jealousy is a reaction against something that is right and good. If you stole something and get caught, the victim might forgive you. All well and good. But if you are more successful or prettier than someone, they may never forgive you.

Cain didn't kill Abel because Abel had stolen his prize watermelon. No, Abel's gift was more righteous than Cain's and Cain was jealous of that.

1 John 3:12-13 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

Jealousy was at work in those who betrayed Jesus.

Matt 27:18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

The early church was persecuted as well:

Acts 5:17-18 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

How did Paul handle jealousy? Remember, he had been jailed, which removed him from the spotlight, so that other preachers could step into it. Paul removed his ego from the equation and was glad that the Word was still being spread.

Phil 1:12-18

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

When Christ is our focus, not our own Self, then we are freed to rejoice, even when we are ignored, passed by, and shoved aside by others. Our life becomes more tranquil.

Prov 14:30 A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

In Joseph Epstein's book "Envy: The Seven Deadly Sins", he says that of those seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all.

The currently recognized Seven Deadly Sins are: Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, Pride. I've earned a medal for each one; they sit not in pride of place on my mantelpiece but hidden under the floorboards of my heart. Like Rachel's idols, I carry them with me and I need to bury them somewhere. Away from me.

We've met such a list in Proverbs 6:16-19. Also see Gal 5:19-21 and Rev 21:8

Envy rots your bones.

Let's say that you are envious of Jane Doe because she's a star and everybody knows her name. Do you feel bad when she succeeds and good when she fails? When you think about Jane, do you always see her in a bad light? Do you just lump her into a category and dismiss everything she does? If the President (either Obama or Trump) does something, must it be bad because you've already put them into a disfavorable category?

And if Jane Doe is indeed wicked, then here is the advice from God:

Prov 24:19-20 Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked, 20 for the evildoer has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Wicked people often prosper. It happens and we envy their success: their wealth, status and lifestyle perhaps. But truly, can you name even one such person whose lifestyle you would really want to have for yourself?

Prov 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

Prov 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Prov 15:30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.

Everybody wants to be happy, right? And we know when that will occur. We will be happy when everybody around us treats us as we should be treated, and when everything goes according to our plans. We will get that promotion, and a raise, of course, our work will be noticed and lauded by management, we will be the go-to person for advice, we will win the lottery and our relationships will all be like BFFs

But external things cannot inner happiness make. And you say, "Platitudes, platitudes – why don't you get that crocheted into a sampler and hang it in your kitchen!" So, don't believe me? In that case, I'll tell you that Science (with a capital "S", supports this idea.)

In her book, "The How of Happiness" by Sonja Lyubomirsky, she states unequivocally, "I support what Kevin just said."

Since external things cannot satisfy an inner desire, it means that even when life is difficult, we can be happy through the love of God for us in Christ.

Psalms 34:5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

This doesn't say, "Depending on circumstances, those who look to him are radiant." No, the Gospel makes people who receive it radiant. And that radiance is contagious.

Have a great week! Go out and be contagious!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Sonja always did like you better. But that's okay, I'm happy for you... 🙄

You know, Brother, a fellow could take an essay like this one, with very few changes, and read it over a couple of times, amending slightly if needed, and then read it another couple of times out loud, noticing about how long it takes to read it aloud, and then after a little more time read for review again, before reading it out loud once more in front of a friendly audience of fellow Christians. A fellow could do such a thing with an essay like this. It might even be a Scientific process. 👍

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Maybe I could get a gummint grant! All in the interest of Science - with a capital "S" of course. And, BTW, Sonja likes you just as well. 😊

Charles Fry:

That would be very sciency!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thanks, Kevin! I enjoy being edified by you. Lots of funny, lots of serious. Good mix. So glad you're my brother! And glad you got away with Kathleen 😊

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thanks brother Kevin! Superb! Just wondering where to fish for crabs north of Topeka? Canada?

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You have to know certain people. Actually it's in a cove, a hollow nestled at the base of steep cliffs which serve as nesting sites for albatross and flamingoes.

September 7: Proverbs 22 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 36

Poetry Reading for 9/07/17

Proverbs 22

Good Morning and Welcome, Gentle Reader and Other Good Friends! What makes good friends? Besides their willingness to loan you lots of money? Let's find out.

FRIENDSHIP (PART I)

Prov 18:24 One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Who is your best friend? I know many of you will say "Jesus," but I'm asking about a worldly best friend. Suppose you are just feeling down, the world seems blue, and there is little motivation to do anything. Who can you reach out to and say "Can we talk and pray together?" Who is there in your life that sticks closer than a brother?

When speaking of friendships, I think of David and Jonathan, or Ruth and Naomi. What other Biblical examples can you think of?

Now you might be one of those people, like me, who really values your private time. Some of us enjoy our solitude and need times of aloneness to recharge our batteries. Crowds and parties are enervating. Jesus went off by himself to get away from the crowds and pray. You may enjoy the book "Quiet" by Susan Cain, which talks about being an introvert. Just don't read it out loud.

Virginia Woolf described the importance of "a room of one's own" (and money) for women who wanted to write. But Virginia Woolf also walked into a river after filling her pockets with rocks.

In "Jayber Crow," Wendell Berry says "For a long time I liked it that way. I enjoyed coming and going without telling or explaining, being free. I enjoyed listening without talking. I enjoyed being wherever I was without being noticed. But then when the dark change came over my mind, I was in a fix. My solitariness turned into loneliness."

And extended solitude makes that dark change more likely. We are social beings. We are to love others and be loved by them in return.

In their book "The Lonely American," associate clinical professors of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School Jacqueline Olds and Richard Schwartz (and married to each other) make the point that friendships can be separated into friendships of commitment and friendships of convenience. They say that, even though people often say they have a lot of friends, the trend is towards friendships of convenience. "The General Social Survey finds that more and more Americans have no people that they confide in. We are only likely to talk about matters of importance with people whose connections to us have stood the test of time."

Friendships of commitment are important. We NEED them in our lives.

We grow in wisdom when we work to replace our preconceptions about how life should work with the knowledge of how God created the way in which life actually works. We become skilled in knowing almost instinctually which path to choose when faced with our myriad daily decisions. Wisdom is skill for living when the rules aren't obvious. And the book of Proverbs provides this skill.

In the area of friendship, we begin by realizing (knowing) that God Himself is our friend through Christ. The Father, Son and Spirit are Love reaching out from the heart in friendship to us.

And what about our own hearts? The Assyrian king Adad-Nirari II (911-891 B.C.) looked lovingly at himself and said "I am royal, I am lordly, I am mighty, I am honored, I am exalted, I am glorified, I am powerful, I am all-powerful, I am brilliant, I am lion-brave, I am manly, I am supreme, I am noble." He evokes the story of Echo and Narcissus and we all remember what happened to HIM.

Anyway, this king thinks he is the great I AM. He is just the kind of guy you'd want for a best friend, right? NOT! This guy obviously didn't need anybody but himself. Proud, arrogant, self-important jerks don't have many, if any, friends, only sycophants.

But it's true that God also talked about Himself:

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"

But God also says something the Assyrian king did not:

Ex 3:12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

"I will be with you." That is a friend. Not of convenience but a friend of commitment. Someone who is there FOR YOU. Rain or shine.

And what does Jesus say?

John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants,[a] for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Jesus calls us friends. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry, ev'ry thing to God in pray'r.

But what is a committed friend?

Prov 20:6 Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?

Prov 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Rare indeed is the faithful friend who loves at all time. You are born into your family – they are stuck with you. But a friend chooses you. And if they love you, not only when life is all skittles and beer but also when the wolf is at the door, not because they have to but because they choose to, then you are lucky enough to have a friend. This definition excludes people whom you know only in a one-dimensional sense. You might say, "Oh, I have a lot of friends at work." But do they know the names of your children? What your interests are? What issues you are grappling with? What you have are a lot of work associates. Similarly, you might say, "I have a lot of friends at church." Do any of them call YOU when they need to talk? Guys, I'm especially singling you out. Friends aren't people with whom you only talk about sports, work, food, cars, video games and women.

It's not always easy to be a friend.

Psalms 15:4 Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord, and keep their promises even when it hurts.

Titus 2: . . . but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good. Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way.

When God gives you a friend like that, hold on tightly.

"The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel." – Shakespeare, Hamlet

A true friend knows who you really are and does not walk away.

Prov 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

Prov 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Prov 24:26 Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

One of the great blessings of a true friend is not just unconditional acceptance and solicitude but also a blunt honesty. And good friends sharpen us – left to our own devices, we become dull. Our friends refine us. By means of respectful confrontation, they help make us better.

We are called to be good friends to our brethren:

Matt 18:15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over."

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Committed friends, true friends, real friends provoke and challenge us, not to tear us down but to build us up in stronger ways. You might not like what they say to you but you WILL want to listen.

Good friendships are waiting for you. If there is no one in your life like that, then are you seeking that person out? Unfortunately, Amazon doesn't deliver.

What does it mean, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend?"

When you are sharpened by your friend, it creates friction. When a friend wounds you, it hurts you.

Hurt is not harm.

To help you grow, a friend will someday hurt you with respectful words that are blunt but true. Accept them, realize the love behind them, and be refined. Jesus spoke blunt words out of love to refine us. People felt hurt. So they crucified Him. Look beyond the hurt of the message to the love that is there.

Next week, we will continue on this theme. Your assignment this week is to make a new friend.



Comment:

Debbie Bolinger:

I'll try & do the assignment!!Thanks 4 the reminder what a True Friend is...

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Yes indeed! We love in a true friendship starved culture!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden

Indeed! I'm so glad that you are my best friend!

Steven Wright:

And we "live" in one too!

Steven Wright:
My new friend's name is Alex btw.
Kevin Crittenden:
A stranger is just a friend I haven't met yet. - Will Rogers

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:
Your comments reminded me of a song I learned in the Junior Girl Scouts, "Make new friends, but keep the old; one is silver, and the other gold."

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, friend!

Comment:

Gaylene Green:
I learned that song too.

September 14: Proverbs 23-24 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 37
Poetry Reading for 9/14/17
Proverbs 23-24

Good morning!

Today, we will continue our exploration of the topic of Friendship as seen through the lens of Proverbs.

FRIENDSHIP (PART II)

Prov17:9 Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

Guess what? Sometimes we do things that annoy our friends. We commit an offense. Maybe more than one. It happens. Maybe we forget ourselves and start to gossip.

You: "Kevin's sermon today was SO insipid! And the way he dresses! Was he raised in a barn?"

Friend: "Gossiping is so easy to fall into, isn't it? But I know you're above that."

The wise person covers this offense with forgiveness, as God does.

Psalms 32:1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

God covers our sins through Christ because He wants relationship with us. That's rather amazing; in fact, it's beyond amazing to know that the Creator of All, not only notices us but wants to have a relationship with us. What a friend we have in Jesus!

We, too, want relationship with our friend MORE than we want revenge for their offense. That is the path of Christ.

And just WHO are these people that repeat a matter, thus separating close friends? Gossips! It's not necessarily that they repeat something over and over, ad nauseum. The word translated "repeats" means to mention the offense a second time. Just one repeat. If the person who offended you admitted it and asked for forgiveness, then just drop the matter. Don't give it a second thought. Words are important. We need to think carefully about what we say; impetuous words can seriously damage a close relationship that has taken years to build.

Prov 11:12 Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Here's a case of some know-it-all yakking on and on, putting somebody else down. (Is it I, Lord?) But the wise man doesn't rebut every insult. We are to humble ourselves with restraint. Silence is not only golden – it can preserve friendships, partnerships, marriages and churches.

"Tho' I've belted you and flayed you,
By the livin' Gawd that made you,
You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!"
– Rudyard Kipling in the Kiplinger Newsletter

Prov 25:17 Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you.

“Do not follow a person who is running away.” – Kalenjin proverb

Put simply: don't overstay your welcome. Don't be a pest. Sure, friends need time together but they also need time NOT together. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. You know what they say about fish and visitors.

In our modern world, a similar thing happens with social media. Some people post very often about the most quotidian things in their lives. And, honestly, if you are posting 15 times a day, every day, people will stop reading your posts. If it continues, they will probably stop following you. It reminds me of the Monty Python sketch of the Spanish Inquisition, where an older woman is showing an endless stack of photos to a younger woman:

Dear Old Lady: This is Uncle Ted in front of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is Uncle Ted at the back of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is Uncle Ted at the side of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is Uncle Ted, back again at the front of the house, but you can see the side of the house. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is Uncle Ted even nearer the side of the house, but you can still see the front. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) This is the back of the house, with Uncle Ted coming round the side to the front. (she hands over the photo and the young lady tears it up) And this is the Spanish Inquisition hiding behind the coal shed. (Friend takes it with the first sign of real interest.)

Young Lady: Oh! I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition.

Prov 18:19 A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle.

Prov 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

Prov 22:10 Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease.

Quarreling is difficult to end after it begins. Maybe you each go into a period of silence where you don't talk to one another and slam doors to make sure the other knows you are still angry. And indignant. And righteous. Anyway, neither of you feels understood but you do feel hurt and don't want to be hurt anymore. So you retreat into your protective inner fortress, behind the bars of your castle where nobody but God can get in.

How can we avoid getting into this predicament?

Paul suggested an answer in his letter to the Corinthian Christians when they were suing one another:

1 Cor 6:7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

Unfortunately, this doesn't always work because some people are not amenable to finding a compromise. They will not bend and they must be right. For them, facts don't matter, the truth is inconsequential, and fairness? – Phhfffft! These people are intractable and cannot ever be satisfied.

So now what?

Drive out a scoffer. But, again, who is a scoffer?

Prov 21:24 "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

A scoffer is in the highest position – in his mind. (Is it I, Lord?) He will not listen or compromise. He will not grow nor does he encourage you to grow. We all need to grow in Christ and change with the support of godly brethren but an unregenerate scoffer hinders our progress.

So, within a church, what should be done about scoffers?

Titus 3:10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

The elders are to take scoffers down the aisle and out the door. One bad apple spoils the bunch. So don't leave it in the barrel, hoping that it will turn good again. Perhaps you don't agree with this method; I've never heard of it being done but then I'm new to the church. How would you handle such a situation in view of the verse in Titus?

Prov 20:22 Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

Prov 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Prov 25:21-22 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,
22 for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

God is telling us that the best "revenge" is love. If somebody is mad at you, by treating them well, you will stimulate their conscience. And surprise them! And possibly get them thinking about what it means to be in Christ.

As Paul says:

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We sometimes act like the enemy of Christ but look how He treats us. Does He take revenge on us? An eye for an eye? By no means. Through Him we are delivered, through Him we obtain mercy, through Him we find sustenance and through Him we find eternal glory.

Prov 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

When Paul was put on trial before Caesar, his friends didn't stick very close, did they?

2 Tim 1:15 You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

Was Paul dismayed? No, because he knew he had a wonderful friend in the Lord.

2 Tim 4:17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

We may have a lot of friends but real friends are those of quality.

“Could we bear from one another what He daily bears from us? Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us, though we treat Him thus. Though for good we render ill, He accounts us brethren still.” – John Newton

It's no good avoiding friendships altogether so that you are neither hurt by others nor are you contributing to others. Don't be like the church in Laodicea, neither hot nor cold.

Rev 3:15-16 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

One of the life skills that we sometimes have to exercise is pruning our friendships to improve the harvest. It really isn't fun but often is necessary so that we may move forward.

John 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This week's assignment: look at the people in your life. Sift them like wheat to see if they add or detract from your life. And, while you are at it, put yourself in the sifter to see if you are an emotional black hole for the energy of your friends, always needing to talk about your woes but never taking real action, or if you add meaning and value to the lives of others.

Life lesson: You are NOT responsible for the feelings of others.

Next week, we will begin to explore what makes the world go around: Money!

I've just come across Roscoe Holcomb singing “I'm a Man of Constant Sorrow,” a cappella, and it points to the pain, sorrow and heaviness of those who are friendless, the bluegrass music whose roots stemmed from watching the WW I veterans walking along the railroad

tracks, sometimes hollering in their pain and freedom upon returning home. Let us be watchful for those who are in such pain.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cJRRc8FToQ>

I am a man of constant sorrow
I have seen trouble all my days

I bid farewell to old Kentucky
The place where I was born and raised

For six long years I've been in trouble
No pleasure here on Earth I found

For in this world I'm bound to ramble
I have no friends to help me now

I fare you well my own true lover
I never expect to see you no more

For I'm bound to ride that Northern Railroad
Perhaps I'll die upon that train

You may bury me in some deep valley
For many years there I may lay

Then you can learn to love another
While I am sleeping in my grave

Maybe your friends think I'm a stranger
My face you'll never see no more

But there is one promise that I'm giving
I'll meet you on God's golden shore

Comment:

Craig Hensley:
Good thoughts. Roscoe could use vocal lessons but it is a decent song.

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Craig, that's the real old mountain sound bro!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thank you for your sound assessment of this so valuable topic brother Kevin!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

You can check out Bill Monroe's "I'm Blue, I'm Lonesome." Bill is known as the father of bluegrass music.

Replies:

Craig Hensley:

I'm partial to Ralph Stanley, but Bill Monroe is great.

Charles Fry:

For some reason Bill Monroe never was a favorite of mine. Flat & Scruggs, Ricky Scaggs, various others had more appeal.

Kevin Crittenden:

Craig Hensley - Thought Ralph was more an automobile man rather than a gandy dancer. Stanley Steamer and all.

Comment:

Craig Hensley:

On the idea of people in you life and whether they add or detract - there is a related and important issue; what do other bring out in you? I have notice that there are people that bring out good things in me. But there are also others that bring out parts of me that I'd rather suppress. I've decided that I need to extra cautious with those people and in some cases stay away.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Why do you feel the need to maintain bonds with such people? Of course, if they are co-workers, you don't have much choice. I think it is part of our human nature to be social creatures and so we tend to adapt our behavior to the mores of the groups that we associate with. If all your co-workers think it's a good idea to congregate after work at the nearest watering hole, you'll be "peer-pressured" to join them to maintain the pretext of being a "team player." By refusing to drink with them, you come across as judgemental and holier-than-thou. And you won't get invited to their birthday parties. Your friends, as you say, will bring out the best in you. Better yet, they will see the potential in you and challenge you to grow in ways that you can meet your potential. Hint: If you want to really form strong and lasting bonds of friendship, challenge others to realize their potential. And be there with them when they take their first hesitant steps.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Happy birthday, Kevin Crittenden! 🎉 I'm so glad we are friends.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Me toooooooooo!!!!

September 21: Proverbs 25 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 38

Poetry Reading for 9/21/17

Proverbs 25

Good morning, All, and welcome to the part of this study that makes Scrooge McDuck the happiest:

MONEY (PART I)

Prov 10:22 The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

What do we already (think we) know about money?

Money can't buy happiness but it can buy a Cadillac to go look for it.
I'm waiting for my ship to come in. (It came in but I was at the airport.)
Money makes the world go 'round.
Money talks.

A fool and his money are soon parted. (A friend learned this the hard way. Yeah, a friend. I'm talking about a friend.)

Money is a good servant but a bad master.

He's filthy rich. (interesting juxtaposition of words)

Pennies from heaven (Should be upgraded to Dollars from heaven. Inflation, you know. God wants us to be rich, you see.)

And what does God say about money?

Matt 6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Psalms 49 . . . People who have wealth but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish.

And the wildly popular:

Matt 19:24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

Those fat cats, the 1%ers, won't fit through the narrow gate. That sentiment seems to be popular in this country currently: very rich = bad. And that is an unfortunate attitude. God wants ALL His sheep.

Getting back to Proverbs - which is what I'm supposed to be talking about - we find there some Godly wisdom about wealth. Wisdom, of course, is skill for living well in the sight of God and man. It is God-given, as Solomon knew when he prayed for it:

1 Kings 3:9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

A discerning mind helps us with the myriad decisions that we face on a daily basis. Like what to do with our money.

Does God think that money is bad? After all, it can be an idol for some people who worship in the temples on Wall Street or in the boardrooms at Wells Fargo.

But no, God made money a blessing and made it available.

Prov 10:22 The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

If you are having frequent hours-of-need because of no money, then the answer isn't a wad of cash that would choke a horse. The answer is the Lord. Your employer doesn't provide for you. God does. If the blessing of the Lord makes rich, then He is the one with whom we should conduct our business.

John Calvin wrote "The Christian must surely be so disposed and minded that he feels within himself it is with God he has to deal throughout his life."

And God is always at hand to be in relationship with. He is always in His office.

Prov 15:3 The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

"He adds no sorrow with it." When you earn money through the blessing of the Lord, you can do it with a clear conscience – no bending of rules, no working yourself into the ground, no guilt. No sorrow.

Is wealth bad? No. God provided ample opportunities for amassing wealth in His Creation. And His Creation is good. Very good, in fact.

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Having wealth gives us an opportunity to grow in the area of sharing with one another. Wealthy people can support widows and orphans, the poor, the brethren, the author of these notes. Of course this attitude of sharing isn't limited to just money.

Acts 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Peter gave something much more valuable than silver and gold. And we see how much more wealth is in Him as we look at His Creation.

Savonarola once mused, "What must not he possess who possesses the Possessor of all things?"

If you are in Christ, then your emptiness has found its fullness, regardless of the amount of money you have. Or don't have.

1 Cor 3:21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

And how does God bless us with money? Through the dignity of our own hard work.

Prov 10:4 A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Certainly, poverty caused by unjust social conditions is NOT a disgrace but laziness IS. Our work, done well, brings a sense of satisfaction of a job well done. Our work enriches not only our own lives but the lives of others. And when we have enough laid by in store to share with others, our joy is multiplied. That is true wealth.

Prov 12:11 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

“Following worthless pursuits” can be read as “chasing dreams.” Is your career dream realistic? Is it productive? I know a woman who is supporting a son. The son has started a couple of failed businesses and now “just needs a little more money” to start another venture. Perhaps, especially here in Silicon Valley, the dream of being the next Steve Jobs affects Many Young People. If only some venture capitalist (they’re called “angel investors”) would listen and fund their idea . . . Their career path amounts to this:

Step 1: Come up with an idea

Step 2: Get funding

Step 3: Become an overnight bazillionaire

Step 4: Finally, move out of mom and dad’s house.

Not really a workable plan, is it? Although mom and dad fervently hope that Step 4 materializes soon. It’s a worldly plan centered around money. But God’s plan gives us a worthy purpose and allows us to build something lasting and successful, not for our own self-aggrandizement but for the glory of God and others. Love one another. This kind of work is not a get-rich-quick scheme but involves a lifetime of effort. We work our land, plowing one furrow at a time, carefully, to assure a bountiful harvest later in life.

Ask yourself, “How will the world be enhanced by what I’ve done this week?” Time is the land that God gives us and He invites (expects) us to make something of it. How are we working our own tract? What are we sowing and what will we reap?

Prov 13:11 Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

It’s no good praying to win the lottery or praying that a rich relative dies and leaves you money. “Little by little” is God’s plan – by the diligent, patient efforts over your lifetime and invested wisely. Don’t just bury your talent in the ground waiting for the master’s return.

This “little by little” process of increasing our wealth also has the concomitant feature of building our character up, little by little. A character of strength that will not dwindle. This is the real purpose behind our financial vicissitudes, the sharpening of our mettle through the love of God for you and me.

Truthfully, would having a great deal of money be a good thing for you? Could you handle it wisely? They say money corrupts. And certainly there are good people out there who have much in the way of worldly wealth. And they handle it beautifully.

But for the rest of us, we have this wisdom:

Prov 15:16-17 Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.
17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

Think of these verses when envy and desire for wealth creep into your thinking. Rather than thinking about keeping up with the Joneses, (or the Kardashians), consider what your life would be like without God’s watchful care and think, “This is better than what I would have had.”

Next week, (little by little), we will continue on with the lingua franca of our society. Your homework this week is to amass \$10 M and see what changes this makes in your life and your outlook.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Good thoughts, Kevin! Thank U! Philippians 4:12.

September 28: Proverbs 26-27 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 39
Poetry Reading for 9/28/17
Proverbs 26-27

Good morning, All. Today we will continue on with a subject that is near and dear to my heart:

MONEY (PART II)

1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain,

So - God made money as part of His good Creation but we, being creative and all, can manage to turn money into a destructive curse through four avenues: control, conflict, confusion, and corruption.

Prov 11:26 The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

This is an example of the curse of control. The one holding back the grain, or any resource, is driving up the price. But grain, in particular, was a resource necessary to life back then. People had to have it for their daily diet.

A central insight of Proverbs can be found in the words of Bruce Waltke:
"The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves."

I think that we can agree that this happens today. ". . .But a blessing is on the head of him who sells it."

How much blessing, therefore, is on the head of Jesus who disadvantaged Himself to advantage us with a love, freely given.

Prov 28:25 A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.

This is an example of the curse of conflict. The word translated as "greedy" is literally "wide of appetite." Nothing can satisfy the greedy person – he has removed his boundaries and limits.

So, being unsatisfied with what the Lord has provided for him, he looks at what YOU have. And reaches for it. Which triggers conflict. This is echoed in James:

James 4:2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

The one who takes his neighbor's belongings will still be unsatisfied, but he who trusts in the Lord as the Provider will be fulfilled.

Prov 11:18 The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.

This is an example of the curse of confusion. "Deceptive wages" can be translated as "wages that are a lie." A selfish person believes that happiness consists of getting what he wants, mainly possessions. Things, then, become the wages that are a lie. Most of us, myself included, are, au fond, a bit selfish. This is the crack in the door that advertisers use to create their vision of a materialistic utopia within us. But this vision is a lie, meant to confuse us and open wide our wallets in the pursuit of happiness.

But what does God say about sowing righteousness?

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

This wisdom may be counterintuitive, but we are emphatically assured that it bears much fruit.

Prov 20:23 Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.

This is an example of the curse of corruption. The "unequal weights" are expressed as dishonesty, cheating, cutting corners, false advertising, bait and switch, bilking pensioners, Ponzi schemes, identity theft and the like which are legion in our society, forming a wall of anxiety within us. How many of us don't like using debit cards because of the fear of skimmers?

These detestable practices are an abomination to the Lord. They constitute moral corruption, as bad as sexual sin. If you are involved in this kind of activity, then God says "Stop it!" Seems pretty clear. Don't mess with God.

Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Prov 11:24-25 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

25 Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Again, counterintuitive. You want to be rich? Then be generous. You want to be poor? Then hoard what you have.

The Hebrew word translated "one gives freely" can be more literally translated as "one who scatters." You scatter seed freely and widely without noting where every little seed might fall. Jesus freely scatters the gospel upon billions of people and takes pleasure in the love for Him that grows in us. His generosity is wisdom for us. Selfishness is poverty. Generosity is wealth.

Prov 30:7-9 Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:

8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,
9 lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?"
or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

This is the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. But what a model for a good way to live! Never going broke but never getting rich – because both are fraught with temptation. Rather, live in a manner where you trust in the Lord and are dependent on Him. Use your money to do good. The widow with the two mites was doing what good she could; trusting in Him.

Paul wrote:

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Paul, at the time, was raising money for the poor. And how did he motivate people's generosity? He didn't show pictures of distressed children or tell stories of malnourishment and abuse. Nor did he say "Give 'til it hurts!" No, instead Paul held up Jesus who, being rich in Heaven, became poor for our sakes so that we might be everlastingly rich in Him.

Have a great week! Next time, the subject will be a matter of life and death.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal
Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Amen!

October 5: Proverbs 28 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 40
Poetry Reading for 10/05/17
Proverbs 28

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen! Hang on to your hats because we are going to discuss a matter of:

LIFE AND DEATH (PART I)

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

When we say that something is a matter of life or death, we are stressing how urgent and important that matter is. Lives may literally hang in the balance and we can't afford to cavalierly toss the matter into our IN basket for later consideration.

Proverbs treats Life and Death seriously and invites us to, as well. Actually “invites” is too feeble a word here; I should say “urges us to.” Life and Death are a major theme in the book of Proverbs and are given dimension beyond whether or not you have a pulse.

We all agree that we have a birthday. All of us were born, some of us further back in time than others. But we know that day and celebrate it. Or not. Just as certain is that we have ANOTHER day on the calendar which is our LAST day. We are not given to know that day. Beyond that last day, according to the Old Testament, lies the realm of death, called Sheol. Proverbs treats death as both an event and a state beyond that event.

Many of us, as we age, increasingly live in the shadow of fear of that future event because the precursors of death, reminding us of our mortality, affect our lives even now. They affect us in the form of sickness, aging, suffering, fear, guilt, anxiety, confusion, boredom, and sin. Anything that weakens our vitality is a step towards the grave.

Huston Smith writes: “ The unwise life is one long struggle with death the intruder, an uneven contest in which age is obsessively delayed through artifice and the denial of time's erosions. When the fever of desire slackens, the unwise seek to refuel it with more potent aphrodisiacs. When they are forced to let go, it is grudgingly and with self-pity, for they cannot see the inevitable as natural, and good as well. They have no comprehension of Tagore's insight that truth comes as conqueror to those who have lost the art of receiving it as friend.”

The book of Proverbs advises us as to where death lurks in the shadows. For example, in the house of the adulterous woman.

Prov 9:18 But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

But God brings vitality into our lives, dispensing it freely through the finished work of His son on the Cross.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 14:19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

What does God offer us and hope for us? That we die less and live more through Christ.

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

Prov 14:12, 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Prov 10:2 Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Prov 19:16 Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die.

Prov 10:16 The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.

We see the words “path”, “pathway”, “way”, “end”. Life is a journey from birth to death and we are on a path. We cannot just somehow make time stand still but must daily choose which path to follow. There are myriad paths, some more traveled and wider than others. But how can we choose unless we have a clear understanding of our destination?

Joseph Campbell had something to say about paths:

"If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path."

This aligns in my mind with Phil 2:12 "therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,"

And, yes, I see you shifting a bit in your seat because you are remembering:

Prov 20:24 A person's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?

We are instructed to work out our own salvation, forge our own path, but always with the Cross in view. That is the direction provided by the Lord. We need to know where we are going.

Many of us feel like we have little choice in the way our life flows, that we are like a dry leaf caught in the middle of a stream and carried along by the current. But we always have choices. Where are we going with our lives? We can choose how we live our life but we don't get to choose the consequences of our actions.

Prov 12:28 In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

So we ask: What is righteousness? And: Is this righteousness legalism? The proverb (10:16) says that "The wage of the righteous leads to life." Is this a legalistic pay-as-you-go plan? Wages are something you receive for the work you do.

Let's look at righteousness as described in Deuteronomy. In the marketplace, people used weights to measure the goods they were selling. This could be used to advantage by an unscrupulous merchant using faulty weights.

Deut 25:15 A full and fair weight you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The word translated "fair" is our word "righteous."

So the unscrupulous merchant makes up his own personal standard of weight. Which benefits him. The righteous merchant uses an external standard, the true standard of weight.

A righteous man understands that there is a standard OUTSIDE of himself, and acknowledges that the standard for what a person should be is Christ who, although fully God, is the true standard of humanity.

In our society, we use external standards all the time to tell us how to look, how to dress, what to buy . . . how to fit in to our society. We all have a horror of being an outsider, of being shunned by the group. So, since we readily accept an external standard for how we look, then is it so far-fetched to accept an external moral standard for how we live? The Bible says that Christ is the standard to which we should adjust. Not just an abstract ideal but a real person. Right, Thomas?

In a study, blogged about by Dr. Tim Keller on the Gospel Coalition website, a group of young adults (ages 18 – 23) were asked "if their moral convictions (some of which were very strong) were mainly subjective feelings or really true to reality. He [the researcher] found that most had difficulty even understanding what he was asking."

And we will continue this theme next time.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome, Butch!

October 12: Proverbs 29-30 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 41

Poetry Reading for 10/12/17

Proverbs 29-30

Good morning! This morning we will continue the theme of:

LIFE AND DEATH (PART II)

So . . .

Last week, we ended with:

In a study, blogged about by Dr. Tim Keller on the Gospel Coalition website, a group of young adults (ages 18 – 23) were asked “if their moral convictions (some of which were very strong) were mainly subjective feelings or really true to reality. He [the researcher] found that most had difficulty even understanding what he was asking.”

In an age of increasing entitlement and self-centeredness, we see a natural trend of becoming OUR OWN moral authority, encountering life events as we go and making decisions on the fly, based on personal cost-benefit. But, without an EXTERNAL standard of moral order, we are forging a pathway leading to death. Without a common guide, if everybody just does their own thing, how can you know how your spouse will behave or how your boss will behave or even how YOU will behave? What can you place your trust in?

Righteousness, then, is growing closer to and walking with Christ, because in His path is life.

And now for the legal fine print, with all its terms, provisions, statutes, conditions, amendments, addendums of syntax, and assorted frippery. Sign here. And here. Almost done. Just initial there – and there - and then put today’s date right here. That’s legalism and, as much as our society loves it, it has no place in righteousness.

Legalism is the attitude that God has a score card and we had better do enough good things and go to the right kind of church for the required number of times in order to get on His good side. Does going to a one-cup church fill you with anxiety? Or if you are on a trip, attending a church that has a paid minister? Or musical instruments? Where are the areas of your own legalism?

The gospel is clear:

Rom 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

And the natural follow-on for this thought is:

Rom 6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

Paul reminds them that, yes, sin is still a big deal. So don't do it.

Rom 6:20-22 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Prov 14:27 The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Prov 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

We have two things here described as "a fountain of life." One is internal and private; the other external and public. Both are needful to satisfy our thirst. Both a loving personal relationship with Christ and a vibrant church family. Both turn us away "from the snares of death."

We may say "I've heard all this before" and shut down because we know intellectually the theology. But Christ is not just an intellectual concept, He is a person and we need to treat Him as such. He seeks relationship. With us.

We may think, "My church isn't vibrant and doesn't nourish me anymore. I wish the elders would do this, that and the other." But don't we, as members of the congregation, have a responsibility to share our love for Christ within the congregation and thereby be an uplifting example? BE part of that vibrancy that you may feel is missing by staying focused on the gospel. Put aside gossip. Put aside wishful thinking. Put aside judgment of your church officials. Instead, trust in your elders and take responsibility where you can.

The singular fountain of life is Christ; the plural snares of death are legion. And Christ flows forth whenever humility and wise teaching converge. Let us drink deeply.

Prov 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise.

We remember the tree of life from Genesis, right? And Proverbs is telling us that we can experience that tree, even today! It can happen through words – a gentle tongue. This can also be translated as "a healing tongue." Perverse words break the spirit but wise words soothe and heal.

Our spirits may be broken by the thoughtless words of others but see how healing these gospel words are:

Matt 9:2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And Christ wants others to hear these words, through us, so that they may experience healing. It's not His will that we go around merely telling others how sinful they are but rather how life-giving Christ is.

The "fruit of the righteous" is their influence. The tree of life is attractive to us. Righteousness is attractive to us. We naturally gravitate towards it. And Christ uses us, as believers, to spread His influence. It's our job to say

"Hey, do you see that tree of life over there?"

"Oh, yeah, I see it now. How did I not notice it before?"

As Jeff Yost reminds us: Think souls!

Have a great week, everyone!

Comment:

Kimra Grantham Robinson:

Good thoughts....and I especially appreciate your "can do" attitude and encouragement to others of the same. Maybe you should be a deacon....oh wait...you are!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Since I'm hunting big game (gophers) in the church lawn, Lori has named me a d-CON.



Kevin Crittenden:

And not to brag or anything, but ever since Ken and I became deacons, the roof hasn't fallen in once! Nor have we been stampeded by herds of Cape Buffalo, Wildebeests, carpetbaggers or any other form of horned ungulates.

Charles Fry:

For the uninitiated, that would be since Sunday, October 8. 😊

Steven Wright:

Wonderful news!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome!

Comment:

Steven Wright:
Thank you brother Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome! Drop in some time and I'll take you gopher hunting.

Steven Wright:
Plastic explosives? Exploding golf courses?

Kevin Crittenden:
I use a Ruger Mini-14

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Kevin! You have 52 inspirational lessons you could give from the pulpit in 2018 from this bible study! 😊 you're so easy to read. You should consider a blog.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Thank you, Ginger! Lessee, if I gave 1 lesson per two months, that would be 104 months or almost 9 years of lessons, all on the Wisdom literature. I really should branch out.
Actually, I do have a blog which I created for my ESL students. I haven't done anything with it for a long while but I may get back to it. You can see it at [https://
eslfilesforsharing.blogspot \(.com\)](https://eslfilesforsharing.blogspot (.com))

October 19: Proverbs 31 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 42
Poetry Reading for 10/19/17
Proverbs 31

Good morning, All!

As we come to the final Chapter of Proverbs, I want to express my thanks for your readership and my hope that you will have gained something by re-reading the wisdom that is contained in the book of Proverbs. Let us be mindful of its teachings as we live our daily lives, all to His glory.

Before we begin, although technically we HAVE begun, I'd like to suggest that you make a pan of this delicious banana bread, recipe from the kitchen of Debbie Bolinger. I think this would be a perfect accompaniment to this study. I also think there is an idea for a book here: "Recipes For Bible Studies."

BANANA BREAD
Debbie Bolinger

Oven 350°

3 LARGE MASHED RIPE BANANAS
2 T MELTED BUTTER
1 TSP VANILLA
1 TSP BAKING SODA, DISSOLVED IN A LITTLE WATER
½ C NUT(Opt.)
1 EGG, BEATEN
1-1/4 C SUGAR
2 C FLOUR
MIX ALL TOGETHER. POUR INTO GREASED LOAF PAN. BAKE AT 350 FOR 1 HR. THEN ENJOY!!!!

Prov 24:13-14 My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.

14 Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

This is the delight of wisdom – as sweet as banana bread or honey. Your body has senses and takes delight in good food. So too, your soul finds God’s wisdom to be deeply pleasing to it.

But just reading it here in Proverbs (like merely looking at freshly-baked banana bread, cooling on the windowsill) won’t do the trick. We need to partake of this wisdom, chew on it and swallow it. With coffee! Savor it!

Christ offers us a feast. He wants us to come and partake, not just look longingly from a distance. There’s a chair waiting for us at the table. If we accept his gracious offer, “there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.”

Let us not be like the invited guests in Luke 14 who found more important things to do than to attend the banquet. This is exactly what I did – essentially telling Jesus “Thanks, but I really don’t know what I believe yet so I’ll get back to you on this.” At some point, it behooves us (and by that I mean it’s vitally important, a matter of life or death) to stop being busy (and therefore making excuses), to sit our fallen selves down and ask ourselves the hard questions:

Why do I continue to procrastinate in self-examination? What am I afraid of?

What, exactly do I believe? And what does it mean to believe something? What resonates within me?

What do I have faith in? And how is faith different than belief?

Do I stand for something? Enough to defend it? Or am I wishy-washy, conforming to the group of people that I happen to be with at the moment?

Why do I believe something? Because somebody told me to? Because I’ll be acceptable to my friends if I adopt their attitudes?

What evidence do I have to support my beliefs? What constitutes evidence?

Who am I pleasing by professing this belief? Is that my main motivation?

Suppose, we turn down Christ's invitation, or even become a scoffer (one who delights in throwing stones at the belief structures of others while having no structure of his own.) Then what?

Prov 29:1 He who is often reprov'd, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.

When God rebukes us, he is guiding us back onto the path of righteousness. Most of us are busy gawking at other things along the way and don't watch where we are going. So He keeps an eye on us and gives us course corrections as needed.

But – if we willingly and knowingly refuse his correction and chase our own butterflies, following our own will, then God may run out of patience with us as happened with Sodom and Gomorrah. Do we think that we can wander around as we please, that God is somehow obligated to wait for US to decide when to come back to Him?

The door stands open now.

Rev 1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus didn't say "There is a way." He said "I AM the way."

Again, let us use His wisdom as revealed to us in the book of Proverbs, to glorify Him.

Prov 9:10-12 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Soli Deo gloria!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome!

Comment:

Jack Dyer:
Great!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Yes, thank you, Kevin! In today's reading verse 26 we are given the example, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." A spirit-led person gathers wisdom. Coupled with wisdom, words are always spoken in kindness. This virtuous woman

glorified the Lord in all areas of her life. We see that the God-ordained role of wife and mother is highly esteemed in the Bible. As well as ministering to the needs of her family she becomes a servant of all. She was not one who sought her own recognition but was awarded it because of her virtue. Fearing the Lord in day to day living brings permanent blessings in this life and in the life to come.

Replies:

Joanne Caffie:
Very well said Ginger!

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Poetry

October 26: Ecclesiastes 1-2 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 43

Poetry Reading for 10/26/17

Ecclesiastes 1-2

Ecc. 1:1-2 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 Vanity, of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Good morning, All!

In answer to a steadily diminishing number of requests, I've been asked to remind folks of the reading for Ecclesiastes over the next few weeks. Which activity, on the face of it, according to the Preacher, is essentially meaningless. I mean, you've all already read Ecclesiastes. Probably many times. So why bother? Is there anything new, under the sun, to be gained?

We shall see.

I am using as a guide, "Ecclesiastes – Why Everything Matters," by Philip Graham Ryken.

Ecclesiastes is the third of the OT books in the category of wisdom, after Job and Proverbs. Its central character is named Qohelet, which can be translated as "the Teacher." However, "Preacher" may be a better translation. The Hebrew root of the word "qoheleth" literally means "to gather, collect, or assemble." So this refers to the gathering or assembly of a community of people, especially for the worship of God. Therefore, Qohelet is not so much a classroom teacher but more like a church pastor. He is preaching wisdom to a gathering of the people of God.

For our purposes, we can assume that Qohelet is Solomon, the wisest man that has ever lived, although there were probably at least 1,000 women that might, from time to time, have questioned that. As with many things, the authorship and the date are in question but the message of Ecclesiastes is probably best served by assuming Solomon wrote it.

This book honestly and painstakingly details the struggles that Qohelet had in his life, capturing the futility and frustrations of a fallen world. It is honest about the drudgery of work, the injustice of government, the dissatisfaction of foolish pleasure and the soul-sucking tedium of everyday life – "the treadmill of our existence." Think of Ecclesiastes as the only book of the Bible written on a Monday morning with only decaf coffee and no doughnuts.

It is a cautionary tale, exploring the problems that beset us if we choose what the world has to offer instead of what God has to give. Qohelet had more wisdom, more money, more pleasure, more power, more opportunities than any of us ever will. And yet, without God, it all boils down to a big "Meh."

Taxi drivers like to boast about the famous people they carry in their cabs. A story is told about one such taxi driver who said, "I had the philosopher, Bertrand Russell, in my cab the other day. I said to him, 'Bertie! What's it all about then?' Do you know, he couldn't tell me!"

So why go to the bother? Qohelet did not have to examine any of this stuff. He could have easily gone along through life, as many of us do, commuting to work (he built palaces and vineyards), eating fast food (he had frequent feasts), and watching Cheers, SNL, TMC and football (he enjoyed getting married; probably got lots of toasters and crockpots).

But he wanted, I believe, to educate his kids. We, too, having graduated from the school of Hard Knocks, want to pass along our experiences to our own kids so they don't have to make the same mistakes. Ecclesiastes, then, is Qohelet's way of passing his painfully learned wisdom along to his kids and, incidentally, to us. He is saying, "Why make your own mistakes when you can learn from an expert in misguided living like me?"

Hint: Don't be a bigamist! (A large cloud bank over Italy.)

Ecclesiastes also tackles some of the biggest questions that people have today. "What is the meaning of life? Why am I so unhappy? Does God really care? Why is there so much suffering and injustice in the world? Is life really worth living?" (Note: I, perhaps naïvely, like to believe that people wrestle with these questions on some level. Maybe that is the optimistic part of me.)

Derek Kidner writes about Qohelet: "Wisdom is his base camp, but he is an explorer. His concern is with the boundaries of life, and especially with the questions that most of us would hesitate to push too far."

Ecclesiastes also helps us worship the one true God, presenting Him as the Mighty Creator and Sovereign Lord, the transcendent and all-powerful ruler of the universe. The book teaches us how to live for God and not just for ourselves, providing us with principles needed to build a God-centered worldview.

This is a book for people unsure of WHAT to believe or not believe. It is a book for skeptics and agnostics who have embarked on an honest quest for the meaning of life, who are open to the idea of God but unsure of the Bible. Ecclesiastes can serve as a back door for believers who are wavering in their faith, as well as a gateway for some people to enter a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that leads to eternal life.

And, therefore, it becomes the most important book that they have ever read.

What does Job say? We remember:

Job 28:28 "And he said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'"

What is the message that Psalms enforces? Steven Wright just guided us through:

Psalms 111:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise."

What does Proverbs tell us? It says to us:

Prov 9:10-12 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

And what will Ecclesiastes conclude? Can you guess?

Ecc 12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

Do you see a common thread here?

The beginning of wisdom AND the conclusion of wisdom is the same.

We are reading Chapters 1 and 2 this week and right from the git-go, Qoheleth says that all is vanity. All what?

“All is vanity” says the Preacher. What is meant? The Hebrew word “hevel” refers to a breath or vapor, like smoke rising from the fire. Life is like that; ephemeral, elusive and enigmatic. It is transitory; fleeting.

James 4:14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

(It rather tickles me that the modern concept of “quantum foam” is much like this mist.)

So the Preacher is alluding partly to the transience of life.

Ecc 1:4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.

Used elsewhere in the book, “hevel” expresses the absurdity and futility of life in a fallen world. Thus, the Preacher can be thought of as saying “All is meaningless!”

Note that he says “all.” Not “some” or “most.” “All is vanity.” All of human existence is empty, pointless, useless and absurd.

Qoheleth had the wherewithal to pursue wisdom in all areas – money, pleasure, knowledge and power. And not only the wherewithal but the desire to do it.

Some people try to find meaning in their knowledge and intellectual prowess, but:
Ecc 1:18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Some people lose themselves in hedonism, or become workaholics or seek power by climbing the corporate ladder or going into politics. Or, even treating their spouses like chattel.

The advice given to those who are feeling down is to watch a funny movie. “Laughter is the best medicine” is advice that all of us are familiar with. I, myself, hope to develop a sense of humor someday.

However, much humor today is at the expense of others or makes liberal use of profanity and does not honor God. Henny Youngman’s famous one-liner “Take my wife . . . please!” is an example. How would you, as his wife, feel about this “humor?”

Is all humor bad? No. An example is from Proverbs, speaking of the wife of noble character:
Prov 31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

Qoheleth tried humor as well, found that life is no laughing matter and concluded in Eccl 2:2 - I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"

He tries alcohol, spending time with his friends Jack Daniels, Jim Beam and Old Grand Dad. Eccl 2:3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

How many people do you know who lubricate their way through life's troubles with a stiff drink or four? Rather than confronting the problems they face by sharing them with God and using His guidance, they crawl into a bottle. However, Qoheleth probably wasn't going on a pub crawl or drinking himself insensate. After all, he says that his heart was still guiding him with wisdom. Solomon also wrote:

Prov 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

He probably was either a dilettante or a connoisseur of fine wines, using them to enhance the pleasures of the palate.

His reference to "the few days of their lives" at the end of Eccl 2:3 showcases the theme of the brevity of life. We are not long for this world. *Vita brevis gloria aeterna!*

Advertisers, the Great Manipulators, know that life is short, and rather than encourage us to live in harmony with God's will, they'd rather use our fear of death to make money. Of course, you can't take it with you. No hearses have a U-Haul trailer connected to them.

Perhaps you remember the advertisement for Schlitz beer that said: "You only go around once in life, so you've got to grab for all the gusto you can." Note the not-so-subtle imperative: "you've got to."

Solomon (I'll just call him Solomon from now on) lived the lifestyle of the rich and famous: Eccl 2:4-6 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. 5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

1 King 7:1 Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished his entire house.

He was adept at horticulture and silviculture:

Song 8:11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.

Derek Kidner says: "He creates a little world within a world; multiform, harmonious, exquisite: a secular Garden of Eden, full of civilized and agreeably uncivilized delights, with no forbidden fruits." The palace of the Preacher was Paradise regained.

To maintain all this, he needed an army of servants and flocks of animals to feed them. Eccl 2:7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

To fund all this, he amassed great wealth. Then he could hire choirs of singers to cheer him as well.

Eccl 2:8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

How many concubines?

1 King 11:3 He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart.

Which of you men out there hasn't ever had the desire to live like this? Wouldn't you like to grab for all the gusto you can?

"He who loves not wine, women and song remains a fool his whole life long." – Martin Luther

Solomon tried it all. In doing so, he disregarded God's warning:

Ps 119:37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.

We are warned more explicitly in the New Testament:

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

So what was the upshot for Solomon? What happens to people who coddle their every fleshly whim? After all, in many ways, we live better than he did with our modern conveniences. We have access to foods he did not, we can hear music anytime, grow trees and plants or visit gardens, we have dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners, washers and dryers for our clothing, ovens and stoves, instant pots and automobiles. As far as concubines and wives, well the Internet delivers women in quantity, a vast harem if you will, to the privacy of your own computer. We lack nothing worldly.

Paul had something to say about this state of affairs:

2 Tim 3:2-4 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

So does having vast quantities of things bring us more happiness?

Sometimes we refer to possessions as "an Albatross around the neck;" they fix us in amber and we are trapped by them. But I'm sure that the features that you really need are in the next release.

Indeed, modern research shows that the more things that we have, the unhappier we are. Solomon didn't need to consult a research team to reach the same conclusion:

Eccl 2:11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

In his book "When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough," Harold Kushner tells of the wife of a very successful man who bought her a dream house. But now she "cannot understand why she goes around every morning saying to herself, 'Is this all there is to life?'"

What about wisdom? Surely wisdom is better than folly. But no, "I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both." What will happen to us at the end? We will all die anyway. So what really is the point of being wise? Once we are dead, what good will our wisdom do us? Death is the great equalizer. Poor and rich, saints and sinners, the wise and the foolish. All will die.

Ps 49:10 For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.

Confronted by his own mortality, Solomon took the question to heart:
Eccl 2:15 Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

The existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre similarly said "Life has no meaning the moment you lose the illusion of being eternal."

And, of course, when we die, we become forgotten. The memory of our existence will be erased. The Preacher says this in the beginning:

Eccl 1:11 There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

Have I lived a good life? A bad life? Did I care about others? Was I a selfish b****d? In not so many years, no one will know. Or care.

Alexander the Great once found the philosopher, Diogenes, standing alone in a field looking intently at a large pile of human bones. When Alexander asked Diogenes what he was doing, Diogenes replied "I am searching for the bones of your father Philip, but I cannot seem to distinguish them from the bones of the slaves."

Toil, too, is meaningless. What do people get who toil all day long? Grief and pain; even at night their minds are not at rest.

Solomon didn't have heavy commute traffic or unreasonable deadlines or bosses but he did work and in the end, hated it:

Eccl 2:18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me,

Leonard Woolf, British publisher, part founder of the Bloomsbury Group and husband of Virginia Woolf, had this to say about his work: "I see clearly that I have achieved practically nothing. The world today and the history of the human anthill during the past five to seven years would be exactly the same as it is if I had played Ping-Pong instead of sitting on committees and writing books and memoranda. I have therefore to make a rather ignominious confession that I must have, in a long life, ground through between 150,000 and 200,000 hours of perfectly useless work."

In our society, our self-worth is often defined by what we do, what career we have. This is why retirement is often a rude-awakening for many as the bottom drops out of their self-image. We ask new acquaintances, "So, what do you do for a living?" In other words, "Are you higher on the social ladder than I am?"

But finding meaning in work has its problems. Leland Ryken has listed some of them in an essay on business ethics:

- An anemic work ethic coexisting with an undervaluing of work;
- On the part of others, an overvaluing of work that takes the form of workaholism
- A sense of alienation from corporate goals, often accompanied by resentment against the corporation as an employer
- Working for a corporation whose ethical standards have long been suspect
- Anxiety stemming from job insecurity in a corporate milieu that feels no long-term loyalty to employees, and
- Viewing workers and work in purely economic terms as a means of production.

No matter how much fortune you amass during your life, You Can't Take It With You. You have to leave it ALL behind.

As we daily grind through our own bleak existence, whether at home, in school, or at work, we may sometimes feel the same way – life is, all in all, a bad business.

Solomon amassed an amazing amount of wealth – but he didn't know if the person who would inherit it would be a wise man or a fool (2:19). Solomon died not knowing the answer to that question but we know. 1 Kings 12 tells us of the folly of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. We toil hard so that our children can have better opportunities and a better life than we had. But there are no guarantees that our children will learn from us.

Question for you: Do you think Solomon, as wise as he was, failed Rehoboam?

Leo Tolstoy came to the same point of despair as Solomon. He wrote:
 "My question – that which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide – was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man . . . a question without an answer to which one cannot live. It was: 'What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life? Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?' It can also be expressed thus: Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?"

And then there's death. The grand finale to a meaningless life and the biggest vanity of all.

So what can a person do?

Ecc 2:24-25 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,
 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Here, Solomon suddenly turns positive and states what Martin Luther calls "the principle conclusion, in fact the point of the whole book." All life is vanity and yet joy is both possible and good.

What has been missing so far is God! Without God, the pleasures of food, drink and work were all meaningless and ultimately sorrowful. With God, these all become enjoyable.

Ray Stedman asks "Isn't it strange that the more you run after life, panting after every pleasure, the less you find, but the more you take life as a gift from God's hand, responding in thankful gratitude for the delight of the moment, the more that seems to come to you?"

1 Cor 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Solomon is passing his experience on to us. We try to find the meaning of life on our own in various ways or in various places; maybe join an ashram in India, or drop acid or immerse

ourselves in Nietzsche or post on Facebook. Whatever, we always come up empty. We are unhappy because we feel that we will never do anything important or be anybody special.

I still fight this. I've never set foot in India and the only acid I might have dropped was in chemistry lab. And Nietzsche has too many big words. I'll cop to FB, though, but still, there is that nagging feeling that my time is limited and I've not found my true calling. Whatever that may be. Am I supposed to be doing something else more important? Do I secretly want to be known outside my circle of spouse?

Is Solomon an atheist? By no means! He believes in the power and sovereignty of God. Which makes his situation worse because his frustrations with the world extend to frustrations with Him who created it. Have you ever felt that life was not worth living, that nothing ever turns out the way you hope for and that not even God makes a difference? Then you are in the same boat as Solomon.

But - he points out the futility of earthly things to make a point by the end of the book – that we CAN find meaning if we put our hope in the everlasting God.

Prov 8:35 For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord.

But in Ecclesiastes, that search seems futile. Without the benefit of divine revelation, figuring out the meaning of life is as unattainable as striving after the wind.

At the end of his life, the poet Ezra Pound said “All my life I believed I knew something. But then one strange day came when I realized that I knew nothing; yes, I knew nothing. And so words became void of meaning.”

Similarly, Richard Dawkins, the infamous atheist, has concluded that human existence is “neither good nor evil, neither kind nor cruel, but simply callous: indifferent to all suffering, lacking all purpose.”

The Preacher concludes his own empty quest with a proverb:
Eccl 1:15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

There are many things that we wish we could straighten out and bend back into shape – relationships, moral failings, financial troubles, disabilities, etc. Nor can we make life add up. We can't count what we don't have and maybe don't even realize what is missing.

Life is what it is and we can't do anything about it.

Anyway, Solomon becomes embittered about life; not just HIS own life but life in general.
Eccl 2:17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

Perhaps you know people who hate life because of constant physical pain or reduced circumstances or broken relationships or . . . The only way out of this depression is for them to expand their vision above the sun and beyond the grave.

Col 3:1-4 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Derek Kidner writes “The function of Ecclesiastes is to bring us to the point where we begin to fear that such a comment (all is vanity) is the only honest one. So it is, if everything is dying. We face the appalling inference that nothing has meaning, nothing matters under the sun.”

Then there is that phrase “under the sun.” Where do we experience life’s futility and meaninglessness? Wherever the sun shines. But, of course, God’s domain is everywhere – including over the sun. To see things only “under the sun” is to look at things from a worldly viewpoint, omitting God. Solomon drives home the point that we cannot find satisfaction or meaning from earthly things, but only in God Himself.

IS there anything new?
Maybe not in worldly things but certainly with God.

He gives us a NEW covenant in the blood of Jesus, shed for the remission of our sins:
Luke 22:20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

He gives us a NEW life that came up from the empty tomb as Jesus arose from the dead with the power of eternal salvation.

He gives us a NEW heart!
Ezek 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

He gives us a NEW “self,” which grows in the knowledge and holiness of God.
Eph 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

This new self is so new that the Bible calls it a “new creation.” When we trust in God, his work in us re-creates our whole world. Do you feel that renewal of the spirit?
2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

God is always puttering around in His workshop:
Rev 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

This is the promise to hold on to when life drags you down and you feel like it’s just the same ol’ same ol’.

Isaiah 43:19 See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.

Someday, we will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth. But, some people don’t buy that; they spout sentiments which are reminiscent of the weariness of Ecclesiastes:
2 Peter 3:4 They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”

But, of course, we are told in the Bible:

2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Our life's frustrations will not continue endlessly – we have hope in the dawning of a new day.

In one of the earliest commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Didymus the Blind wrote, "A person who is enlightened by the 'sun of righteousness' is not 'under' it but 'in' it. Thus it is said in the Gospel: 'The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father,' not 'under' the sun."

So what about the question asked in Eccl 1:3? What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? Answer: Nothing.

Jesus asked a similar question:

Matt 16:26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

Not even the entire world is compensation enough for the loss of a single soul.

Ecclesiastes was written to convince us that loving the world is futile and empty. It was written to point us back to God. Christ offers Himself as the source of all our satisfaction.

"Lord, I have all things if I have but Thee." – Christina Rossetti, "Jesus Alone"

I'll leave you this week with an excerpt from a sermon given by Freddie Fritz on Ecclesiastes:

Eutropius had fallen into disgrace. As the highest-ranking official in the Byzantine Empire (late fourth century), he served as the closest adviser to the emperor Arcadius, then ruling in Constantinople. But Eutropius abused his imperial power and aroused the anger of the empress Eudoxia, who orchestrated a campaign against him that resulted in a sentence of death.

Desperate to save his life, Eutropius slipped away from the palace and ran to the Hagia Sophia, where he clung to the altar and claimed sanctuary. Soon an angry mob of soldiers surrounded the great church, denouncing Eutropius and demanding his execution. Eventually, the crowds dispersed, but the next day was Sunday, and so they returned the following morning to see whether the pastor would give in to their demands for the execution of Eutropius.

The pastor was John Chrysostom, the famous preacher who served as the Bishop of Constantinople. As he mounted his pulpit, Chrysostom could see a church crowded with worshipers and thrill-seekers. They, in turn, could see Eutropius groveling at the altar. The great man had become a pitiable spectacle, with his teeth chattering and hopeless terror in his eyes.

The dramatic sermon Chrysostom preached that day may have been the finest he ever preached. For his text Chrysostom took Ecclesiastes 1:2 ("Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity"), and for his primary illustration he used the decline and fall of Eutropius.

Here was a man, Chrysostom noted, who had lost everything--position, wealth, freedom, safety. Only days before, he had been the second most powerful man in the world. But it was all vanity, as events had proven, for now Eutropius had become "more wretched than a chained convict, more pitiable than a menial slave, more indigent than a beggar wasting away with hunger." "Though I should try my very best," Chrysostom said, "I could never convey to you in words the agony he must be suffering, from hour to hour expecting to be butchered."

Chrysostom did not stop there, however. His purpose was not to condemn Eutropius but to save him, and also to give his listeners the gospel. To that end, he challenged his listeners to recognize the vanity of their own existence. Whether rich or poor, one day they would all have to leave their possessions behind. They too would face a day of judgment--the judgment of a holy God. Their only hope then would be the hope that they should offer to Eutropius now--mercy at the table of Christ.

The sermon must have hit its mark, for as Chrysostom came to a close, he could see tears of pity streaming down people's faces. Eutropius was spared--a life saved by the preaching of Ecclesiastes.

Because Ecclesiastes is the Word of the living God, it can have the same impact in our lives today. Ecclesiastes teaches us that there is more to life than what we can see with our eyes. Ecclesiastes warns us to live our lives in light of eternity. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live a meaningful life.

(From a sermon by Freddy Fritz, Introduction to Ecclesiastes, 7/11/2010)

Have a great week, everyone!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, brother Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are very welcome, brother Butch!

Comment:

Jack Dyer:
Very good! Truly, Solomon's Selfish Searching and Seeking has impact for us today! Thank you for reminding us.

Comment:

Crittenden:
Thank you, Jack. His selfish quest led to his unselfish disclosure of his findings. Good can come out of our past as we are refined in the crucible of His loving chastisement.

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
Someone may ask me who is this Kevin Crittenden fella? As of December 2016, I would have said the name is "meaningless" to me. Whoever he is, nothing he has ever done has had any impact on my life or anyone I know of. And then on Dec 28th, Charles Fry messaged me that he would like to ask someone he knew to consider volunteering to be one of the 7 Bible Reading leaders. I said that would be fine since Charles was vouching for him. Kevin found his "true calling" when he replied with the following: "Sounds awesome! Would be happy to do that. So how do I (and Kathleen) get into this group? I assume that to be nominated, you need to rock suspenders. Butch and I do that." Ever since that day, for almost an entire year on Thursdays I have sat at the "Facebook Feet" of this man and read some of the most intellectually eloquent sermons on Poetry that I have ever seen. God has made Kevin

Crittenden significant in my life and I might not even get to personally meet him this side of heaven! "To the man who pleases HIM, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness.." 2:26

Replies:

Kathleen Munger Crittenden:

And Marc, to give you some context in this physical life . . . Kevin married into an Iowa family. My grandparents were Roy and Ruth Munger, and Gladys Turnquist was my dad's aunt. I knew your dad when we were teenagers. :-)

Kevin Crittenden:

<red heart emoji>

Comment:

Hermon:

Wow, Kevin! Thanks for all the laughs and the interesting lessons. You are quite a writer! Very much appreciate your thoughtful insight and big picture examinations each week. You're a blessing ❤️ the heart of Ecclesiastes: only in God does life have meaning and true pleasure.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

<red heart emoji>

November 2: Ecclesiastes 3-4 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 44

Poetry Reading for 11/02/17

Ecclesiastes 3-4

Eccl 3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Good morning! I hope you all survived Halloween and have bagged up your left-over candy for the poor and needy. I'm poor and needy, by the way.

Do you remember Genesis Chapter 3, where Adam and Eve committed The Big Boo-boo at the urging of the serpent, and therefore got kicked out of Eden? Their lives took a nasty turn for the worse as sin entered the world. Curses and pain were introduced as well as decay and the inevitable return to dust. One can think of Ecclesiastes as being a poetic interpretation of Genesis Chapter 3 – pain and suffering and meaninglessness. Later on, we will see that in the same way, Song of Solomon can be thought of as a poetic reimagining of Genesis Chapter 2.

Everyone (well, everyone of a certain age) reading Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes will be reminded of this song by Pete Seegar in the 50's and later popularized by The Byrds:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHvf20Y6eoM>

Indeed, there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens. And now, speaking of activity, it is time for me to stop eating Halloween candy and get busy writing these notes.

Note the beauty of the lines in Eccl 3:1-8, each an expression of an activity and its opposite. Each pair forms a merism, a figure of speech which combines two opposites to form a totality.

For instance, when the Bible says that God created the Heavens and the earth, it means that God created the entire universe.

Each of the merisms in vv. 1-8 make up a larger whole. For instance, a time to laugh and a time to weep comprise the entirety of human emotion. Birth and death comprise the whole of human existence.

Up to this point, Solomon has been rather moody, and so we might expect that he continue in this pessimistic vein about time, complaining, perhaps, that our time on earth is too short and some things we start will never get finished, so why bother doing anything?

Time is indeed fleeting, and we cannot regain the hours that have elapsed, whether we've spent them feeding the hungry in a soup kitchen or watching Hee Haw on TV.

Horace Mann once wrote the following want ad: "Lost, yesterday, somewhere between Sunrise and Sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered, for they are gone forever."

But Solomon chose, rather, to write this beautiful poem on time. He has come to a proper appreciation of the sovereignty of God over time and eternity. Eccl 3:11 gives a strong affirmation of God's timeliness in ordering human events.

Eccl 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

These pairs of verses seem to encompass the entirety of human experience, from birth to death, from war to peace and all that lies within.

Not only is God sovereign over time, there is also an orderliness to His efforts. He has a chronology.

Gen 8:22 While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

God does everything at just the right time.

We remember that Solomon was a great builder, planner, doer, visionary, collector and writer of proverbs, and evidently good at husbandry. He certainly had enough wives!

But his poem isn't just about human activities – these things are done by God as well.

Jer 1:12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it."

Each activity is listed with its opposite, and together both of them tell us what God does in the world.

You and I were born and you and I will someday die. These are appointments that we must keep. Both follow God's timetable. God is the Author of Life. So David praised Him:

Ps 139:13 For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

God is also the One who numbers our days:

Job 14:5-6 Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,
6 look away from him and leave him alone, that he may enjoy, like a hired hand, his day.

“You cannot live any longer than the Lord has prescribed,” said Martin Luther, “nor die any sooner.” Suicide attempts often fail. Assisted suicide (euthanasia) is an attempt to circumvent God’s timetable. If you feel that God’s timetable CAN’T be circumvented, then what do you think about Cain killing Abel? Was the death of Abel according to God’s timetable or do you think that Abel would have lived a long and prosperous life without Cain’s intervention?

We learn that God is the Creator God but (remembering our merisms), He is also the Destroyer God at the right time.

Creator God planted His people as a fruitful vineyard.

Isa 5:1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

But when the people turned away from Him, Destroyer God dug up the vineyard.

Isa 5:5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

We must accept God in His entirety, not just the Creator God who builds us up. We must also be cognizant of arousing His wrath.

Deut 32:39 “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me;
I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

There is a time for this and a time for that. How shall we spend OUR time? How shall we spend OUR lives? As followers of Christ, we don’t just look at time as measured by a clock but as measured by opportunities to serve God. So consider three practical ways to apply the message of this poem to your life of Christian discipleship:

1 – Wait for God’s timing. We need to trust in God’s sovereignty over time and that He knows the right time for everything. David knew this; he knew that whatever time it happened to be, God was still in control.

Ps 34:1 I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

Most of us encounter “times,” when events are out of our hands. We don’t control them as we think we should. So we get impatient, or try to push ahead of God’s schedule (any Biblical examples come to mind?) What we really need to do when we are impatient is to hurry up and wait for God.

“My times are in thy hand;
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul I leave
Entirely to Thy care.” - William Lloyd

2 – Live your whole life knowing that there is a time for you to die.

Well, this isn't going to be a popular sentiment and it probably won't attract a lot of people into your church. People don't want to hear bad news (and death is bad news to a lot of folks). But we need to keep in mind the message in Hebrews:

Heb 9:27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

Certainly, if death is a subject to be avoided in polite conversation, then the ensuing judgment is hardly to be thought of, let alone mentioned. Let's change the subject already.

The question, though, that should be uppermost in your thoughts is, "Am I ready for death when that time comes?" It perhaps would be easier if we knew WHEN we were going to die. But we don't. We aren't privy to that information like Hezekiah was:

Isa 38:5 Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.

When the Vicomte de Turenne was mortally wounded at the Battle of Salzbach on July 27, 1675, he wistfully said, "I did not mean to be killed today."

Certainly you can prepare for your own death as much as you can – plan your funeral, choose the hymns, write your own obituary, get your affairs in order, finish all your projects . . . and then wait for God. I think there's a British TV show called "Waiting For God" about a group of elderly people in a nursing home. But everyday that we find ourselves still living probably means that there is more work for us to do in God's vineyard.

But really, we should all be ready to die at anytime because Heaven is God's promise to every believer. If you are not feeling ready for eternity, then there is no time to lose.

2 Cor 6:2 For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Reminds me of the question Harry Callahan asked. (Sort of):

Uh uh. I know what you're thinking. "Did God give me another year to live?" Well to tell you the truth in all this excitement I kinda lost track myself. But being this is most powerful and only Deity in Creation and would cast you into Hell, you've gotta ask yourself one question: "Do I feel lucky?" Well, do ya, punk?

3 – Make good use of whatever time you have.

Time is a precious commodity, given to us by God, for doing the work of His kingdom.

Stephen Olford calls it "a fragment of eternity given by God to man as a solemn stewardship."

The Bible tells us to use our time wisely:

Eph 5:15-16 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

We may sometimes feel that we are using our time wisely because we can cram more and more things into our already-busy schedule. Busyness has become a virtue in our culture. It is a well-known fact that if you want something done quickly in an office, give it to the busiest person there. But there is a time to work and a time to rest. Don't neglect your rest; if you do, your work will be shoddy.

Relationships are often tricky and we need to use our timing wisely. Having the heart of Jesus means knowing when it is time to weep and when it is time to rejoice.

Rom 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

We need to have a good sense of timing to know when to speak up and when to shut up.

1Pet 3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

James 1:26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

So, ask yourselves: Is it time to build up or tear down? Is it time to scatter or gather? Is it time to embrace or exclude? Is it time to edify or to listen? Is it time to teach or to learn?

We pray for guidance in this matter as Moses did:

Ps 90:12

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Solomon now asks again, "What do workers gain from their toil?" You might ask, especially on a Monday morning, "Why should I go to work?" People invest their time and energy into work; what kind of return do they get?

Eccl 3:10 I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.

People work hard. Is it worth it? In Chapter 2, the answer was "No. The worker gets nothing at all." But here, immediately after the question, Solomon affirms the goodness of God in Eccl 3:11 "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

Solomon is praising the way that God continues to rule the world – the seasons of nature and the patterns of human activity.

God "has put eternity into man's heart" – we all want to set up a PERMANENT residence and relationship with Him and He has PROMISED us this through an everlasting Covenant. Imagine! We have been promised an everlasting and permanent home with Him. But it is a Covenant. We have a part to play.

Gen 9:16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

2 Sam 7:13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

God has kept His promises and continues to offer eternal life to those who accept His Son, who first loved us so much as to offer his perfect life painfully, publically, and shamefully for our intractable sins before rising from the grave with power over death.

But we're not there yet and so we keep looking to understand what it all means. Solomon looked as hard as one can look and concluded that "[man] cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." We have a point of view but God has a complete view. [See the fable of the blind men and the elephant.]

But rather than give up on our desire for understanding, it is better to stop looking “under the sun” and realize that our desire for eternity shows that we were made for another world.

Ecc 3:12-14 I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; 13 also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil —this is God's gift to man.

14 I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.

Solomon has gained two insights (“I perceived”), one about doing God’s business and the other about trusting in His sovereignty.

He tells us to take our short time here on earth and use it joyfully in the service of God. And he tells us to get off the couch and get busy. This is the best we can do. But he now understands that life, indeed, has meaning and joy.

Without meaning, we have the viewpoint expressed by Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote: “It was true. I had always realized it – I hadn’t any ‘right’ to exist at all. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, a microbe. I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential buzzing. I was thinking. . . that here we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there’s nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing.”

As far as doing God’s work, we remember Ephesians 2:10 - For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Good works are our purpose. Let’s face it – while it is good to spend time in the Word, if that is all we do, then it is like continually sharpening an axe that will never be put to use.

And we are to do good as long as we live. There is no mandatory retirement. But if we find joy in doing good, we won’t give retirement a second thought. (Personally, I think that the subject of retirement is given short shrift – it is a major life change and I believe it would be a good study area.)

Solomon’s second insight was to trust in God’s sovereignty.

Ecc 3:14 I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.

“Whatever God does” will endure. “Whatever God does” will be in His time, not ours. Nothing will be added to it or subtracted from it. Even if you “know what He intends to do and thus try to help Him out.”

Michael Fox says, “God’s works steamroller over man’s puny efforts, and nothing substantially new can interrupt the awesome course of events that God has ordained.”

So . . . despite our best efforts, we can do nothing about our situation in life. Why does God do this? “So that people fear before him.”

The fear of God isn’t about frightening us into submission; it is a positive concept. To fear God is to revere Him and to tremble at His mighty power. Remember:

Job 28:28 “And he said to the human race, ‘The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.’”

Ps 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Prov 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

And at the end of Ecclesiastes, in summation: Fear God.

Martin Luther said, “This is what it means to fear God: to have God in view, to know that He looks at all our works, and to acknowledge Him as the Author of all things.”

The last part of v 15 in the NIV reads “and God will call the past to account.” This seems to align with a later verse:

Eccl 12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

But in the ESV, 3:15 reads “That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.”

This seems to be talking about things that have happened and seem to be lost and yet God seeks to find them. Perhaps God is looking to redeem the past and not simply to render judgment.

At the end of Chapter 3, Solomon tackles the issue of death. The fear of death is called thanatophobia, brought on by the knowledge that death is inevitable.

Eccl 3:19 The fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both. As one dies, so dies the other.”

Solomon is wondering what will happen when we die. He has noticed in v3:16 that even in the place of judgment, wickedness is there. And similarly, in the place of justice, wickedness is there. The court systems are corrupt. Innocent people are jailed. Murderers go free. And nothing can be done about it. Solomon is unhappy, not only that injustice is happening, but that it goes unpunished. When our human institutions for justice become defiled, where can righteousness be found?

Solomon once again notices the oppression in the land:

Eccl 4:1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

God stands firmly against oppression.

Amos preached against oppressors:

Amos 4:1 “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring, that we may drink!’

Ezek 12:22 In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord God.

Zech 7:9-10 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

Sure, we see a lot of injustice in our world today. And we wish something could be done about it. But take heart in Eccl 3:17 – “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.”

There is a season for everything and God’s timing includes a time for justice.

If you are impatient, listen to the words of Habakkuk:

Hab 2:3 For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

Solomon wonders now if there is life after death. Men die just the same as the animals. All return to dust.

Eccl 3:21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

He wonders: Who knows? How can we be sure? In fact, CAN we be sure?

We know we will die. But will we live again?

Not having an answer, Solomon thinks it’s best for a person to bury themselves in work. But can work bring you lasting satisfaction?

So, in the beginning of Chpt 4, Solomon despairs again at the oppression in the world. Better not to ever have been born.

As a character on the TV show, The Sopranos, said; “It’s all a big nothing. In the end, you die in your own arms.”

Fortunately, we have the answers and therefore have hope and joy in this life because of the promise of salvation and justice to come.

2 Tim 1:10 and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

Eccl 4:9-10 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

Often, the OT authors would compare one thing to another. To show the path to wisdom or the way to obedience, they would make such a comparison.

1 Sam 15:22 And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

Solomon makes such comparisons. Maybe it is better if we’re never born than to suffer the troubles of this world. But then he gives us practical advice for living in this fallen world.

Ecc 4:4-6 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.
5 The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.
6 Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

It is better for us to live in contentment.

There are many reasons, of course, to work, but Solomon is pointing out that envy is one of them. We want the things our neighbor has. But Solomon reminds us that wanting something that God has given to someone else is vanity.

And then there's that guy who "folds his hands" and doesn't work. I project this description onto the people at intersections with their cardboard signs, asking for money, when all around us are help wanted signs. I know I'm being judgmental and it is a flaw of mine.

Solomon calls the lazy man a fool.

Derek Kidner says "[The fool] is the picture of complacency and unwitting self-destruction, for this comment on him points out a deeper damage than the wasting of his capital. His idleness eats away not only what he has but what he is: eroding his self-control, his grasp of reality, his capacity for care and, in the end, his self-respect."

But "Better a handful of quietness." Or contentment. The quiet person is done with striving after things and finds contentment in what he has and his work. Sometimes, less is more.

Is work always good? We see a trend in this country, and others, to work harder, longer, faster, smarter. People make costly sacrifices to "get ahead" in their careers and build their portfolios without considering whether it is all worth it. Solomon saw it as a warning for us all against isolation, selfishness, greed and a sinful addiction to work. Here in America, we tout our "Self-Reliance" and "Rugged Individualism."

But living and working for selfish purposes can turn the American Dream into a nightmare. "For whom am I toiling?" Not for myself, the Christian says, but for the glory of God and the good of other people, including the people I love in the family of God.

Otherwise, we might end our days like the workaholic businessman who died at the age of 51. His obituary cited coronary thrombosis but the people who knew him also knew he died of overwork. He was at the office six days a week until 8 or 9 at night. On the day of the funeral, when the company was already looking for a replacement, the president looked around the office for candidates and said "Well, who's been working the hardest?" And when a friend consoled the man's wife by saying "I know how much you will miss him," she answered, "Oh, I already have."

Ecc 4:13-16 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

This comparison shows us that it is better to lead with a teachable spirit than to be too proud to allow anyone to teach us at all. You can't teach an old dog or a foolish king new tricks.

In this brief story, the king will someday be forgotten. All kings will someday be forgotten. All of our illustrious movie idols and sports teams and presidents will be forgotten. Even I will someday be but a memory. OK, not even a memory. Fame is fleeting.

Derek Kidner says this new king “has reached a pinnacle of human glory, only to be stranded there. It is yet another of our human anticlimaxes and ultimately empty achievements.”

But one of the main lessons here stands out. Of all the contrasts between the two kings – youth vs. aged, poverty vs. wealth, wisdom vs. folly – the most important is their attitude towards advice. How many institutions in today’s world are saddled by older men who are set in their ways and refuse to let go?

And, are you so sure of your understanding of the Word that you have closed your mind to new ideas? These verses are an encouragement for “mature” Christians (I hesitate to use the word “elderly”) to listen to counsel. They are also an encouragement to younger Christians that they can do important work for the kingdom of God.

When he described his conversion to faith in Christ, the Reformer John Calvin said that God subdued his mind and brought it to “a teachable frame.”

A Christian, then, is a teachable follower of Christ.

Have a great week!

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=fHvf20Y6eoM>
“Turn! Turn! Turn!”

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:
Great post, brother Kevin! Thank you!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome!

November 9: Ecclesiastes 5-6 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 45
Poetry Reading for 11/09/17
Ecclesiastes 5-6

Eccl 5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

Good morning!

To begin with, please take 5 minutes to watch this short film, James 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pvK3dMo5qI>

What do you notice in this film about the attitudes displayed and the words exchanged? Did you notice the great change that occurred once the family got to church? Do you think that

the “happy faces” that they put on, once they got to church, represents the reality of their lives? Or were they just pretending?

Solomon began Ecclesiastes by bemoaning the meaninglessness of our existence, but by now, he is giving us practical advice, teaching us the right way to live. He is preaching to us and he starts chapter 5 by exhorting us to have truth and reverence in our hearts when we come before God to worship Him.

Derek Kidner says that the Preacher’s admonitions are for “the well-meaning person who likes a good sing and turns up cheerfully enough for church; but who listens with half an ear, and never quite gets round to what he has volunteered to do for God.”

Solomon is talking to us, the church-goers, who sometimes allow our minds to wander, finding it hard to pay attention, finding it difficult to serve God.

Solomon tells us:

Eccl 5:1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.

Which reminds us of:

1 Sam 15:22 And Samuel said,
“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

Solomon exhorts us to listen. We need to make every effort to keep focused on what is being said from the pulpit. We don’t have paid preachers who are adept at public speaking, but use, instead, the model of mutual edification. Naturally, we will have certain speakers that we prefer over others. But every person up there, without exception, has spent time working on a sermon that will edify the body and that edification is the Word of the Living God. So we need to stop feeling judgmental or disappointed and ask ourselves:

Am I ready to listen to the voice of God?

Is my heart open to spiritual instruction?

Are my ears attentive to the message I will hear from the Bible?

Rom 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Solomon tells us that if we are not fully engaged in listening, then we are not offering God a sacrifice of praise but, instead, “the sacrifice of fools.”

Heb 4:2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

When we therefore go to church, let us listen:

- WITH the confidence of Solomon:

Prov 30:5 Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

- WITH the eager anticipation of Mary

Luke 10:38-39 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.

- WITH the faith of Peter

John 6:68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,

Solomon now tells us to shut up. Well, not really. He tells us in v 5:2 to let our words be few. Harmful words should not find easy egress from our lips. Do you remember the interactions on Facebook during the election? The libel, the defamation, the vitriol, the accusations, the insults? Is this Christian behavior?

Remember, every time you open your mouth, your heart is on display.

Luke 6:45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

"Angry words! oh, let them never
From the tongue unbridled slip;
May the heart's best impulse ever
Check them e'er they soil the lip."

James pretty well sums it up when he says:

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

Now that Solomon has told us to watch what we say, he now tells us what to do.

Vv 5:4-5 When you make a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

Do what you say. Put your money where your mouth is. He is talking specifically about vows made before God, like the vow Asaph described in Psalm 76:11:

"Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared,

Often, we make these kinds of vows in our prayers with an IF – THEN construction. IF you, God, help me through this mess, THEN I'll attend church more regularly.

And how easy it is to renege on that promise. Better not to have made it in the first place. We need to follow through; not only that, but without delay.

Charles Bridges gave some advice about making vows: "A solemn engagement advisedly made with God is a transaction needing much prayer and consideration. It should rest on 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."

V 5:7 For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

We began with vanity – all is vanity – and are moving to the book's conclusion: the goal of life is the fear of God. So we are moving from vanity to reverence.

Charles Bridges defined the fear of God as “ the grand fundamental of godliness.” Fearing God is recognizing His might and majesty, His grandeur, His place in Heaven and our place on earth.

T.M. Moore has written a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 5:1-9 to drive home its spiritual lessons.

How brazen and dishonest people are
with their religion. They will go as far
with it as suits their needs; so they attend
the services and sing the hymns, and when
they have to, give a little money to
the Lord. But do they live as one should do
who's made a vow to God? Don't kid yourself.
Among their friends their faith is on the shelf....
Remember, God knows everything.
He knows our hearts when we before him bring
our worship, and you can't fool him. So take
a good look at yourself before you make
your next appearance before the Lord. And go
to listen, not to speak, for he will know
just what you need. Why, any fool can spout
a lovely prayer or sing a hymn about
his faith. His words are mindless, like a dream,
although to people looking on they seem
impressive. Not to God....
For words are cheap,
just like the dreams you have while you're asleep.
God wants your heart, my son, not just a show.
Get right with him before you to him go.

Solomon now moves inexorably on to the subject that causes so much conflict in the world-
money. Would \$1,000 make you happy? \$10,000? A million? Happy for how long?

There's a favorite game that people play – it's called complete the sentence: “If I won the
lottery, then . . .” Naturally, you could realize all your dreams, you see, because, as we learn on
TV, the best things in life cost money. I don't mean to come across as sitting on my moral high
horse – I've played this game myself.

Solomon tells us that whoever loves money is never satisfied – they always want more. And
money divides the loyalties of a person; mammon or God, mammon or God. We are easily
distracted by the trappings of wealth.

Matt 6:24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or
he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Solomon knows that we wage a spiritual battle with riches and therefore shows that the love of
money is just vanity. He begins by talking about injustice brought about through the
oppressive structures of society. No matter what form of government you have, poor people
lose out. We see this now when companies, grasping for a better profit margin, force workers
to neglect their families. Solomon tells us not to be so surprised – this is how things are in a
fallen world. From the king downwards through the ranks, each person abuses his power.

Martin Luther says that unless there is “some Solomon to exhort and console him, government
crushes the man, extinguishes him, and utterly destroys him.”

We, therefore, understanding that even the best of governments is far from perfect, live in the hope of a better administration some day.

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

In our society today, we have a spiritual problem that author Jessie O'Neill calls "affluenza" which is "an unhealthy relationship with money." Most of us have this to some degree or other. We give thanks for what we have, then cast an eye over the fence to where the Joneses have parked their new car. And then feel guilty and inadequate that we haven't supported our families as well as we should have.

As Solomon points out, our appetite for what money can buy can never be satisfied. The only way to curb it is to be content with what God provides.

Let's say we have a bunch of money. Solomon then tells us in v. 5:11 that other people will take it from us. The more we have, the more other people (government, relatives, friends) try to take it. It will all be used up before we can use it. Vanity.

Solomon also notes in v. 5:12 that rich folks don't sleep very well. Our lifestyle is just not healthy for us. Derek Kidner points out one of the ways that we see this in the West, where almost everyone is wealthy. He looks at all our "modern exercise-machines and health clubs" and says it is "one of our human absurdities to pour out money and effort just to undo the damage of money and ease."

But, of course, there is much grief in losing money.

Ecc 5:13-14 There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, 14 and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.

We have a saying: "Here today, gone tomorrow." And "Easy come, easy go." And "Kevin and his money are soon parted." So . . . to count on money always being there is vanity.

Ecc 5:15 As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.

We saw this idea in Job 1:21 "And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

And in 1 Tim 6:7 "for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world."

We can't take it with us. At some point in our lives, we must accept our mortality, that appointment with death when we shuffle off this mortal coil.

Martin Luther said "As I shall forsake my riches when I die, so I forsake them while I am living."

Randy Alcorn: "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving."

We are destined for Eternity so let us travel lightly.

Solomon concludes chapter 5 as follows:

Eccl. 5:18-19 Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. 19 Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.

We've seen the same sentiment expressed in 1 Timothy:

1 Tim 6:17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

Solomon recognizes that our brief time on this earth is a sacred "gift of God," for which he is grateful. Notice how Solomon attributes the joy that we have in this life, including the joy that money can bring, to God. Both having things and enjoying things are gifts from God.

Eccl 5:20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

When we learn to depend on God for our enjoyment rather than on one or more of His gifts to us, then we won't pay too much attention to nor long remember our worldly things.

I've been told that I'm supposed to cover chapters 5 AND 6 this week so, with a lot of further ado, including reinforcements in the coffee arena, we'll go on now to Ecclesiastes 6.

Eccl 6:1-2 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: 2 a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.

Let's face it. Our desires exceed our capacity for satisfaction.

Jonathan Clements, in an article for the Wall Street Journal, concludes: "We may have life and liberty, but the pursuit of happiness isn't going so well. . . We constantly hanker after fancier cars and fatter paychecks – and, initially, such things boost our happiness. But the glow of satisfaction quickly fades and soon we're yearning for something else."

Dissatisfaction guaranteed.

Chapter 6 is not a happy chapter. In it, we read what the Russian poet calls "reason's icy intimations, and records of a heart in pain."

Solomon writes about the disappointments he's encountered that have left him deeply dissatisfied, followed by questions answerable only by God. Perhaps some people you know

also see life as a series of disappointing events with no discernable meaning. “What is the purpose of my pain? Is it to teach me a lesson? Why this same lesson, over and over again? Why can’t anything good ever happen to me? Does God hate me?”

Solomon starts out with the example of a man who had it all. Everything his heart desired was his for the taking. But, oddly, he couldn’t enjoy his life. Martin Luther called these verses “a description of a rich man who lacks nothing for a good and happy life and yet does not have one.”

In the end, the rich man lost everything without ever having enjoyed it.

People dream about winning the lottery – then they could have their heart’s desires. Right? But if you did win the lottery, I suspect the first thing you’d acquire are hordes of friends and relatives with chronic cases of “hours of need”. Then there are the taxes. And the phone calls, text messages, etc. from solicitors. Strangers knocking on your door. You might notice envy creeping into the attitudes of your friends. (Steinbeck’s book “The Pearl” covers this.) People would treat you differently. Not a lot of satisfaction in all that, I’m afraid.

And afterwards, the whole shootin’ match might go to strangers.

Ps 39:6 Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

Having money will not guarantee enjoyment but keeping God at the center of our lives allows us to experience real joy at the gifts He bestows upon us. The fear of the Lord not only is the beginning of wisdom; it is also the source of satisfaction.

Solomon then goes on to muse whether a man would be better off stillborn than suffer the disappointments that life’s good things bring him. Even the blessings of 100 sons and daughters (poor wife!) and a really long life (v 6 tells us 2,000 years), would not bring this man enjoyment of his prosperity.

Today, we work hard to build a better future for our families – we want to provide opportunities for our children that we never had. But the Teacher is telling us that even if we provided the best possible outcome for our children, it is to no avail if God is missing in their lives.

So the Teacher muses that such a man might think: “I wish I had never been born!” One commentator says “Better to miscarry at birth than to miscarry throughout life.” The reasoning is that the stillborn child is the first to die and therefore the first to find its eternal rest.

And, of course, eventually we all come to the same place of death. Karl Barth took this personally when he said, “Some day a company of men will process out to a churchyard and lower a coffin and everyone will go home; but one will not come back, and that will be me.”

So - if life is fairly joyless anyway, ennui studded with moments of stark terror, then what’s the advantage of soldiering on? Every cloud has a silver lining? It’s always darkest before the dawn? There’s a light at the end of the tunnel? These imply that something good is coming your way but, of course, there are no guarantees. Maybe nothing good is coming. Tomorrow, you’ll be another day older and deeper in debt.

At this point, Solomon wonders if we will ever be satisfied.

Eccl. 6:7-9 All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. 8 For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how

to conduct himself before the living? 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

So if you can live to be 2,000 years old with 100 sons and daughters and everything your heart desired (up through yesterday) yet still finding yourself moping around the house 'cause you don't have something that the Joneses have, then you are the perfect American consumer. Sure, the wise man seemingly has an advantage over the fool but even wise men have unfulfilled longings, same as the fool. And the poor man, who knows how to live rightly, is still in the same boat – disappointed along with everyone else.

You would think that having sufficient food, shelter, clothing, family, friends, entertainment, coffee and pizza would be enough. Oh, and chocolate. But Desire is a whore, always wandering out to the street corner looking for something new. The “wandering of the appetite.” And it affects us all. We are always reaching for something new that we hope will satisfy us at last. But only in God will we find that fulfillment.

Philip Ryken suggests that before we go out on a spending spree, it is better to talk things over with the Father, saying “Lord, you know how empty I feel right now. Help me not to run away from my problems but to turn them over to you. Teach me that you are enough for me. And by your grace, give me the peace and the joy that you have for me in Jesus.”

But Solomon isn't to that point yet. He knows that satisfaction cannot be found, and wonders if he would be better off dead. His appetite is insatiable and now (vv. 6:10-12) he complains that life is just the same old routine, the endless rut until you die and who knows what happens after that?

There is nothing new under the sun. Humans haven't changed since the Fall. An old German proverb says “As things have been, so they still are; and as things are, so they will be.” And, as v. 10 says, “no one can contend with someone who is stronger.” The stronger one is God; no sense, then, complaining to Him, as Job did.

All of our reasoned explanations and obvious improvements to God's plans aren't going to impress Him. And the more we talk, the emptier we sound.

Romans 9:20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

Chapter 6 closes with a couple of questions:

Ecccl 6:12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

These are life and death questions. The first has to do with our life. What is our best possible course of action during our brief existence? How do we live a good life? And the second question is about death. What happens after death?

We seem to be back where we started in Ecclesiastes: Everything is meaningless and nobody knows what happens next.

But Solomon has been examining everything from a human perspective (under the sun). No joy there. But he has a purpose in doing so. By openly discussing our disappointments and trials in life, he opens our minds to the realization that we have a longing for God. Ecclesiastes may not answer the questions Solomon raises fully but the Bible as a whole does. In it, we

learn God's will for man, how man should live out his days and by doing so, find hope in the new life to come.

Naturally, there are naysayers.

British Humanist Association "Life leads to nothing, and every pretense that it does not is a deceit." (This itself is a statement of faith, since there is no way to prove this. A rather cold comfort, IMHO.)

Skeptics hedge their bets. They may not believe in an afterlife but realize that they cannot deny the possibility.

Rabelais "I am off in search of a great Perhaps."

Thomas Hobbes – who described his death as the "last voyage, a great leap in the dark."

But you and I, and that guy over there, know that we can take God at His word and trust in the promises that He made in the Bible. There IS a life to come. And it IS indescribably good.

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:
Thank you. Always appreciate your thoughts.

November 16: Ecclesiastes 7-8 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 46
Poetry Reading for 11/16/17
Ecclesiastes 7-8

Eccl 7:1-2 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

Good morning! And how is YOUR name regarded today?

At the end of Chapter 6, (which, of course, you remember clearly), Solomon asked a couple of questions. One was essentially, "What is the best way to live our lives?" Chapter 7 contains answers to that question with a series of comparisons, i.e. It is better to eat hot cereal for breakfast than Hostess Ho Hos. (S'truth!)

This series of comparisons is used by Solomon to teach us discernment in how we conduct our lives.

V 7:1 sounds a lot like Prov 22:1 "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold," which is not surprising if Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were written by the same hand. Solomon collected proverbs, finding them useful, so uses them here and there. Anyway, back in those days, perfumes and ointments were expensive commodities; even much later in the days of Jesus when a woman, (foolishly to some), dumps a jar of nard on Jesus' head. (Matt 26:7)

It takes many years and long experience to build up a good reputation. And, as Job discovered, it can disintegrate overnight. Thus, people with truly impeccable reputations are rather rare. Perhaps rarer than nard.

So how do you build up a name for yourself over time? Certainly, by the good deeds that you do, by the encouraging words that you write or speak, by your availability and willingness to further the welfare of the church and the edification of the brethren therein. And, ALSO, these days, by what you post on Facebook, by the gossip that you engage in, by the complaints that you make, by acts of selfishness or failures to participate when needed. Think of some people you know. Do you see them as generous? Stingy? Dour? Cheerful? Critical? Encouraging? Babblers? Circumspect in speech? Truthful? Prone to fabrications? Filled with excuses? Reliable? Whatever actions you take (or don't take) affect how people see you and therefore your name.

How do you think that other people see you?

In 1786, the poet Robert Burns saw a louse on a lady's bonnet in church and wrote an ode to it. In this ode (To a Louse), he pens the immortal words:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!

(Of course, as a poet, you would think he could spell better.)

Sometimes, we think we are making a humorous statement, but someone finds it hurtful and then we backpedal by saying:

"Oh, I was only kidding." No. You weren't.

"I didn't mean it." Yes. You did.

Remember, when you advertise yourself as a Christian, your actions reflect not only on YOUR name but on the name of Jesus Christ.

The second part of Eccl 7:1 ". . . and the day of death than the day of birth," could mean that Solomon is glad that his life is almost over. Or, more positively, it could be that life has been so

hard for some people that death will be a welcome relief. Since the first part of the comparison was positive, then the second part is probably the more positive interpretation as well.

After studying this verse, Didymus the Blind commented that a believer's dying day is best because it is "the end and termination of evil."

In Philippians 1:21-23, Paul couldn't decide whether life or death was best for him. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

And, of course, it was a wonderful day when Christ was born, the coming of our God and King. But the better day was to be found, not in Bethlehem but in Calvary. The birth of Jesus did not save us but His death did.

But Solomon knew that the day of death was better than the day of birth, because death has more to teach us about life.

Eccl. 7:2-4 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Matthew Henry concludes: "It will do us more good to go to a funeral than to go to a festival."

Why?

Because happy occasions do not lend themselves to thoughts of our own mortality or the all-too-brief time that we have left. A funeral, however, can cause us to reflect on our own lives; perhaps guiding us to wiser living and preparation for our own end. It is a foolish choice to depend on a long life; the wise man gets his house in order and can live out his days in peace.

Our society today is beginning(?) to regard aging as a disease and death as postponeable. This is an attractive message to our worldly culture. More time to consume the forbidden fruit; to buy more things and enjoy them. And worship them.

In secular society, wrote Susan Sontag, "death is the obscene mystery, the ultimate affront, the thing that cannot be controlled. It can only be denied." And deny it we do. We don't like to talk about death. We don't like to think about death. We send our aged into nursing homes where we allow them to founder without visitations, we tend to skip the part where we see the coffin being laid to rest, and we refer to those who die as the "departed," as if they've gone on a trip somewhere. They're not with us anymore, they're in a better place, they're at rest, they've passed away. They've done everything except what they actually did do which was to die."

We've heard the expression for death as "going the way of all flesh," but that is a misquotation of "going the way of all the earth." (1 Kings 2:2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man,")

Joshua 23:14 "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed.

We need to embrace the subject, the fact, the necessity of death.

Martin Luther says that it is good for us to “invite death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move.”

Ps 90:12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

It is time to think wisely about death.

Eccl. 7:5-6 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.
6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.[a]

To live wisely in this world, it is advisable to listen to the rebukes of those wiser than we are. They are passing on their knowledge and experience; if we pay heed to their advice, it will be better than learning in the school of hard knocks.

As far as laughter goes, fools will laugh at most anything, funny or not. They are also prone to laughing AT others, which is certainly not godly behavior.

Luke 6:25 “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.
“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Eccl. 7:7-8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Solomon moves on to warn us against focusing on short-term gain and to start paying attention, instead, to the long-term goal. Students wonder in their Pre-Algebra classes “Why do we have to know this stuff? We’ll never use it.” Or “Why bother planting fruit trees? It will take years before I get enough fruit to make it worthwhile.”

So why bother planting anything?

Matt 13:8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Eccl 7:10 Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.”

Things were better back in the good old days. Let us regain our former glory. This is a rather current theme in our country. We remember through rose-colored glasses that life was much simpler, much more godly, much more friendly etc. back “then.” (For certain classes of people. For others, not so much.)

But Solomon warns against focusing our attention on the past. Look forwards, he says, not backwards. Remember, when the Second Temple was going to be built – the old-timers said “Nah, it won’t be nearly as beautiful as the first.” Solomon, who built the first temple, would have cautioned these people to let bygones be bygones.

Why look forward?

Because God’s Plan is still unfolding. And we are blessed to be witnessing it. We look forward because of what is said in Romans 13:11 “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

Eccl 7:13 Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

Solomon had made a careful observation of the way God works. He noticed the world around him, the way there was a time for this and then a time for that. He noted how people worked and played, lived and died.

Of course no one can straighten something that God has made crooked. And by “crooked,” we don’t mean evil but rather the difficulties that we face in life. We all suffer from something; personally, I suffer(ed) from social anxiety. Some people suffer from other types of phobias. Or physical difficulties. Or difficult loss. Or tragic circumstances. One of my students lost her baby in utero. There is SOMETHING that we wish to God was straighter in our lives and would change if we could.

Job asked why good people suffer and, of course, realized that they can do nothing about it.

Paul was not spared either:

2 Cor 12:8-9 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

When we are floundering in the midst of the crooked part, and slipping into the whirlpool of despair, then let us remember the hope that we have through the Sovereignty of God. Sure, we suffer the frustrations of life in a fallen world but God has a plan to set us free and is working all things together for our good.

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Solomon then tells us that some days will be good and some days will be bad. But God has made them both and we need to acknowledge that.

Job 2:10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Since God has made both good and bad days, Solomon tells us that we cannot discover anything about our future. This will put a lot of palm readers, astrologers and seers out of business. Toss out your Tarot cards and your Ouija boards; they are of no use to you; in fact, they can be detrimental to your spiritual health.

I like to know what is going to happen – it gives me a sense of security. And if I don’t know what will happen, there is a certain anxiety. If I go to a dinner party and have to sit with strangers, then what? If I have to give a sermon at church and get tongue-tied, then what? I need to learn, perhaps you need to learn, to leave our future in God’s capable hands. This is a trust issue.

Martin Luther said (and, yes, I know I’m a name-dropper. Deal with it.) “Enjoy the things that are present in such a way that you do not base your confidence on them, as though they were going to last forever . . . but reserve part of our heart for God, so that with it we can bear the day of adversity.”

And the Puritan Richard Baxter:
Take what He gives,
And praise Him still,
Through good or ill,
Who ever lives.

So . . . If God gave you something crooked, would you make it straight? Would you change your financial situation or your disability or your disease? Would you make yourself prettier or more handsome? Taller? Or would you trust God to make it straight in His own time?

Eccl. 7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

Solomon has identified two evils that lead to destruction. Essentially, righteous people perish and wicked people prosper. This seems at odd with our expectations of a good and just God and with Deuteronomy 4:40 "Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time."

These injustices are a part of this world and are some of the crooked things that we wish we could straighten out. But Solomon knew we couldn't straighten them so he advises us with his practical wisdom:

Eccl 7:16-17 Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

So is Solomon advocating a life of moderation? Don't be a goody two-shoes and don't be a felon? Avoid extremes? Was this a good policy for the church in Laodicea?

Rev 3:15-16 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

If this is what Solomon is advocating, then he is again focusing on life under the sun and neglecting God.

However, let's consider an alternative.

When he says not to be "overrighteous," he might be saying "Don't be self-righteous." This could refer to someone only pretending to be righteous. After all, IS there a way to be too righteous? God's standard is perfection. No, the problem is (as usual) with us thinking that we are more righteous than we really are.

Strange, isn't it, that there never is any lack of people who think they are good enough for God. This thought led H. C. Leupold to suspect that a "peculiar type of righteousness was beginning to manifest itself in Israel, an overstrained righteousness which lost sight of the ever-present sinful imperfections of men and felt strongly inclined to argue with God and to find fault with Him because He was apparently not rewarding those righteous men as they deemed they deserved to be rewarded."

So the two dangers are:

- 1 – A temptation for the religious person – self-righteousness
- 2 – A temptation for the non-religious person – unrighteousness.

Both lead to destruction. And the way out is given in v. 7:18 – live in the fear of God.

We now come to Eccl 7:19-29, wisdom for the wise.

Although written over two millennia ago, Ecclesiastes echoes the questions that we (should) ask ourselves today: “What is the meaning of my life? How should I search for it? Do I know my place in the universe? Do I know who I am? Do I know what I am doing here?”

Solomon is detailing his own spiritual quest. Not having all the answers yet, he still extols the value of wisdom as a necessary part of living rightly. Here, he says that wisdom will make us strong.

Eccl 7:19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

Wisdom governs our thoughts, so the wise man, who puts God at the center, knows how to think rightly about things and thus makes a capable governor.

Wisdom governs our will, so the wise man knows how to make right choices.

Wisdom governs our speech, so the words of the wise man are few but effective.

Wisdom governs our actions, so the wise man knows what to do in every situation.

That, my friend, is strength.

Solomon goes on, now, in vv. 7:21-22, to say don't take too seriously what people may be saying about you. And remember that you've badmouthed others yourself.

Pascal observed: “If all men knew what each said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.”

Perhaps we could learn to take criticism graciously, like the wise man who said: “He didn't insult me at all; in fact, he was talking about another man: the man he thought I was.”

And our own words condemn us, our criticisms of others pointing more towards our own faults than towards anyone else's. Which bolsters v 7:20: “Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”

So let's give others a break; make allowances for them when they misspeak and offer them the same grace that we, ourselves, need so often.

Titus 3:1-2 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

Solomon talks now about the difficulty in finding wisdom, which echoes chapter 28 in Job. He has searched diligently, testing and seeking and searching out. And here, in vv 7:23-24, he admits he's failed. “Who can discover it?”

Solomon's quest may end in failure; he is looking for wisdom that he cannot seem to find. He is unable to explain the purpose of life, or explain why everything matters.

Derek Kidner describes these verses as “the epitaph of every philosopher.”

And in his *Pensées*, Pascal ruminates: “When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me? *Memoria hospitis unius diei prætereuntis.*”

That last sentence translates to the last part of the sentence in chapter 5, verse 15 of the Book of Wisdom:

Wisdom 5:15 For the hope of the wicked is as dust, which is blown away with the wind, and as a thin froth which is dispersed by the storm: and a smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind: and as the remembrance of a guest of one day that passeth by.

And, of course, those who ruminate on Rumi will be familiar with his work “The Tavern” which asks the basic questions:

“All day I think about it, then at night I say it.
Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?
I have no idea.
My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,
And I intend to end up there.

This drunkenness began in some other tavern.
When I get back around to that place,
I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,
I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.
The day is coming when I fly off,
But who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?
Who says words with my mouth?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?
I cannot stop asking.
If I could taste one sip of an answer,
I could break out of this prison for drunks.
I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way.
Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.
I don't plan it.
When I'm outside the saying of it,
I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.”

When we, ourselves, ponder the meaning of our own existence and come up empty-handed, then we ask “What's next?” There are two choices:

- 1 Give up - which leads to despair
- 2 Admit that we don't have all the answers but realize that God does and then wait for whatever wisdom He provides. This is the way of humility and faith – what Calvin called a “learned ignorance.”

Solomon couldn't find wisdom in v 24 but continues looking anyway in v 25. No quitter, he. He was investigating the differences between the wise way and the foolish way to live and

finding his biggest disappointment in other people. Such as the v26 woman. Her heart is a trap. This may have been a real woman that Solomon knew (he knew a few), but the intervening years have been kind to her and she embodies sexual sin (as seen on TV) in today's world. Her hands are the chains of slavery.

Ambrose Bierce – “Oh, that we could fall into a woman's arms without falling into her hands.”

But there is a way out of the trap. The man who pleases God will escape her, just as Joseph did when Potiphar's wife, a cougar in today's terminology, tried it on with him.

What shall we say about Eccl 7:27-28? He found only one righteous man amongst a thousand and no righteous women. Was Solomon being sexist? We have to remember that he was also hard on men in v20 – “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” Even that one good guy out of a thousand was still a sinner.

Solomon was probably also speaking from his experience with his 1000 wives and concubines who came from foreign countries and engaged in pagan rituals. The hearts of these women were traps that led to Solomon's downfall (1 Kings 11:1-8)

Although Solomon evidently never met any godly women, certainly there are many in our circles. Thinking of these women in the church, Martin Luther said “there is [nothing] on earth so lovely as a woman's heart, with God's grace to guide its love.”

Solomon comes to a sad conclusion at the end of Chapter 7:
Eccl 7:29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

This is an indictment of the human race, what Charles Bridges calls “a humbling testimony to the universal and total corruption of the whole race of man.”

There are no exceptions here; we all sin. Sin – the great equalizer.

Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Of this, Mark Twain remarked “Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.”

Fortunately, Ecclesiastes does not stop here; lest we fall short of salvation. Fortunately, the Bible doesn't stop with the Creation and the Fall but goes on to teach redemption by grace. There is the first Adam but there is also the last Adam in the person of Jesus Christ:

1 Cor 15:45 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Although the first Adam failed to remain upright, we can trust in the last Adam for our salvation; he will act as our intercessor, helping us stand firm at the last judgment.

And so we come to Chapter 8, wherein we are instructed to obey the king.

Eccl 8:1-2 Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.
2 I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him.[b]

Chapter 8 teaches us wisdom that we can use when dealing with governments, whether good or evil.

Solomon asks a rhetorical question: Who is really wise and able to explain things? You might think the answer is “No one” after Solomon, himself, has just said that no one can discover wisdom. But in the last part of v1, Solomon says that a person’s face brightens with wisdom. Why would he say that if no one can find wisdom?

There must be some people that have found wisdom. Rather than saying that no one has wisdom, Solomon is saying that wisdom is rare. Few and far between are those who can tackle questions concerning the workings of God.

Some individuals do have the gift of interpretation. Think of Daniel. He matches the description given in the second half of v 1. His face shone and he looked healthy.

Dan 1:15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

Just so, as we pray to our Heavenly Father for increased wisdom, our own inner joy will be seen as radiance.

2 Cor 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Solomon now offers his counsel about worldly authority. “Obey the king’s command.” Of course, the king (or governments) may not rule in a godly way. This is hinted at in v 9, which indicates the abuse of power. Power, as we know, is often used in a destructive manner. “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” –Lord Acton

Solomon’s attitudes towards political authority are described by R. N. Whybray: “on the one hand he counsels obedience and submission to it on the grounds of prudence, while on the other he does not hide the fact that he regards it as brutal and tyrannical.”

So we need to ask ourselves: How can we live in a wise and godly manner under authority?

Solomon says “Obey the king’s command.” Our first duty, then, is obedience. Jesus later said “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Luke 20:25). And Paul says in Romans:

Rom 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

So we are to obey every godly request that the government makes of us. Pay the full measure of your taxes. Register for volunteer service. Obey traffic laws.

Closer to home, though, is our attitude of submission to our elders in the church. Let us be enthusiastic in building up the church under their leadership.

We honor God by our submission to authority.

And there may be times when it is necessary to disobey the government. In a conflict between God and man, we obey the higher authority.

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

Ecc 8:6-7 For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him. 7 For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?

Here again we are reminded of God's timing and the wise person is aware of that. There is a time to submit to authority and a time to rebel against oppression. There is a time to work to save your marriage and a time to leave an abusive or adulterous spouse. There is a time to work hard to make your job situation better and a time to look for greener pastures. Should I go or should I stay.

But how do we know when the right time is? It is hard to know. The troubles and frustrations of life abound. We aren't able to see the future nor can anyone tell us. Not even esteemed prognosticators.

Death, of course, is the biggest unknown. You can build bigger barns (or bigger portfolios), but who knows if you'll be around to enjoy them.

Ecc 8:8 No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

In this verse, in view of the reference to death, Solomon is using the word "spirit" to mean the breath of life.

In time of war, soldiers are in harm's way but cannot quit the battlefield. Their responsibility is to stand and fight, as they continue to do so for this country even as you read this. One of the hardest responsibilities that governments levy on their subjects is to subject them to military service. They are to defend their country; a role that brings them into danger and with that danger comes uncertainty about the future. When our son, David, was a Navy Corpsman, he chose to go greenside, meaning he was attached to the marines and did a couple of tours with them in Iraq. He was in mortal danger, subject to ambushes, suicide bombings, IEDs . . . (all of which he experienced). Kathleen and I did not know the future and it was harrowing.

We, also, are under authority and face an uncertain future. So how shall we live?

The wise way to live is by submitting to the sovereignty of God and entrusting our lives to the authority of Jesus Christ. He is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:30), the King of kings (Rev 19:16), the Savior who died at His appointed time in obedience to the Father (Luke 23:46) and the Lord of eternal life (John 6:68).

"He for death is ready, who living clings to Thee."

Spoiler alert! - I'm going to die.
Worse spoiler alert! - You are going to die.
And . . . we have trouble believing it.

But attending a funeral can bring that fact into sharp focus as it probably did for Solomon. He's been ruminating about the power of worldly authority and God's sovereignty over life and death and now he's just witnessed in v 8:10 the burial of a wicked person. This increased his wisdom.

"The sight of a funeral is a very healthful thing for the soul." - Charles Spurgeon

Why? Because as Columba Stewart said, "Awareness of mortality exerts a unique power to focus the mind and heart on essentials."

Solomon saw the wicked buried and noted how they received praise in the city. This today is normal as well. Nice things are said at funerals. Don't speak ill of the dead. However, v 10 could be translated as the wicked "were forgotten in the city."

This aligns with Prov 10:7 "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot."

And, again, the theme of wicked people prospering while good people suffer comes up. In this life, Solomon tells us that things seem a bit topsy-turvy. So what is the point of being righteous?

Furthermore, the lack of swift justice (v 8:11) encourages the wicked to sin even more. If, as a child, you touch a hot burner on the stove, it hurts and you quickly learn not to do that. But if, as a child, you act out and your parents make excuses for you, then what do you learn except that you can act out even more.

God is very patient with us, slow to anger, but some people use that as an implied consent to sin some more. After all, the final judgment is a lo-o-o-o-ong way off, and indeed, they think that He may not judge them at all. Maybe He will forget.

2 Pet 3:4 They [scoffers] will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."

William Provine of Cornell University expresses the worldview of scoffers: "Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear -- and these are basically Darwin's views. There are no gods, no purposes, and no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That's the end of me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans, either. . . . Since we know that we are not going to live after we die, there is no reward for suffering in this world. You live and you die. "

But Solomon believed that there would be a final tally of rights and wrongs after death; he believed that God would make things right in the end.

Vv 8:12-13 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

The wicked may enjoy prosperity in this life but there are no blessings for them after the grave.

T. M. Moore offers this paraphrase of v 10: "And then they die. The funeral's nice enough: we give the guy his due; his loved ones weep; his friends all say they'll miss him; then we bury him away from sight, and everyone forgets him."

Fortunately, it will go better for those that fear God. The fear of God is what Michael Eaton calls "the awe and holy caution that arises from realization of the greatness of God."

Justice is coming. I don't know when, it's not on my calendar, but it is only a matter of time. In the meantime, Solomon commends the enjoyment of life in 8:15. Despite the sufferings of this life, we can experience genuine joy, for God is near and our day is coming.

Chapter 8 concludes with Solomon again expressing his frustration at the difficulty of understanding wisdom. Samuel Johnson felt similarly when he was working on his dictionary (published in 1755). In the preface, he wrote "I saw that one enquiry only gave occasion to another, that book referred to book, that to search was not always to find, and to find was not always to be informed; and that thus to pursue perfection was . . . to chase the sun."

Ecclesiastes is not a book that raises questions and immediately provides answers. Instead, it is a book of struggles with problems that we all face in our daily lives and by reading it, we learn to trust God even though we don't have the answers. This is how life as a Christian works; it's not just about our final reward but also about who we become along the way.

Have a great week!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:
Thank you, Kevin!!!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
You are welcome, Butch!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:
Thanks, Kevin! So many good thoughts and lessons above.

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:
Whew! That was like an all-star bunch of thoughts. Bobby burns and mark twain and Solomon and Matthew Henry, Martin Luther . I am going to print it out for further perusal. You made so many good points about our society's attitude towards death. I have heard so many moms say they won't take their children to funerals, for fear the children will be scarred.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
When I was 4 years old, I had a tonsilectomy at Letterman Hospital in San Francisco. Soon afterwards, my cousin, also 4 and my good sandbox buddy, had the same operation. Unfortunately she died during the surgery. I remember sitting in a big room with the mourning relatives and looking at Kendy, noticing how waxen and still she seemed. Being curious, I wanted to go over and touch her; I didn't really understand that she had died; death was not in my experience yet. And no, I was not allowed to go touch her or say good-bye, just cautioned to be quiet. I've stayed quiet for decades.

Comment:

Jack Dyer:
Thank you Kevin. I have not heard or read such an enlightening study of Ecclesiastes!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Jack. Of course, I am following a guide and am mixing in my own experiences and thoughts which I hope are flowing into me from the H.S. (when I can shift my ego.)

November 23: Ecclesiastes 9-10 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 47

Poetry Reading for 11/23/17

Ecclesiastes 9-10

Good Morning and Happy Thanksgiving!

Grab a cup of coffee and a steaming haunch of turkey, curl up on the couch and tell the kids to go outside and play while we delve further into the wisdom of Solomon. So far, we know from him that life is a dreary business, it's impossible to know for certain what God is doing and only liars claim to know the meaning of life. People, being human beings after all, are prone to want to understand God and when they, by necessity, fail, they get angry about the personal circumstances of their lives. Why did God do this and why doesn't God do that and when will He answer my prayers? C'mon, God! Tick tock!

But wisdom tells us to humbly accept that we are finite beings with limited capacity and therefore incapable of understanding everything. Francis Bacon warns us not to "draw down or submit the mysteries of God to our reason." Rather we should be more like Paul:

Rom 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

Isaac Watts, in a hymn, wrote "Where reason fails, with all her powers, there faith prevails, and love adores." - from "We Give Immortal Praise"

At the beginning of Chapter 9, we see that Solomon's faith in God continues to prevail. He doesn't conclude that God is absent (Atheism) or that God has wandered off and abandoned us (Deism), or that God has contracted Alzheimer's and doesn't know what He is doing (as described by Thomas Hardy - "the dreaming, dark, dumb Thing that turns the handle of this idle Show.")

Solomon concludes that we all are in God's hands. For us, having the Word, being in God's hands is a wonderful feeling - we gain comfort and assurance. We trust in God to leave our cares, our concerns, our anxieties, our worries, the heavy burdens of our life in this fallen world - all this we can give over to the one who loves us so much that He died on the cross for us.

Solomon, of course, is ignorant of the Cross and is uncertain about what God is doing, saying in v 9:1 that "no one knows whether love or hate awaits them."

Essentially, Solomon says we don't know where we stand before God - whether he loves us (accepts us) or hates us (rejects us).

Rom 9:13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

How can we tell if God favors us? One seemingly reasonable way is to look at our earthly prosperity. If everything is coming up roses for us, then we say "God is Great!" or "God has

answered all my prayers.” We look at prosperous people and think how much God has blessed them.

But Solomon did not fall for that kind of thinking. He saw that God tends to treat everyone more or less the same. Even though some people (righteous) honor God, and other people (wicked) are scoffers, both groups suffer the same fate. Vv 9:2-3.

Matt 5:45 “. . .For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Since there seems to be, on balance, a parity between what happens to the good and the bad, then there just doesn't seem to be any way to tell who has earned God's favor and who has not. Solomon was displeased with this situation and called it evil in v 9:3. Then, continuing on in a bad mood, he says, still in v 3, that human beings are rubbish.

Eccl 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

Well, gee, it all seems so futile, useless and meaningless. We accept that we are in God's hands, but can't tell if He likes us or will scourge us like Job (whom He liked! Go figure.). Now, Solomon is saying how sinful we all are. Time for another Flood? (Except God promised that He wouldn't.)

And then, of course, we die. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. We all die. Solomon keeps resurrecting the topic of death, giving us another memento mori (reminder of death), concluding that it is better to be alive than dead.

This is a switch from Eccl 4:2 in which he said “And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.”

Also a change from Job's thinking in Job 3:11 “Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?”

But living is better than dying according to Solomon. Death brings ignorance, death brings loss (remember: you can't take it with you, there are no U-Hauls attached to hearses), death brings oblivion (over time, no one will remember your name). When we consider losing all the wonderful feelings we have for our loved ones and the little joys we experience (a sunrise, that first cup of coffee, a letter from a friend, the gentle touch of your spouse, . . .) we can find joy in being alive and be reminded of the many blessings He bestows on us daily.

Yet Solomon found little to hope for in living. Sure, it's better than dying but not by much. If life only ends in death, what hope is there at all?

Ecclesiastes, of course, is part of the Bible and we look to the rest of the Bible to find that there is indeed hope because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has gone ahead of us into glory. He has prepared the way for us by sacrificing Himself on the Cross, becoming, without doubt, as dead as any of the dead people that Solomon saw being buried. Jesus was tenderly laid in the tomb, with a heavy stone sealing the entrance but Jesus overcame Death, rolled away the stone and emerged victorious into everlasting life on the third day.

The grave is not our final destination – it is merely a way station. It would be a mistake to get on a train not knowing where you are going and then be unhappily surprised when you get there. Do what you need to do to stay on track. Consult the Scriptures for details.

Solomon now tells us (vv. 9:7-10) that we may as well make the most of our short time on earth, enjoying its many pleasures.

1 Cor 15:32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Solomon tells us this so that we may gain a balanced perspective. Life often is burdensome, thankless and frustrating. But there are times of joy as well. To everything there is a season. A time to go shopping and a time to pay taxes. If we neglect one aspect of life, then we are not living fully.

Solomon believed that all is vanity and also came to believe that there is joy in life. According to Martin Luther, the Solomon of Ecclesiastes "is not urging a life of pleasure and luxury characteristic of those who do not sense this vanity, for that would be putting oil on fire; but he is speaking of godly men, who sense the vexation and troubles of the world. It is their downcast hearts that he wants to encourage."

And we can enjoy ourselves because (v 9:7) "God has already approved what you do." Obviously this is not a blanket endorsement, which would include sinful behavior, but rather that our activities enjoy the blessing of God. The enjoyments of life are not "guilty pleasures" but are godly pleasures.

So what pleasures does Solomon mention? Contentment, comfort, and companionship. Go experience the heartfelt joy of dining with good friends; building relationships and engaging in fellowship. Wear white always (the dress-up clothes of the ancient Near East). Wear perfume – you want to smell good in a hot climate. "Enjoy life with your wife." You and she entered into a covenantal relationship before God.

Note that this last is a specific command to husbands. So married fellas, listen up! The man says to enjoy life with your wife. This means in ALL the rooms of your house. She is (or should be IMHO) your best friend. (This is another good topic for a men's group)

Husbands, try to:

Spend more time together as good friends do, in conversation, going out to dinner or movies or plays. Shopping together. Bible study together. Sit on the porch and hold hands. Share with each other the little things that were interesting to you this day.

Are you a good listener? Or do you listen with your answer running? Sometimes you need to look beyond the spoken words to the feelings underneath. And respond to that. Let her know that you have heard her in a way that opens and deepens the channels of communication.

It is natural that the spark of sexual passion that you felt in your honeymoon days is now often buried underneath the kids' dirty laundry and the unwashed dishes. Who has time for romance anymore with all the after-school activities and PTA meetings? Men – your wife may often seem harried and tired, and playing kitchee-coo with you is a million miles away in her world. So – help her out with the stuff that makes her harried and which makes her feel like she's being pulled in a hundred directions. Go to the grocery store, do the laundry, make breakfast for the kids. And her. Treat her like you did when you were courting her. Stand underneath her bedroom window at midnight and serenade her. OK, don't do that.

In general, try not taking your wife for granted. Value her as a person; let her feel your love for her every day just as you feel the love that Jesus has for us. We are special to Him every single day.

Rom 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We will see more of the way in which love and enjoyment go together in the Song of Songs, coming to a Facebook group near you this Dec. 3.

In the last part of v9, Solomon tells us to enjoy all our toilsome labor under the sun because that is our portion as well. We all have godly work to do and we are called to enjoy it. Also, v10, we are called to do our work to the best of our ability.

The Puritan William Perkins said, “We must take heed of two damnable sins . . . The first is idleness, whereby the duties of our callings . . . are neglected or omitted. The second is slothfulness, whereby they are performed slackly and carelessly.”

The spirit of what Solomon is saying about the pleasures of wine, women, and work is summed up by Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase in *The Message*:

“Seize life! Eat bread with gusto, Drink wine with a robust heart. Oh yes - God takes pleasure in your pleasure! Dress festively every morning. Don't skimp on colors and scarves. Relish life with the spouse you love Each and every day of your precarious life. Each day is God's gift. It's all you get in exchange for the hard work of staying alive. Make the most of each one! Whatever turns up, grab it and do it! And heartily!”

But, of course, we need to be watchful in our pursuit of pleasure lest we fall into spiritual danger. We get distracted by the gifts and ignore the Giver.

The pleasures of food can lead to gluttony (not how much you weigh, but your attitude towards food.) Thus, Phil 3:19 “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

The pleasures of alcohol can (as we sadly are aware) lead to life in a drunken stupor amidst the splinters of a shattered family.

The pleasures of relationship can foster a tendency for a couple to “cocoon”, turning inwards towards each other instead of outwards in service to others.

The pleasures of work lead to a generation of workaholics, living for the money, prestige and status that work brings and avoiding the problems of dealing with their families.

Tim Keller writes, “Sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into ultimate things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God.”

For some, it is tempting to avoid this spiritual danger by denying themselves ANY pleasure. This self-denial is known as asceticism and is conflated by its practitioners with godliness. They live by Col 2:21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”

As in most things, including pleasure, discretion is advised.

1 Cor 10:23 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

What does the Bible say about enjoying pleasure? What it tells us to do is to receive the good things in life with gratitude, returning our thanks to God. To keep our gifts in perspective, it is wise to praise God for all of His gifts.

1 Tim 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

Elizabeth Barrett Browning:
“Earth’s crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

The words “Thank you, Father” should never be far from our lips.

In vv. 9:11-12, Solomon reiterates one of the frustrations of life – the same fate not only befalls “the righteous and the wicked”, as stated in v2, but also the same fate befalls those with special talents as those who do not. Having speed, strength, intellect, knowledge – any human ability - is no guarantee of success in life. Time and chance happen to us all. Tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanoes, cancer do not discriminate between their victims.

We let the words “Everything is in God’s control” pass easily from our lips but our minds balk at the fact that we don’t know what He is doing. So we cannot tell WHEN our hour will come. Solomon uses the examples of fish and birds who unknowingly meet a cruel fate; had they only known what awaited them, they could have avoided it.

We all have an appointed day. It is marked on God’s calendar and we cannot peek at it. God, in His mercy, allows us to know that such a day exists so that we may use our time wisely.

So, if there are no guarantees that our efforts will improve our lot, then why try? Why run at all if being swift is no guarantee of winning? Why bother to go to college if there is no guarantee of a better life? Why not just lapse into fatalism and just say “it is what it is?” Why take the hard road when the easy path leads to the same place?

In vv. 9:13-18, Solomon counsels us to take a different path than fatalism. He commends living wisely by giving an example (probably based on a true event) of an anonymous wise man whose sage advice saved a city from a great king. This event was something that Solomon had seen and it had greatly impressed him.

Similar examples of a person saving a city are found in 2 Sam 20:14-22 (wise woman saves Abel Beth Maakah from Joab), 2 Kings 19 (Sennacherib repulsed because Hezekiah’s prayer was heard by the Lord) and when Archimedes saved Syracuse from the Romans by sinking their ships.

Although the wise man in Solomon’s example was soon forgotten, yet his wisdom proved valuable. In vv. 13-15, wisdom is exemplified and in vv. 16-18, wisdom is prioritized. (This is better than that.) “Wisdom is better than strength,” he says. Brains are better than brawn. If we are wise, we will recognize and heed wisdom when we hear it.

Unfortunately, one bad apple can spoil the bunch and “one sinner destroys much good.” One loud-mouthed fool can spread malicious gossip in a church or on Facebook, damaging reputations that have taken years to build.

“A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” – Mark Twain

So now that we know how wisdom is exemplified and prioritized, HOW can we apply it in our world where “time and chance” happen to us all and life is uncertain at best? First, we give ourselves over to Jesus Christ, becoming a member of His flock, asking for forgiveness for our

sins, being washed in the precious Blood of the Lamb, subjugating our stubborn will to His, and working to the best of our abilities in His vineyards to produce a mighty harvest.

We can then simply ask God for increased wisdom if we want to be wiser.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

And this godly wisdom has come to us primarily in the form of Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

Let us go back to the example that Solomon used about the anonymous wise man who saved the city and see how Jesus illustrates it by His saving work. What do we know about Jesus? He was as poor as anyone, having no home (Luke 9:58), no possessions, totally dependent on God for His physical needs (Phil 4:19) and was wiser than anyone as we know from the things that He did and said. As for all the events of Jesus's earthly existence, all His achievements and miracles, how he healed the sick, raised the dead and fed the people, are they not written in the Scriptures?

By His wisdom, Jesus delivered the lost city of humanity. Satan, with all the forces at his command, the full and mighty powers of Hell, was besieging that city. Jesus, alone, saved that city through an action born of Wisdom and Compassion, an action that to us, in our limited understanding, might seem foolish. He willingly became the sacrifice for us, dying on the Cross and then rising again. He didn't raise huge armies with bigger weapons of war to outflank Satan in the plains of Armageddon but knew that "Wisdom is better than weapons of war." So simple. So effective.

Satan, of course, continues to wage war against humanity by appealing to our fleshly selves, but there is now in place a road to safety; the road that leads to the Cross. We just need to accept His outstretched hand and He will lift us up to that road. That is wisdom.

How else can we apply our wisdom after accepting Christ?

We can be thankful. We will be disappointed in life as we journey through it but let us be thankful for the many blessings God bestows on us every day.

We can be content. I'm never going to be Time's Man of the Year and I've learned to be okay with that. My ship came in but I was at the train station at the time so I've missed my chance to be a bazillionaire. Oh well. Wisdom is content with what God gives us. Or doesn't give us. I remember a story about a widow with only two mites who didn't go around bemoaning her circumstances but chose instead to donate what she had – to people richer than she was. Wow!

We can be prayerful. The Bible is filled with examples of God responding to godly prayer. If you truly need something, then God welcomes your prayerful request. Prayer reminds us that we are submissive to the One in charge; that our earthly goods are gifts from Him. Prayer is an answer to the myriad anxieties and soul-wrenching terrors that lay siege to our wellbeing:

Phil 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

We can learn to be humble. If you notice that your speech is filled with the word “I”, then perhaps it is time for some reflection. “I am a CEO”, “I have a doctorate”, “I own a house”, “I travel the world”, “I have money”, “I have a gardener”, “I own this and that” . . . This all boils down to “I have social status.” Meh. Rather than thinking too highly of ourselves, let us learn to use our God-given talents to do His will. Our gifts flow from Him.

We can be generous. Do we really need to hold on to every last penny that we have? For me, this really is about anxiety – not trusting in God’s providence. I think you will find that people who share without reservation have much and people who share grudgingly or not at all have very little. The balance of generosity vs. securing a comfortable future for ourselves and our families would be a good discussion topic.

2 Cor 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

We can be faithful. If there are no guarantees, if the race doesn’t always go to the swift, and if strength does not always prevail, then we might lose heart and think that nothing we do matters. But wisdom teaches us the opposite – that if our future is so unpredictable, we need to leave the results of what we do in God’s capable hands. We need to do what He has called us to do and trust Him to make use of the results. So, yes, we need to do our best.

We can be hopeful. Wisdom tells us that “time and chance happen to them all,” so the wise person puts their hope in God. What do we know about the future? That we will be secure, comfortable, surrounded by loving family and friends? Maybe. Maybe not. But we do know that Jesus is coming again. That’s not a “maybe.” And He will deliver us from whatever troubles we have.

And so we arrive at Chapter 10, which starts off with a funny odor.

V 10:1 Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Perfume was a precious and expensive commodity (nard) but the whole batch could be tainted into becoming something repugnant by introducing just a small bit of impurity. Solomon makes the point that wisdom is a precious commodity but a bit of folly ruins everything. We see how quickly one bad decision can taint a person’s life.

Derek Kidner says, “It is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness.”

An indiscretion on the part of a beloved public figure (i.e. Bill Cosby) can ruin his image forever.

Godly wisdom doesn’t just happen overnight (for me, anyway). It grows over a lifetime of quiet reflection on one’s personal experiences coupled with the careful exegesis of the Word.

Chapter 10, then, is Solomon’s injunction to avoid folly. It reads a lot like Proverbs, with a seeming hodge-podge of comparisons, proverbs, exhortations and ruminations. But through it all, two ways of living are contrasted – the foolish way and the wise way.

Do we know the difference between wisdom and folly as well as we know the difference between good and evil? Are the choices we face in life more about good and evil or about choosing wisely or otherwise? Actually the latter, right? Most of us don’t wake up wondering whether or not we should steal our neighbor’s stuff. But we might tussle with the issue of lending a goodly sum of money to a troubled relative.

A “fool” isn’t just somebody with a subpar IQ. Rather, it is someone who lacks the proper fear of God and therefore “kicks against the goads.” Thus he wanders off the straight road and gets lost or mired down or falls into the nearest watering hole.

Ps 14:1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.

The fool is differentiated from the wicked. The wicked are deliberately malicious, compliant with and subservient to the Devil, whereas the fool is prone to impulsive disobedience, self-centered arrogance and rash disregard for God.

The fool has no moral compass as stated in v 10:2 – the heart of the wise goes to the right and the heart of the fool goes in the opposite direction. Sort of like what Jonah did at first, going to Joppa rather than heading to Nineveh.

What direction we go in life is dependent on our heart. The heart is the core of our being. Charles Bridge defined the heart as “the center of affection – the seat of knowledge – the source of purpose and emotion – the very soul of the spiritual life.”

Our hearts can incline either to the left or to the right. Leaning upon our own understanding and drives, leaving God out of the picture, we tend to follow our fleshly lusts, putting our heads down into the mud and rooting for truffles. Nobody will be throwing pearls before us.

But, contrariwise, if we put our faith in God, then the beloved Psalm 23 tells us:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

HE leads me.

HIS is the path of wisdom.

HIS is the right path.

The fool, however, has ignored the signs and taken the wrong road. V 10:3 tells us that he is seen by all to be stupid. Like most fools, he seems to be the only one that doesn’t realize he is a fool. We’ve met these folks before – the ones that boast loudly about their great intelligence – how they are the ones in the know and patiently, with a patronizing smile, tell everyone else, “Here, let me explain this in terms that even you can understand. . .”

Prov 13:16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly.

We do best to ask for and lean on God’s wisdom rather than stubbornly go in our own direction. It’s a well-known joke in our society that men don’t know how to ask for directions, but when it comes to our lives, we need to be serious about our need for guidance.

Vv 10:4-7 now give us some practical advice for dealing with foolish people. For we WILL meet them. We may work with them, go to school with them, go bowling with them, go drinking with them . . .um . . . scratch that one, or even marry one. I’ve even heard some people opine that there are fools in government! (gasp!)

Mark Twain: "Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself."

This quote resonates with what Ecclesiastes says about political leadership. Vv 10:5-7. Folly sits in high positions of authority. How can we know when the leadership inclines to the left? Whenever society celebrates immorality, perpetrates wrongful violence, punishes righteousness, denies God or persecutes God's people.

So do we respond by rioting in the streets, breaking shop windows and setting police cars on fire? Do we shout down opposition speakers with taunts, slogans and jeers? Do we meet their boasting with our own rodomontade? Do we bomb clinics? Do we forget that God is in charge and take matters into our own hands? No. V 10:4 tells us to stay the course. Solomon recommends a gentle response that turns away wrath. This is the Biblical way of dealing with fools, not by acting as they do but by emulating the example of Jesus Christ.

One commentator says "The anger of a ruler must be soothed with a calm forbearance that neither panics in fear nor deserts in bitterness."

Ordinarily, the best response to anger, then, is to stay, not run away, and to remain calm instead of flaring up in anger yourself. Because, as Derek Kidner explains, "it is better to have only one angry person than to have two!"

The angry people in our lives could be bosses, teachers, relatives, or spouses. It is best, then, in dealing with these people, not to be intimidated or to shout back at them but to maintain a calm demeanor.

The angry people in Peter's life suggested that he stop preaching the gospel. But he recommended a response of quiet gentleness.

He told Christians to submit to the governing authorities, EVEN WHEN they were persecuting the church because by performing good works, the suffering church would "put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." (1 Peter 2:13-15)

He told servants to respect their masters, EVEN IF they were unjust, for it is a gracious thing to endure injustice. (1 Peter 2:18-19).

He told wives to submit to their husbands, EVEN IF they were unbelievers, so that by their pure and respectful conduct, they might lead their husbands to Christ. (1 Peter 3:1-2). I must commend my wife, Kathleen, for her tremendous help to me by her shining example in gentling me towards Christ.

And if we still say, "Why should I put up with this? I'm so outta here!" then we remember what Peter also said:

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Jesus is our example: Angry rulers rose against him, angry priests and teachers of the law wanted to kill him but He didn't run away or call down fire from Heaven. No, Jesus continued His mission, calmly doing the work that He had been called to do.

1 Peter 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

In Vv. 10:8-9, Solomon tells us that fools often manage to hurt themselves by their foolish behavior. The world can be a dangerous place and wise people proceed with caution. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But, while it seems on the surface to talk about occupational hazards, which can happen to anybody, this whole section is contrasting foolish behavior with wise behavior. So when Solomon says in v 10:8, "Whoever digs a pit may fall into it," think rather of someone digging a hole to harm another.

Psalm 35:7 For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life.
[

Similarly in Psalm 7:

Psalm 7:14-16 Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.

15 He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made.

16 His mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends.

Similarly, someone who heedlessly breaks boundaries and pushes through limits (i.e. breaking the law) may be bitten. Charles Bridges says "Evil shall fall upon the heads of its own authors."

Solomon now uses vv 10:10-11 to show a wiser way of living by using the analogies of a blacksmith and a snake-charmer. V 10:10 describes wisdom as the sharpened blade of an axe. It takes a lot of effort to cut through a tree root with a dull axe and it tires the user out quickly. This is what foolish people do – flail away at things in life without achieving much progress. Were they to grow in wisdom, then they could mend those relationships or grow in their community and have a closer walk with the Lord. How do we sharpen our blade? By taking advantage of training opportunities when they arise, opting for a prudent courtship instead of a whirlwind romance, gathering the materials you need before beginning a project, accepting help instead of stubbornly going it alone.

While v 10 seems to argue in favor of wisely taking time to prepare, v 11 seems to argue that acting too slowly is a danger. It is vitally important that the snake charmer gets down to business and charm the snake before it bites. Foolish delay can bite you.

Taken together, vv10 and 11 show that we sometimes need to take time to make solid preparations and sometimes we need to strike while the iron is hot. All to say that in every situation, we need to depend on God's wisdom.

"The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is the knowledge of our own ignorance." – Charles Spurgeon

Solomon has been contrasting the difference between wisdom and folly. In the final verses of Chapter 10, he will teach us:

Vv. 12-14,20 The wise employment of words

Vv. 16-17 The wise exercise of leadership

Vv. 18-19 The wise expenditure of effort

"Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt." – Abraham Lincoln

Prov 17:28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Ecc 5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

When we speak, the mouth reveals the contents of our hearts, whether it be folly or wisdom. If our listeners hear wisdom, then we are deemed to be wise. (V 10:12). Our reputation is built up. However, translating v 12 as “The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor” allows us to see a different aspect. The word “favor” is really the Hebrew word for “grace” (hen), favor that is undeserved. A wise person’s words show this kind of grace to others – their words are a blessing to the ones listening. So, really, v 12 isn’t so much about what WE get (our built-up reputation) but what we are able to give to OTHERS, namely, the gracious love of God.

Have you ever been in a conversation where you can’t wait to talk about your own accomplishments and achievements or to focus attention on yourself? Mostly, our conversations are attempts to BELONG to some social group or other. We desperately need to feel included; part of the In-Crowd. Part of “Those In the Know.” We want to feel important. Too often, people will use their words to tear others down in order to build themselves up. We often use our words to get something that we want. We tell jokes to build a sense of camaraderie, or use flattery to get a girl to accept a date request, or spin a web of deceit and misrepresentation in order to win favor during a job interview or to get elected. “Oh! What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive . . .”

Do we use our words wisely as instruments of grace? Do we use our wise words to build others up and edify them? Mutual edification, then, is the way of wisdom.

Are you prone to prattle, given to gossip, largely loquacious or even vexatiously verbose? Consider the following ways to use your words more wisely. The wise person:

- Offers verbal praise and thanksgiving to God. By doing so, it reminds us of who we are. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, then speaking or singing worshipfully is the path to wisdom.
- Uses more words of encouragement than criticism. Nobody likes to be chastened for their faults. Rather, use words of encouragement to guide them along the road to positive change.
- Speaks “the truth with his neighbor” (Eph 4:25) He speaks what needs to be said in a loving manner. Sometimes that may mean speaking hard truths when they need to be spoken, what the Bible calls “a word in season.” (Prov 15:23)
- Speaks with gentleness, never in unrighteous anger. I close down when somebody is yelling at me. You too? Yelling is eminently unhelpful and unproductive. It is wiser to wait until emotions can be brought under control and then our words can offer healing. Prov 15:28 The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.
- Knows how and when to say “I’m sorry” and “Please forgive me.” And mean it. Sometimes we are in the position of needing to defend ourselves but the wise person, rather than be defensive, is content to give a quiet answer and then let God bring vindication in His good time. A wise person does not lash out in anger or make cutting remarks but remembers Prov 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”
- Speaks words of love and affection. Although “actions speak louder than words,” a wise husband makes his wife secure by verbally affirming his love. Sometimes, wisdom is as simple as saying “I love you.”

But, as we know, many people speak foolish words. We all do from time to time.

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

I don’t seem to be a perfect man and I sometimes wonder about you.

Verse 10:12 tells us that the words of a fool are self-destructive in that the lips of a fool consume him. Words can be destructive in many ways, but one example that Solomon gives is in v. 20. He says don't denigrate people in authority, even in your thoughts, even if you think you are alone, because the walls have ears and those words will come back to bite you. Most nations at that time were absolute monarchies and I'm sure the kings did not take kindly to criticism any more than our leaders do.

Of course, cursing political leaders is not an activity that is condoned for Christians – it is wrong – and that message needs to be reinforced during political election cycles.

Exodus 22:28 “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.” Except on Facebook? No.

And consider v 10:13: The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

There is a progression here, a downward spiral. The fool starts out with snide remarks and descends into “evil madness,” which smacks of moral turpitude and mental instability. Do you know people who make hurtful remarks, then defend themselves by saying “Oh, I was just joking.” How long will it be before those remarks turn into outright abuse? Do you know people who sometimes tell “little white lies?” and tee-hee when you call them out for it? How long before they begin to lose the ability to know the difference between truth and falsehood?

If we are wise, we will guard our speech carefully. If foolish talk comes from our children, then we need to offer correction. In his book “War of Words”, Paul Tripp offers the following questions for self-examination:

“Listen to the talk that goes on in your home. How much of it is impatient and unkind? How often are words spoken out of selfishness and personal desire? How easily do outbursts of anger occur? How often do we bring up past wrongs? How do we fail to communicate hope? How do we fail to protect? How often do our words carry threats that we have “had it” and are about to quit? Stop and listen, and you will see how much we need to hold our talk to this standard of love, and how often the truth we profess to speak has been distorted by our sin. It is time for many of us to confess that we have not known the way of love. Our words have hindered, not helped, what the Lord is seeking to do.”

V 10:14 tells us that the words of a fool are presumptuous; they often bray loudly like a donkey, making boastful claims about what they know and what they will do but are unable or unwilling to put their money where their mouth is. They talk the talk but cannot walk the walk.

Plato once said to me, “Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.”

The end of v 14 reminds us that neither the wise nor the foolish know the future. But fools often talk at length about the future – either global disasters or how they're going to strike it rich or how the current government is leading the country to ruin . . . I don't mean to sound all judgment, I've done this myself and will probably do it again. Hopefully I can catch myself and be reminded of what James said:

James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

Solomon, in v10:16, addresses the need for wisdom in government – something that he was personally familiar with. V16 can read “Woe to the land whose king was a servant . . .” or “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child . . .” This is a picture of a kingdom run by somebody incompetent to do the job. There ARE exceptions (Josiah who took the reins at age 8). Of course, one does not need to be a child to be incompetent to rule. (Rehoboam, age 41 2 Chron 12:13) Soon, what Solomon had built up became divided.

What about these princes who feast in the morning? These folks are supposed to be running things wisely but instead, these dissolutes start the mornings – every morning – reveling in debauchery and drunkenness that would make the participants at a college frat kegger blush.

V 17 reminds us that feasting is not the problem – there is a time and purpose for that. It brings the governing body together for sustenance and communication.

The problem is with people who use their lofty position for personal pleasure.

Isa 5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening as wine inflames them!

Prov 23:20 Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,

Drunkenness fills us with wine but empties us of the Holy Spirit.

Eph 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

As for ourselves, we do best in our eating and drinking to avoid excess, exercising control by the power of the Holy Spirit. So put down that Fat Tire and those Ho-Hos.

Rom 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

V 10:18 reminds us that it is not good to sit around feasting all the time. (Personal sigh.) We need to get off the sofa, turn off the TV and get some work done.

Well, if feasting to excess is a foolish enterprise, what about fasting? Fasting is not necessarily just about giving up food, but can be putting aside a favorite activity, like watching television, or going to restaurants, or watching movies, so that the Kingdom of God can move to the head of the queue in your life. Matthew seems to think that fasting should be a regular part of the Christian life.

Matt 6:16-18 “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

I don't think that fasting is part of the Church of Christ regimen, but certainly it is not discouraged. What do you think?

Solomon moves on to the wise expenditure of effort. In v10:15, he says, “The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.”

Wise people work efficiently; they are the go-to people when you need something done quickly and correctly. The fool gets worn out by his work because he isn't necessarily doing his job. He is the one who spends time at work surfing the internet, or walking around talking to the young women. And getting paid for it. There is a dishonesty about that which, added to the knowledge that he hasn't got much to show for the time he has been at work, causes a weariness of the soul. There are guilt feelings associated with slacking off; not only that, but the realization that all your work still needs to get done can be debilitating. Oh well, stop for a drink on the way home; that will help.

If that is the fool's mode of living, then he may never have learned the value of hard work. He's lost his way and doesn't even know how to get to the big city, although there are signposts all over the place.

Derek Kidner says, "So the picture begins to emerge of a man who makes things needlessly difficult for himself by his stupidity."

Such stupidity will prevent him from getting very far in this life and will cause him to stumble into the pit on his way to God's New Jerusalem.

V 10:18, then shows the culmination of laziness. The rafters sag, the roof leaks, mice and vermin run amok, relationships fade, opportunities are lost, self-esteem diminishes, and hope fades. Dry rot of the soul has set in. Too much to take in today, though. After all, tomorrow IS another day.

Solomon is telling us that sloth is a deadly sin. A soul that is too lazy to seek its own salvation is in real danger of being lost. And a society which increasingly shows the attitude of entitlement rather than sacrifice and responsibility is a society headed away from the Cross.

V 10:19 "Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything."

Living a wise life does not mean foregoing the pleasures of life. You don't need to live as some dour archimandrite in order to please God. Gatherings of family and friends, basket dinners with the brethren, get-togethers with good friends - all are conducive to building healthy relationships and putting into practice the dictum "Love one another." As far as money goes, certainly if we have enough money, we can afford our food and our wine plus the table to eat it on. Charles Bridges states that someone who has money lacks "nothing that this world can give. It supplies a thousand advantages - not only the necessities, but the conveniences, indulgences, and embellishments of life."

But money can also do something else, which is to advance the kingdom of God by supporting the ministry of your church. A wise person toils under the sun not only to support himself and his family, but to honor God by investing in His kingdom.

Have a great week and if you haven't ever done so, try a turkey and cranberry sandwich!

Comment:

Jack Dyer:

Kevin, I appreciate your thoughts. However, it must be my error reading it on my phone, but your message was cut off before you were finished (?).

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Jack - I looked just now and it all seems to be there. If there is still a problem, I'd be happy to email it. Just send me a message. Thanks!

Jack Dyer:

I was able to finish reading in your reply. Thanks

Charles Fry:

There is something quirky about this post. I couldn't read it on the iPhone, had a glitch on the iPad too, but was able to read it all. I don't know why, a technical glitch.

Kathleen Munger Crittenden:

This may be because when he originally posted there was a glitch and it disappeared, so he re-posted.

Butch O'Neal:

I just finished reading it's entirety on my laptop.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

It's probably too long.

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:

I would qualify your posts as long. But never, as too long! :)

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Just came in from splitting logs all afternoon and read 10:9. Thankful I was never endangered. :)

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Well don't push your luck! Don't quarry any stones on your property! And why are you splitting logs on Thanksgiving? Did you run out of toothpicks?

Marc Hermon:

Celebrating on Saturday

Kevin Crittenden:

Ah, one of those antiestablishment types.

Comment:

Denise Waits:

This has been one of my favorite posts for Ecclesiastes. I've made a few screenshots for self-reminders. 😊

November 30: Ecclesiastes 11-12 (Kevin Crittenden)

Week 48
Poetry Reading for 11/30/17
Ecclesiastes 11-12

Hello Again!

Today, we finish Ecclesiastes and come to the conclusion of the matter. Solomon has been wrestling with many of life's issues to find meaning in our existence and has graciously shared his findings with us.

He starts out in Chapter 11 by telling us to hedge our bets. Diversify. Spread our risk. Don't put all our eggs into one basket.

11:2 Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

11:1 Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.

On the face of it, this doesn't make much sense. If I throw some bread into the nearest creek, it'll get soggy and sink or the ducks and fish will go after it. After many days, the crawdads will be all over it and why would I want to find it again anyway? Yuck! What gives, Solomon?

But, of course, this addresses something real in our lives. It addresses the investments we make, perhaps in others. Have you ever wondered whether your prayers for a friend really get answered? Or whether the money you give to a homeless person really makes a positive difference in their lives? Or whether your sharing of the gospel with an uncommitted friend or stranger will someday help lead them to Christ?

Sometimes, after a while (long or short) we actually may see that we have made a positive difference in someone's life – we see God at work in that person. We have found the bread that we cast.

So we continue to cast our bread on the water, not knowing how God will use our efforts. We may never know. But we continue to pray, continue to serve, continue to hope.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Luke 6:38 "give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

V 11:2 tells us to invest in many ventures, 7 or even 8 because we don't know what disaster may befall the land.

Taken together, vv 11:1-2 may indicate the prudence of engaging in international trade, sending your products (grain) out and then waiting (many days) for fine goods from other countries to arrive. Don't be like the servant who took the one talent entrusted to him by his master and buried it in the ground. (Matt 25:14-30). Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Solomon is telling us to be prudent in our spiritual lives. When we invest our time, our money, our talents in God's kingdom, our investments are never wasted.

Michael Eaton tells us: "The first proverb [in verse one] crystallizes the essence of the Preacher's appeal: it is a call to a venture of faith. The allusion is to the element of trust in much ancient business. Ships on commercial voyages might be long delayed before any profit resulted. Yet one's goods had to be committed to them. Solomon's fleet, which brought back 'gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks' (1 Kings 10:22) sailed once in three years. Similarly, the Preacher has called his readers to take life as from the hand of God, and to enjoy it despite its trials and perplexities. Such a life contains within it the elements of trust and adventure (Cast), demands total commitment (for your bread is used in the sense of 'goods', 'livelihood', as in Deut. 8:3; Prov. 31:14), and has a forward look to it (you will find), a reward which requires patience (after many days)."

V 11:2 reminds us not to put all our eggs into one basket. Diversify your investments, just as you diversify your stock portfolio. This protects against loss because, while some investments may go badly, others may go very well. This is prudent because "you do not know what disaster may come upon the land."

And this pertains to spiritual investments as well; to do 7 or even 8 things to spread the gospel and wait for God's ship to come in.

Solomon now talks about the weather – as do most farmers – because it is important. As we learned earlier, there is a time to plant and a time to uproot. But the one who watches the wind will not plant and the one that looks at those dark clouds in the sky will not reap. These people are risk averse – to the point that they end up doing nothing. Have you ever known people who always want to wait for the "right moment" before embarking on some project? Nothing gets done. The farmer stands out in his field, observing the heavy clouds. Over in the corner of his land, a tree has fallen down, maybe from the wind. The farmer can't do anything about the rain or the tree – those are the result of natural causes.

He does, however, have control over whether he will plant his seed or harvest his crops. But he is just standing there, observing. Waiting until conditions are better and, until then, he does no work. Just like the homeowner who lets his rafters sag and his roof leak.

What things are we putting off, either because something bad might happen or because we tend to procrastinate? How can we reach our goals if we engage in this kind of thinking? I don't want to go to the doctor because she might tell me something bad or chide me about my weight. I don't want to take that class which will help me in my job because I might want to go on vacation and the class is at an inconvenient time anyway.

And yes, the farmer could plant his seed and then see it shrivel and die in a drought. But the chances of a harvest are better if you sow than if you never plant. Time and chance happen to us all.

But we are called to step out in faith – not necessarily in our own efforts – but faith that God will use our efforts to His glory.

In v. 11:5, Solomon reminds us of the paucity of our knowledge as compared to God. Wind is used as an analogy for the mysterious purposes of God. We don't know which way the wind will blow. Jesus used the analogy of the wind when he taught Nicodemus about the mystery of regeneration:

John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Again, Solomon uses the word “wind” to describe the human spirit and wonders (v5) what divine mysteries occur in the development of a human baby. Birth was mysterious then and is mysterious now. Who can explain how the soul animates flesh and blood?

Psalms 139:14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Solomon uses the example of the development of a baby as an example of ALL the works that God does in His Creation – only He has understanding.

Job 5:9 who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number:

These unsearchable, marvelous things are used as a call to faithful obedience in v6. We may not know what God is doing but we act in the faith that He knows what He is about.

Solomon now moves on, starting in v 11:7, to the aging process. We, as a society (and we are not alone), spend untold wealth on attempting to forestall the aging process. It hasn't worked for me, so far, and I've spent upwards of \$.50 on it. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, Americans alone spent over \$16B in 2016 on cosmetic surgery. God made us in His image but I guess we feel we can do better.

In her book “Drinking Problems at the Fountain of Youth,” journalist Beth Teitell writes “I know women who worked hard to get into good colleges, worked their connections to land enviable jobs, married well, produced children who could pose for Ralph Lauren ads, vacation on the right islands with the right beach towels and the right heiresses — they have fractional ownerships in Cessnas, for heaven's sake — and yet if they have furrows and hints of upper-lip lines and puppet mouth when those around them are smoother than freshly ironed Pratesi linens, what's it all worth? In a word, nothing.”

The fear of not being seen as young is rampant. We have set up a cult of youth and worship shamelessly in its temples. Around 1965, the saying “Don't trust anyone over 30” became popular. 30 was old. Young people today look horizontally to their own age group for answers to life's questions and no longer respect their elders. After all, what wisdom could you possibly hope to get from somebody that has trouble understanding a smartphone?

We fear, don't we, that when we lose our youth and beauty, then we will be discarded, no longer loved. “Will you still love me when I'm no longer young and beautiful?” – Lyric from song by Lana Del Rey. “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?” – Beatles. Alienation and loneliness, the great fears of the aging population.

Solomon, though, teaches us to enjoy life at whatever age we happen to be. But he doesn't hide the troubles that come with growing older. He starts out in v 11:7 by exhorting us to revel in the goodness of life, even though life is vanity. Those of us who are of a certain age, know full well that light is sweet, that many of life's little moments are sweet. We remember. And long life has given us many opportunities to build up sweet memories.

However (v8), “But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many.” We've had good times and hard times – there is no reason to think that our future will be any different. We will have good times and we also have an appointment with death. This is our reality. But we are not to mope around the house, saddened by our impending mortality. Rather, we let our light shine while we can and brighten the corner where we are instead of shuffling through

life, griping about our problems like some elderly people do. Greet each new day as described in Psalms 118:24 “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”

In v 11:9, Solomon addresses young people. While the elderly are to praise God for the length of their days, the young’uns are to praise God for the strength of their youth. To the young, the world is their oyster. The road ahead seems limitless and opportunity beckons. Dreams can come true with so many choices opening up!

However, Solomon cautions against youth as being a license to do whatever you please. There ARE consequences to living in the moment. Sure, (v9) “Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things, God will bring you into judgment.” Live, enjoy His Creation, find gladness in your senses but do it in a God-Fearing way.

That “judgment” is THE Judgment talked about in Romans 2:16: “on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

So live responsibly. Celebrate your youth but be mindful of Paul’s admonition in 2 Tim 2:22 - “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

To wrap up Chapter 11, Solomon tells us to rid ourselves of anxiety and troubles because youth and vigor are meaningless. Inasmuch as each of us is unique, the things that vex us are unique. But whatever the situation, we are to take care to avoid discouragement from our souls and protect our physical selves. Live prudently in order to maintain optimal mental and physical health. And, guys especially, that means going to the doctor instead of trying to “tough it out.”

Easy for him to say. HOW do we banish anxiety from our hearts?

We refuse to feel sorry for ourselves.

We stop dwelling on our troubles and focus instead on counting our blessings.

We stop holding everything in and trying to appear “normal.” We open up to our trusted family and friends. I include church family – those who can see things through the clarifying lens of the Word.

We go to God in prayer and ask Him for help.

Phil 4:6-7 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Obviously, we won’t stay young forever, even if you bathe daily, like Bathsheba, in Oil of Olay. “Youth and vigor are meaningless.” Youth is like a puff of smoke, evanescent, elusive, ephemeral. So, Solomon advises us to live free from care as long as we can.

“We worship you, Lord Christ,
Our Savior and our King,
To you our youth and strength
Adoringly we bring:
So fill our hearts, that all may view
Your life in us, and turn to you.”
- Margaret Clarkson – We Come, O Christ, To You

Chapter 12 – The Conclusion of the Matter

12:1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";

Solomon is exhorting young people to put God first in their lives. How easy it is to forget God when your body is youthful and the infirmities of age have not yet introduced themselves. The concept of mortality hasn't hit yet and the wonderful, beautiful, daily blessings from God are easily taken for granted. Those of us who are a little further down the road can understand, I think, these passages a little better.

The evil days have indeed drawn nearer; our senses fade, and our desire for wine, women and song gives way to a desire for regularity.

"What dreames may come, When we haue shuffle'd off this mortall coile, Must giue vs pawse."
- Shakespeare

But we can remember that EVERY day is a gift from God. And we also can remember that we need to walk in His ways, even if we need to use a cane, because, not only is He our Creator, but our Judge. Solomon is no longer just looking at things under the sun where everything by itself is meaningless but is now including That which gives meaning to everything – God.

To "Remember your Creator" doesn't mean just thinking about Him on Sundays or dropping a card to Him at Christmas, but living our lives 24/7 for Him, with Him and in Him.

Derek Kidner calls this remembrance "no perfunctory or purely mental act; it is to drop our pretense of self-sufficiency and commit ourselves to Him."

Ecclesiastes 12:2-5 is a beautiful poem that captures the essence of growing old as we pass through the winter of our lives. The storm clouds gather more and more frequently as we age. It's just one problem after another with little time to recover in between.

About these verses, Derek Kidner says that this scene is: "somber enough to bring home to us not only the fading of physical and mental powers but the more general desolations of old age. There are many lights that are liable then to be withdrawn, besides those of the senses and faculties as, one by one, old friends are taken, familiar customs change, and long-held hopes now have to be abandoned."

The analogy is made between an elderly person and a house that is crumbling with decay. In v 12:3, the "keepers of the house" are a person's arms, beginning to tremble. The "strong men" are his legs, becoming stooped with age. "The grinders" are what are left of a person's teeth. The "windows" are a person's eyes – dimmed by cataracts or macular degeneration or just plain age. The "doors" are a person's ears that no longer hear as well as they used to. The "songs" are the vocal cords that no longer can sing and the blossoms of an almond tree symbolize the hair turning white with age.

What shall I do with this absurdity -

O heart, O troubled heart - this caricature,

Decrepit age that has been tied to me

As to a dog's tail?

William Butler Yeats lamenting his aging body

Vv 12:4-5 remind us of something that elderly people already know too well: they have trouble sleeping and arise at dawn with the first birdsong. They grow more anxious and afraid along with their growing frailty. Desire, including sexual desire, fades away.

Remember what Barzillai's response was to King David when invited to the royal palace in Jerusalem?

2 Sam 19:35 I am this day eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or what he drinks? Can I still listen to the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?

Death is coming. It is described in vv. 12:5-7 and we do well to remember our Creator while we still are young.

The image of the silver cord being severed evokes the Greek mythological Fates, the three sister deities, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Clotho spun the thread of life, Lachesis drew lots and determined how long the thread of life would be, and Atropos used her shears to sever the thread.

The shattered pitcher and broken wheel indicate the end of life for something that has been useful but no longer is. And our bodies return to the dust of the ground while our spirit returns to God.

Psalms 22:15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

In v 12:8, Solomon reminds us that everything is fleeting, and will soon be forgotten. All your accomplishments, your pleasures, your sufferings, the work you did, the wealth and status you accumulated. All gone. Ultimately, death makes everything meaningless if it wasn't meaningless already.

It reminds me of a news story:

JACKSONVILLE, FL- "Aladdin," a greyhound that races at the Jacksonville Dogtrack in Jacksonville, Florida, was bitterly disappointed when he finally caught the rabbit he's been chasing all these years and discovered it was mechanical.

"Boy do I feel stupid," said the greyhound. "I feel like such a fool. I've completely wasted my life chasing around this... mechanical rabbit."

Aladdin had been running at the Jacksonville track for many years and chasing various mechanical animals along the way. The notion that they all may have been fake was a huge blow to him and the other dogs. Many of them paused to ponder the meanings of their lives, and wondered what the future would be like with no animals to chase.

"All my life I've been chasing this rabbit around thinking someday I'd be able to catch it and have a...good meal," Aladdin said. "I became obsessed with it. I admit it. It was unhealthy, but that rabbit represented something to me. And now, to find out it wasn't even a real rabbit after all, well that's just devastating."

In Conclusion:

Bono of U2 wrote: "Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books. It's a book about a character who wants to find out why he's alive, why he was created. He tries knowledge. He tries wealth. He tries experience. He tries everything. You hurry to the end of the book to find out why, and it says, 'Remember your Creator.' In a way, it's such a letdown. Yet it isn't."

Herman Melville, the author of Moby Dick, called Ecclesiastes "the truest of all books."

Thomas Wolfe described it as "the highest flower of poetry, eloquence and truth" and "the greatest single piece of writing I have known."

While Chapter 12 paints a rather somber portrait of the aging process, we elderly pensioners can find encouragement there. God doesn't stop loving us when we reach retirement age. God loves His people, through the trials of this life, into old age and beyond to the grave.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

We live in the faith that we have in His remembrance of us rather than making our salvation contingent on our remembrance of Him.

Psalms 71:17-18 O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. 18 So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.

We live in the security that Jesus will remember us ALL our days and that he will raise us up to eternal life.

John 6:39-40 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

2 Cor 5:1 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Must we someday become useless to the Lord? No. The Psalmist says:

Psalms 92:12-15 The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13 They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,
15 to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Philip Ryken writes "If there is no God, then there is no Judge. If there is no Judge, then there will be no Final Judgment. If there is no Final Judgment, there is no ultimate meaning to life. Nothing matters."

This path of reasoning is used by the character, Quentin, in "After the Fall", by Arthur Miller. Quentin says,:

"You know . . . more and more I see that for many years I looked at life like a case at law. It was a series of proofs. When you are young you prove how brave you are, or smart; then, what a good lover; then, a good father; finally, how wise, or powerful, or what-the-hell-ever. But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption. That one moved not in a dry circle but on an upward path toward some elevation, where . . . God knows what . . . I would be justified, or even condemned. A verdict, anyway."

I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day—and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was this endless argument with oneself—this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench. Which, of course, is another way of saying—despair.”

And indeed, Solomon found despair as well when he considered the sum of human existence without God.

The renowned film director, Ingmar Bergman, explored the idea of a world confronted with God’s desertion in his Trilogy of Faith, consisting of: Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light, and The Silence. The films are rather chilling and dystopian.

Solomon has used a technique called “inclusio” in saying the exact same thing in 12:8 as in 1:2. However, let us not think that he is merely repeating himself. What has changed? We, the readers, have changed. We have a grander perspective on life now and so these words are more meaningful.

What have we learned?

Work is vanity (1:3), we gain nothing for our toil under the sun, human wisdom is vanity; it just increases our sorrow and vexation (1:18), it makes no difference if we are wise or foolish because we all die anyway (2:15-16), pleasure is vanity, wine, women, song, gardens, vineyards, precious metals - all for nought. (2:11). Power is vanity – no one comforts the oppressed (4:1), money is vanity – it can vanish in an instant (5:11-14) and money cannot satisfy our souls (5:10). And then there is death – the last vanity. Most of us will undergo the losses of aging (12:1) and then we return to dust (3:20)

Now Solomon isn’t completely being Debbie Downer here, because – in the face of all this – he has encouraged us to enjoy what we can (2:24), paying attention to the times for this and that (3:1-8). He has encouraged us to rejoice in the prosperity that God has bestowed (5:19, 7:14) and to enjoy our lives with our loved ones (9:9).

Solomon has shown us what a world without God is like. “Look upon my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

In verse 12:9, Ecclesiastes changes tone and Solomon now speaks of himself in the 3rd person as the Teacher. We’ve heard WHAT Solomon said, and now we learn HOW (v 9-10) he said it. Over the course of his life, he would have heard many wise sayings from many countries but he distilled only the most important of these into his book. This would, of course, include the Book of Proverbs.

1 Kings 4:32 He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

Solomon wrote with clarity about the things that he had evaluated so that we could understand the message of what he wrote. But he also wrote with literary artistry, to find “words of delight” (12:10) and with intellectual integrity he uprightly wrote words of truth.

So why did Solomon write the Book of Ecclesiastes? HE took the time and trouble to figure all this stuff out. Why wouldn’t he think that others should also expend their energies on discovering the truth for themselves? The reason is given in verse 11:

V 12:11 The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.

A “goad” is a sharp stick used by a farmer to get his stubborn oxen, children or other beasts to move in a desired direction. The words of Ecclesiastes (indeed, the entire Bible), then, act as goads to our consciences so that we are turned away from falling into sin and kept on the right spiritual path.

George Thaumaturgos said, “the mind is roused and spurred by the instructions of wise people just as much as the body is by an ox-goad being applied.”

Solomon also compares the sayings with “firmly embedded nails,” which imparts the idea of permanence. These sayings are true for all time.

The sayings, the words of the wise, are given by one Shepherd. Solomon didn’t say that the sayings and the wise words were given by the Teacher. He is making a distinction between himself and the Greatest Teacher, our Guiding Shepherd, God Almighty.

Thus, we see that Ecclesiastes is the Word of God. As such, we can not only admire them and ponder their wisdom but we must also submit to their authority.

2 Peter 1:21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Ecclesiastes, then, is God’s goad for steering his herd (us) in the paths of righteousness.

There is a warning given in v 12. We need to listen to the voice of our Shepherd, and not give credence to that which is not of Him. There are SO many books – more than we could ever read, let alone study. Don’t let your Bible be just another book on your library shelf, gathering dust along with the 400 other books you have. Are you on a spiritual quest? Be like the child you once were – you asked questions because you wanted answers, not to argue about them or insist on your own answers. The Bible provides the spiritual answers you are looking for. Surrender to His will and stop being the kind of person mentioned in 2 Tim 3:7, “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.”

Do not settle for anything less than you find in the Bible nor should you demand more than what you find there.

Rev 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

We are at the end now. So how should we respond to everything that has been written? Verses 13 and 14 tell us the eschatological conclusion: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The best we can do in this life is to come before the one true God in worship and obedience. Because we know there will someday be a Judgment, and that God will bring every deed into that judgment, then, truly, everything matters.

And what matters most is what you decide to do about Jesus Christ. He is knocking at your door, even now. Will you answer?

Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Soli Deo gloria!

Comment:

Jack Dyer:

Very good conclusion to this lifelong questioning!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden Thank you, Jack. I've been really blessed and edified by being a reader leader.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

Good stuff, the themes and the exposition. My 2 cents on v6, I think we're still in metaphor of the aging body, the silvr cord and golden bowl, consider a hanging lamp, so perhaps we're thinking of the spinal cord and tanned cranium, a fall that fatally injures; the pitcher and wheel references to organ failure, perhaps heart and kidneys.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Good thoughts! I SO look forward to ageing.

Charles Fry:

Yesterday the surgeon who removed my gall bladder made reference to me being "of a certain age." 🙄🙄

Kevin Crittenden Oh yes, I've been that too. Many years ago, too! 😊

Comment:

Butch O'Neal Thank you, Kevin!!!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Butch! It's been a good year!

Butch O'Neal:

Yes, Kevin, it certainly has! I have learned much from this study this year. We all are extremely blessed! Wonder what will be next? 😊

Comment:

LuAnn Woody Thank you for your time and effort in gathering all this information and weaving it together. It was really helpful and truly edifying.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden You are so welcome! I certainly have been edified!

Comment:

Patty Cluney Thompson:
Amen!

Comment:

Marc Hermon

So out of curiosity I did a word count on this Week 48 Poetry post. It came out to be 620 words longer than the book of Ecclesiastes! I've enjoyed BOTH books by BOTH of these wise men. May your silver cord be long, Kevin Crittenden.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

This is what happens when you get up at 5 am and have coffee. Please remember that I lean heavily on sources for guidance in what I write. I'm rather surprised that this week's submission is longer than the whole book. Maybe if I take the commercials out.

Marc Hermon:

The commercials are my favorite part!!! I've been waiting all year to hear your thoughts on the Song of Solomon!!! 😊

Kevin Crittenden Hah! I should have started with THAT one, then.

Charles Fry I didn't do a word count, but I thought John Morris probably set the record with the post for Zechariah 9-14. ;D

Comment:

Ginger Hermon

Thanks, Kevin Crittenden! Another great lesson in the books!

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman Excellent. Appreciate all of your work. Very edifying.

Seven Bible Studies 2017

Poetry

December 7: Song of Solomon 1-2 (Kevin Crittenden)

SONG OF SOLOMON

Week 49

Poetry Reading for 12/07/17

Song of Solomon 1-2. Alternative reading, Song of Songs 1-2.

INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to the reading of Song of Solomon! So please turn to page 358 in the grey songbook.

In my vast experience, (and by “vast”, I mean from here to my front door), this book isn’t taught very often in church. Is this because there isn’t much to be gleaned from it? Let’s see.

For my comments, I am leaning on the wisdom in the book by Douglas Sean O’Donnell, entitled “The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy.”

Genesis chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve, as well as the planting of the garden in the east, in Eden. Certainly, there is an account of the trees of the garden, good to eat (except one!), and the wild animals and birds. All these things were good. We will see that Songs also has a wealth of imagery related to gardens and animals. Thus, we might say that Songs is a poetic reimagining of Genesis chapter 2.

Our reading seems to have two names, either “Song of Solomon” or “Song of Songs.” The very first verse says something about this:

Song 1:1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

Solomon wrote this, (although some would argue that this is not certain, nor is the earth round), and, just as the Holy of Holies describes the Most Holy Place, then the Song of Songs is the best of all songs.

This book, on the face of it, is a paean to human sexual love. So why was it included in the biblical canon?

The characters are a man, a woman, and a group of women friends, referred to as the daughters of Jerusalem, probably the bridesmaids. The Song doesn’t explicitly say whether this is a married couple or if they are just about to be married. However, it should never be thought that this is a license for premarital sex, which is proscribed as sin by the Bible.

1 Cor 7:1-2 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own WIFE and each woman her own HUSBAND.

How do we know that this couple hasn't been married for 30 years? Yeah, right.

The topic of human sexuality is rarely broached in polite conversation at dinner parties in our culture:

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Vanderbilt, is that a new sachet of myrrh cradled between your fawnlike breasts?"

No, we tend to avoid the subject altogether, even to the point of finding it difficult to explain the facts of life to our children.

I'll share that my mother never had this talk with me. As it must to all men, puberty came and I experienced that change with bafflement, bewilderment and fear. Nor was there ever any conversation about the morality of sexuality. So, since sex was treated as a taboo subject in my family, I took on the assumption that it must be a shameful activity; after all, it IS what caused my father to discard us.

Anyway, if sexuality is an uncomfortable topic for you, as it is for many, then please remember that it is a God-given blessing to be enjoyed WITHIN the covenant of marriage. God isn't uncomfortable with sex so let's be cognizant of the reasons that we seem to be.

Acts 8:30 "... Understandest Thou What Thou Readest?"

This was Philip's question to the Ethiopian eunuch. The man replied "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

This book, Song of Songs, like Isaiah, can also be difficult to interpret. The ninth-century Jewish rabbi, Saadia, likened it to "a lock for which the key had been lost." The nineteenth-century German Lutheran Hebraist Franz Delitzsch wrote, "The Song is the most obscure book of the Old Testament. Whatever principle of interpretation one may adopt, there always remains a number of inexplicable passages."

Fortunately, you have me, a retired aerospace engineer and card-carrying introvert, to unlock its ancient secrets.

We will proceed by using four guideposts:

- 1 – This is a song
- 2 – This is a song about human love set in the context of marriage
- 3 – This song is found in the Bible
- 4 – This song was written to give us wisdom.

Guidepost 1 – This is a song

Verse 1 identifies this as the Song of Solomon, which differentiates it from epistles, prophecies, laws, revelations or dunning notices from my many creditors. Thus it is like a hymn at church, written to be sung, perhaps during the seven-days-long marriage festival by professional singers. So we are talking here about celebration – most likely public – of the wedding union.

How do we know the marriage celebration lasted seven days?

Gen 29:26-27 Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the WEEK of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." -The celebration took 7 days.

Judges 14:12 And Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can tell me what it is, within the SEVEN days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothes.

Since this is a song, it wasn't really meant to be subject to Biblical exegesis for the purposes of classroom teaching any more than the song "Rock of Ages". It was meant to be sung. Joyfully! At weddings! (By the way, this is called an epithalamium)

This is poetry set to music and yet our purpose is doggedly to extract and scrutinize every last pericope from this Book. Of course, we won't be doing that but maybe we can hit some highlights.

As I tell my ESL students, an enhanced vocabulary enables one to write expressively – much as having a multitude of colors at one's disposal allows one to paint expressively.

Poetry is word-play, often using alliteration to add dimension to its purpose.

We remember Dumaine's remark in Act IV:Scene 3 of Shakespeare's play Love's Labour's Lost:

On a day, alack the day!
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air:

How much more richness and sensual pleasure is in those words and the image they conjure up as opposed to something mundane and prosaic such as:

I saw some girl playing outside. She was ok looking, I guess.

Song of Songs asks us to indulge our senses – all of them. When you read it . . . or rather, when you partake of it . . . go slowly, . . . as you would to seduce a lover. Take time to smell the sweet fragrance of exotic perfumes wafting through the air, feel the yielding, verdant and luxurious bed in the richly appointed chambers of the king, sample the sparkling wine, noting the confluence of flavor notes blending into a harmonious and sapid symphony in the crystal goblets, let the rose-red apples and raisins bursting with sun-ripened flavor kiss your taste buds, hear the pleasant cooing of the pure white doves in their courtship dance, see the strength and virility of the graceful gazelles bounding over the hills, lose yourself in the refulgence of her eyes . . . The verbiage in the Song of Songs is saturated in bodily sensuality, which, of course, is a staple of good marital intimacy.

Guidepost 2 – This is a song about human love set in the context of marriage

On the back cover of a commentary on the Song of Songs by Tom Gledhill, we read:
"At first reading, the Song of Songs appears to be an unabashed celebration of the deeply rooted urges of physical attraction, mutual love and sexual consummation between a man and a woman.

Tom Gledhill maintains that the Song of Songs is in fact just that--a literary, poetic exploration of human love that strongly affirms loyalty, beauty and sexuality in all their variety."

But is that all there is? If so, why is it included in the Bible?

A skim through this book might leave you with the impression that this is erotic poetry set within the ethical limits of the marriage bed. But the consensus over the last 1600 years of both Jewish and Christian interpreters is that this is really about divine love. It sings of God's love for Israel and Christ's love for the Church.

The reason for this consensus is that it was presupposed that human sexual love was an inappropriate topic for Scripture. So writers and commentators from Origen of Alexandria to Charles Spurgeon of London, medieval mystics to American Puritans have heavily allegorized the Song to avoid a carnal interpretation.

For instance, it was supposed that the sachet of myrrh that lies between the bride's breasts in Song 1:13 symbolized "Christ in the soul of the believer, who lies between the great commands to love God and one's neighbor." (See *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. and ed. by Richard A. Norris, Jr.)

If we, like them, adopt the attitude that sexuality is the antithesis of spirituality, that praying is sacred and kissing is profane, we lose our witness to the world which then asks in horror, "You mean your religion has nothing good to say about sex, a basic human drive?" And we watch as the door slams shut behind them.

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then we also throw out John 1:1-14 where the Word became flesh.

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then we also throw out the tenet of a bodily resurrection (1 Cor 6:12-20; 15)

If we reject the flesh as unworthy of Scripture, then what are we to make of the promise of a new heaven and new earth (2 Peter 3:13)?

Gen 1:27-28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Sexuality was a good gift from God for Adam and Eve. Before the Fall, they were encouraged to be fruitful and multiply, as had the living creatures before them. Yes, I believe that there was sex in Eden.

Gen 2:23-25 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Note that Adam and Eve were married in the sight of God. She is his WIFE. He is her HUSBAND. As an aside (aka rabbit hole), you may wonder if possibly there were children before Cain and Abel, children before the Fall. I'm assuming that the living creatures were busy multiplying before the Fall. But Gen 3:23 says that the LORD banished HIM from the garden. (And presumably his wife.) Also, no kids are mentioned before Cain, but things aren't always presented in chronological order.

Let us not be afraid of the sexuality expressed in the Song; rather, let it guide us to see that the earth is filled with the beauty of Heaven, that the union of man and woman is amazing:

Prov 30:18-19 Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand:

19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.

Let the Song guide us to see that sex is not just a necessary duty for the purpose of having children but an affirmation of the beauty, chastity, and sacredness of human love.

Guidepost 3 – This song is found in the Bible

Now, lest we throw the baby out with the bath water, we need to understand that the Song DOES showcase God's love for us and our love for Him. This is Hebrew poetry and all Hebrew literature from that era was religious. The imagery in the Song has ties to the rest of the Old Testament. It is saturated with Hebrew names, places, poetic devices and was written by Solomon – a Hebrew. His identity sets the Song into a historical and theological context.

Thus, the Song – which is a song about human love set in the context of marriage that is found in the Bible – must be read in its canonical context. In reading the Song's positive examples of a godly marriage, we catch a glimpse of the alternative, the horror of Israel's unfaithfulness as outlined in the prophets.

Isa 62:5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The relationship is good at first; Israel was as white as snow, but over a short time she drifted into promiscuity and adultery. (Hosea, Ezekiel 16:7,8, Jeremiah 2:2, 19, 20, Isaiah 54:5-8)

And, of course, we need to read Songs with Jesus in mind, the one whom John the Baptist calls "the bridegroom" (John 3:29, Matthew 9:14,15) and whom Paul calls our "one husband" (2 Cor 11:2), the one whose kingdom and consummation is like a wedding feast (Matt 22:2; Rev 19:7)

Douglas O'Donnell gives a helpful illustration:

"If you were to read C. S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia" and did not know that Lewis was a Christian and uses Christian symbolism and parts of the plot of the Bible, then you might never see Aslan, who dies and rises and rules, as a Christ-figure. You might just think he is a lion who talks, a neat character in a nice children's tale. But those who know something about the author and his intentions see more of what he wanted his readers to see: the story beneath the story. The story of Jesus opens our eyes to the subtle details of those Narnian adventures. Similarly, knowing the story of Jesus opens our eyes to the story of the Song. The love celebrated here has as its source and ultimate illustration Jesus Christ; the loyalty, beauty, and intimacy of human love depicted in this Song points to 'that Love that undergirds all of reality and in whose Presence alone all longing can be satisfied.'"

Guidepost 4 – This song was written to give us wisdom

The Song of Songs is grouped with Wisdom Literature in the Bible, certainly because the writer is identified as Solomon, who brought us the wisdom of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Certainly it fits in, then, with those books as well as the Book of Job.

Solomon wrote rather extensively; 1 Kings 4:32 tells us that he wrote 1,005 songs.

At what age did Solomon write this? The medieval Jewish scholar thought that Solomon wrote this song in his old age as an act of contrition. He had, by then, a long history of ungodly behavior including idolatry and polygamy, which separated him from God. (1 King 1-11). He wrote the Song with an attitude of contrition, saying "I'm passing on to you my experience of failure. Don't do as I did but rather as this Song says."

I feel for him. Certainly, I've made mistakes in my life (hanging the toilet paper improperly) and it behooves me to pass those mistakes on to my kids so they can avoid the things that I did. Solomon was wise enough still to overcome his shame and write about his misdeeds in the interest of edifying his children and us.

There is also in the Song, a WISDOM ADMONITION that runs several times throughout, namely:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.

And also a WISDOM ADMISSION: My beloved is mine, and I am his.

These two refrains are used by Solomon to pass on wisdom to the two groups of adults that form his audience: the married and the unmarried. The primary focus is on the unmarried – the “daughters of Jerusalem” who are of marriageable age, whose bodies are mature enough for sex, who are experiencing feelings of lust but are still unmarried.

And what is the wisdom offered to these unmarried daughters? They are admonished to Just Say No, wait, and remain virgins until marriage. Wait for marriage despite what their bodies are urging, wait for marriage despite what their boyfriends are hoping for, wait for marriage despite what our society allows or even encourages.

But we are more sophisticated now and we have ways of preventing pregnancy and we lived through the Free Love generation (Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll, All You Need is Love), and besides, everybody else is doing it. As a culture, we've outgrown the dour and joyless lessons of the musty old Bible with its emphasis on celibacy before marriage. I remember as a graduate student, walking along, inwardly cringing as I listened to the conversation of two guys behind me. They were expressing amazement and rather making fun of a friend of theirs (a guy) who was still a virgin at age 21.

Note that this admonition is not delivered to the young women by a stern rabbi or a worried parent. No, it is delivered by the newlywed – the bride, a former daughter of Jerusalem herself. This wisdom is delivered to the young women by one of their peers. This is part of Solomon's wisdom – he knew that in his time, as well as our time, that our young adultettes are more likely to heed the advice of one of their own.

So we begin to see that, while Proverbs was a book written for boys, admonishing them to choose wisely whom they marry, Song of Songs is a book written for girls with the message “uncompromised purity now; unquenchable passion then.”

Both genders, before they are married, need to go take a cold shower. But not together. Advice from Dr. Solomon.

The wisdom for married couples is rated at least PG. The second refrain “My beloved is mine, and I am his” is for them. The two become one in absolute intimacy. And not only when you are newlyweds. Maintaining intimacy and expressing passion throughout a marriage is another good discussion topic for a men's or women's group. Or a mixed group. Remember, God isn't saying that passion is only for the young or the good-looking.

Titus 2:3-4 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,

In Songs, however, the young bride is passing on wisdom to the older married women who have possibly forgotten how to love their husbands. It asks, Is your marriage bed cold?

In Songs is the wisdom of increased intimacy that reflects the intimacy of Christ's love for the church, that causes people to sit up and take notice of the gospel, to ask How can I be a part of this intimacy and What must I do to be saved?

If you think that this is just flowery, feel-good Christological verbiage, then let me explain that over the years, I've been a witness to the bonds between the congregants at several churches. I saw an intimacy, a closeness, a welcoming joy that awoke the feeling within me to want to be a part of that. How could I be a part of that? I had to ask the question, What must I do to be saved?

And finally, Dear Brethren, eight pages of notes later, we arrive at the beginning of the book:

CHAPTERS 1, 2

In verse 1:1, as we've mentioned, we are told the name of the book and given the identity of the author. So far, so good. We can happily read this Bible verse to our young children.

But then, without even bringing us flowers or buying us a nice dinner, Solomon plunges us into Eros and whisks us away to the bedchambers by verse 4. Typical man, all action and no talk.

We don't really study Song of Songs around the littles, do we? Verse 1:2 can be translated as "Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses." How do you explain the juxtaposition of alcohol and sex in the Bible to kids when you're doing everything as a parent to warn them against such things? "Someday, you'll understand but for right now, just do as I tell you." For further clarification, read the book "Parenting Without Guilt." That book hasn't been written yet, though. (Actually, I'm wrong. I just checked Amazon and there IS a book by that title. I certainly did not write it.)

Anyway, the plunge into Eros is so startling that first-century Jewish rabbis warned the young men of their congregations not to read the Song until they turned thirty.

We are not introduced to the characters in this love story. How did they meet, who are they, are they even married? And this omission is intentional because Solomon wants the TONE of their love to be the focus. We'll find out a bit more about the lovers as the Song unfolds.

The Song starts out with a woman talking; the character is merely identified as SHE. SHE is the main speaker throughout the Song. (Women talk more than men.) By leaving the identity of the couple vague, then they can represent every woman and man who have fallen in love, whether brown or black or white, they're all precious in His sight.

Her words say something about her character. SHE isn't timid or passive or shy. SHE looks forward eagerly to the passions of the wedding night. (As we will see, SHE knows what to expect because she has been instructed by her mother.)

SHE says (1:2), ". . .for your love is more delightful than wine." SHE uses wine to connote pleasure, not drunkenness, as is used elsewhere in the Bible.

Ps 104:15 and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.

We remember that Jesus turned water into the finest wine, showing the great joy that only He can bring into this life and we remember His great sacrifice by partaking of the unleavened loaf and the fruit of the vine.

In v 1:3, SHE approves of the perfumes HE is wearing. You have to remember that they lived in a hot climate, temperatures might be in the high 80s, and men often worked outside. With animals. A man, coming in from working in the fields, drenched in sweat and covered in dust and ragweed pollen, probably doesn't evoke thoughts of the bedroom in his wife in today's world and I'm sure it didn't back then either. So our ancient lover cleaned up as best he could and used perfume (they didn't have Axe back then) to mask his natural odor.

SHE is also attracted by the "perfume" of her lover's name. In that time, your name represented your character. This should be true in today's world as well. Very few parents name their kid Adolph today.

1 Sam 25:25 Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.

Ruth 4:14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!"

Matt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

We also know from Acts 4 that there is no other name than Jesus under Heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.

Our young swain's physical persona, as well as his reputation, win the day and gain the maiden's love, so she implores him to take her away with him. Not to a restaurant or to the movies but to his bedchamber. This is their wedding day and she is ready for the denouement. But she doesn't drag him into the bedroom, she respects the gender roles and waits for him to take the lead.

Did you notice that in the beginning of verse 1:2, she talks of him in the third person but quickly switches to the second? This is a common device in Hebrew literature with the effect of enhancing the intimacy of the scene. She goes from "him" to "your" and then to "you." "Let us hurry." The two have come together to become an item – "us."

But, in the last part of v 1:4, she doesn't say "You take me . . ." she reverts back to 3rd person. "Let the king bring me . . ." She thinks of her lover as HER king and uses a phrase to show how greatly she thinks of him.

And now that the couple has disappeared into the honeymoon suite, where we will leave them alone, it's time for the choir to sing. And the daughters of Jerusalem do, voicing their approval of the timing for sexual intimacy – on the wedding night.

This is all very well and nice but how does peeking into the intimate lives of this ancient couple inform our own lives?

We see four applications.

Application 1/4 – Desire is not demonic

Sexual lust is not of the devil. Sure, it is a useful tool in his arsenal but sexual intimacy is God-given, natural and good when used as directed.

What did God think when he saw His Creation including human beings with their sexual drives?

Gen 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The sexual drive, itself, is NOT sinful. Without it, we could not be fruitful and multiply. But we live in a fallen world and so are subject to distortions and misapplications of our God-given gifts:

1 Cor 7:9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Cor 7:37 But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

Being still creatures bound by the flesh, we need to keep a wary eye out lest immorality creep into our lives as it has for so many. Paul knew how difficult it is when lust obscures reason and we can't think straight anymore. He warned against the works of the flesh.

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

So just say NO to fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex after marriage with someone not your spouse), homosexuality (sex with a person of the same gender), bestiality (sex with an animal), pederasty (sex between a man and a boy) and whatever else is out there.

Glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6:20) by following His rules and receive His gift of desire with thanksgiving.

1 Tim 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

Application 2/4 – Character and chemistry both matter when it comes to Love

So why does this woman love this guy? Because he's a bad boy? The captain of the football team? He's just so cool? His daddy has deep pockets? Because the other girls want him?

No. She loves him first because of his name, his character. He has a good reputation; his name is like a perfume to her and her friends respect him as well. They're not talking among themselves saying, "Oh, she could have done so much better!"

She loves him secondly because they have chemistry between them. He loves her and she delights in that. He's probably been whispering sweet georgics in her delicate, shell-like ears. This won't be the last time that we see this chemistry.

Ladies, don't be dazzled by wealth into marrying the wrong man. Don't overlook a shallow character by becoming obsessed with physical beauty. You are NOT going to be able to "fix" him; he won't change just to "please" you. Don't be misled by the popular slogan, "Love conquers all."

What you should do, then, is look instead for a man who is ALREADY of a godly character: a man who is “understanding” (1 Pet 3:7), “not . . . harsh” (Col 3:19), sacrificially loving like Christ (Eph 5:25, 28) and able to lead and nourish you in your faith (Eph 5:23, 26-29).

Hmm. Where should you look for such a man? It’s not like they’re on Aisle 12 at Wal-Mart.

Meanwhile, young men should stop loitering around Aisle 12 and look for a woman who ALREADY has a godly character: a woman who has a submissive spirit (Col 3:18, Eph 5:22, 24, 1 Pet 3:1, 6), is pure in conduct (1 Pet 3:2) and values the internal “ unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” more than external beauty (1 Pet 3:3,4).

My wife took a huge risk in marrying me; I’ve got more issues than National Geographic, yet God has seen fit to bless our marriage and for that I am truly thankful.

Application 3/4 – That first flame need not fizzle out

Do you remember your wedding night? The tears, the locked bathroom door, the pleading, cajoling and patient coaxing until you finally unlocked the door and came out trembling into your new wife’s arms? You probably didn’t spend the evening watching TV, reading books or posting on social media. You remember what you were doing and it was new, exciting, thrilling! Even on the second night!

But the years begin to fly by, the children come and the energy goes, the schedules become hectic, couples begin to take each other for granted, and, of course, our bodies relentlessly age. A sense of bodily shame creeps into our intimate relationships; we become self-conscious and shut down sexually. The white-hot flame of new erotic passion morphs into sporadic hum-drumness. Some people miss that spark of excitement, so seek out new partners. They have affairs. They view pornography. Some men, achieving the dazzling heights of social success, feel entitled to a new, hot trophy wife, not much older than their children. One man I heard about reasoned that God wanted him to be happy so would condone him having an affair. Utter folly.

Douglas O’Donnell meets one-on-one with the men in his church. He will ask the married men:

Do you love your wife? He has yet to have a man fold his arms and say “No.” They all say “yes”, the “yes” of commitment, the “yes” that means he doesn’t want to divorce her and that he wants to remain faithful to her. So far so good.

Then he asks:

Do you like your wife? Those with healthy marriages will often laugh and say “Of course I like my wife very much.” Those men who are struggling in the marriage will tend to open up and share. “Recently, things haven’t been going so well” and go on from there.

And, thinking about what we are reading in Songs, a third question would be:

Do you desire your wife? How many wives would want to be a fly on the wall and see how their husbands answer THIS question?

What can you do if your answer is no?

First, PRAY. Ask God to soften your hearts.

Here is a poem by Steve Scafidi called “Prayer for a Marriage” in which he talks about he and his wife kissing on their wedding day and prays that desire will not fade.

When we are old one night and the moon
arcs over the house like an antique
China saucer and the teacup sun
follows somewhere far behind
I hope the stars deepen to a shine
so bright you could read by it
if you liked and the sadness
we will have known go away
for awhile – in this hour or two
before sleep – and that we kiss
standing in the kitchen not fighting
gravity so much as embodying
its sweet force, and I hope we kiss
like we do today knowing so much
good is said in this primitive tongue
from the wild first surprising ones
to the lower dizzy ten thousand
infinitely slower ones—and I hope
while we stand there in the kitchen
making tea and kissing, the whistle
of the teapot wakes the neighbors.

Secondly, REMEMBER. Remember what kindled that flame to begin with. Share these memories together. Laugh about them while cuddling. Feel the joy of being near to each other. Let it be time to arouse and awaken love.

Remember when you felt this way: “You are the finest, loveliest, tenderest, and most beautiful person I have ever known—and even that is an understatement.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald

Thirdly, UNDERSTAND. Understand that desire follows love. This is what we see in Songs. SHE wants to be kissed because HE loves her. Men and women are different. Foreplay for a man is having the woman show up. We’re simple creatures that way. Foreplay for a woman (as many women haven’t told me) probably involves having the man show his love for her by sacrificing for her – helping with the kids, the housework, being willing to share the load of daily living. Once she knows he loves her, desire follows.

In his book “Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God”, C. J. Mahaney advises us men: “Before you touch her body, touch her heart and mind.” Let’s spend some time getting to know our wives again as we did when we were courting them.

Application 4/4 – Desiring Christ

Just as our desire for our spouses is an indicator of marital health, so too our desire for Christ is an indicator of our spiritual health. There is a connection between the relationship of a man and his wife and Christ and the Church. Paul uses that connection in Ephesians 5. We see this connection again in Hebrews 1:8,9 where the author quotes Psalm 45:6,7 which is a wedding song. In Scripture, when marriage is mentioned, think of Christ.

Paul desired to be with Christ:

Phil 1:23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

And Bernard of Clairvaux expressed himself thusly: “Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast; but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest.”

Now, if you're like the man who doesn't desire his wife except you're struggling to desire the Bridegroom, then you can follow the three same steps in reverse order.

UNDERSTAND that desire follows love. As His bride, we lose our desire for Christ and we are to blame. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend and Jesus laid down His life for friends and enemies alike. The barrier here to intimacy is sin.

John 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

But what do we do? Keep His commandments? Obey His will? Or do we have a dalliance with every sinful desire that beckons from the alleyway?

REMEMBER, which is what we do when we partake of the Lord's Supper. We remember His sacrifice for us. If you wish to desire Christ more, remember His person and His works.

Psalms 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

PRAY because only God can create desire for God. John Piper starts out his book "When I Don't Desire God" with these words: "I hope you will not be offended if I open this book by praying for you. There is a reason. When all is said and done, only God can create joy in God."

If you've wandered away from your love, then pray for its return.

Rev 2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Pray 1 Pet 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

Pray Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Pray one of the great hymns of faith or perhaps this Keith Green chorus:

My eyes are dry
My faith is old
My heart is hard
My prayers are cold
And I know how I ought to be
Alive to you and dead to me

But what can be done
For an old heart like mine
Soften it up
With oil and wine

The oil is you
Your spirit of love
Please wash me anew
With the wine of your blood.

Getting back to the text of Songs, (you may remember that we are looking at Song of Songs), and have gotten all the way to verse 5 of Chapter 1, where SHE describes herself. I could call her Lola, but Songs doesn't give her a name so I won't either.

Most of us have a self-perception that is less than ideal (unless you are a movie star) and SHE describes herself as very dark. Later (v 2:1) she describes herself as a Rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. What does she mean by these descriptions?

Normally, brothers are protective of their sister but these half-brothers (her “mother’s sons”) evidently are angry at her and make her work outside in the hot sun tending their vineyards. Isaiah 5:2 details some of the work she probably had to do. So she is darker than usual. Oh, and Songs 8:8-9 tell us that the brothers did protect her virtue so at least they were of some use.

Anyway, she says she is as dark as the tents of Kedar – made of tanned Bedouin hides. Perhaps she would fit right in on the California beaches. (The West coast has the sunshine And the girls all get so tanned). Not a bad thing, right? But in that time and culture, darker skin meant working class and lighter skin meant upper crust. So she’s a girl from the wrong side of the tracks.

And she says “my own vineyard I have not kept”, which is a reference to her own body. She hasn’t had the time or wherewithal to use mascara, eyeliner, lipstick, blush, blenders, hair extensions, highlights, glitter and whatever other Myst’ries that men don’t know about. Her fingernails and toenails probably weren’t even manicured and painted! How could any man love that?

Contrast this to Esther who probably didn’t have to do pick and shovel work in the broiling sun. Esther 2:12 Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—

SHE then compares herself to a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. She calls herself “lovely” so she knows she would clean up nicely but lilies are pretty common wildflowers in the countryside so she doesn’t see herself as anything special to write home about. She’s just more or less common.

This is how SHE sees herself.

Now, how does HE see her? To her usage of the common lily metaphor, he retorts with one of his own in v 2:2 “Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women.” He says, “Yup. Line up the winsome young ladies as you will, you are the best-looking of the bunch.” This is the point at which she demurely lowers her gaze and lets drop her hankie embroidered with her phone number on the ground in front of him. He’s doing well, but in v 1:9, overcome with the passion of his unrequited love, he declares “I liken you, my darling, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariot horses.”

Crash go the chariots?

He might have done better to compare her to a summer’s day than to something that you can scratch along the withers. Even Amos didn’t make that mistake; using, instead, such similes to make a different point:

Amos 4:1 Listen to this, you fat cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria. You make it hard for the poor.

“I liken you, my darling, to a fat cow of Bashan”????? No.

But HE and SHE like the description. The horse is a beautiful animal and it is HER beauty that is being compared. It should be noted that placing a mare in front of stallions pulling chariots would cause chaos, so this was a well-known battle tactic.

HE goes on to describe the beauty of her jewelry, being sure to keep his observations above the neck. HE is captivated by her natural beauty, enhanced by her earrings and necklaces.

Duane Garrett says “The only actual visual similarity between the bride and the horse is that they both are ‘adorned in splendid ornamentation.’”

The mares for Pharaoh’s royal chariot, as depicted in Egyptian art, wore elaborate headdresses lined with jewelry. SHE is probably dressed for her wedding and so wears elaborate jewelry. SHE is his black beauty and he’s doing well to even be able to speak coherently in her presence.

HE has given her three compliments:

SHE is a lily among thorns.

SHE is a black beauty, magnificent in her loveliness.

SHE has those eyes, which HE compares to doves in v 1:15.

Eyes are very special and they are an important part of a woman’s beauty. By gazing into a person’s eyes, you can get an impression of the person as a whole.

Matt 6:22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,

By comparing her eyes to doves, HE is showcasing her innocence. Jesus also connects innocence with doves:

Matt 10:16 Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

In v 1:7, SHE asks “Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?” This question shows her attitude of innocence; she’s not going to be seen, even in broad daylight, going out to him and be thought of as some kind of prostitute, a veiled woman.

Gen 38:14 she took off her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.

Even though she is urgently wanting to be by his side – v 1:7a “Tell me, you whom I love”, v 2:5b “for I am faint with love”, - she maintains her honor by her behavior. So no, she’s not going to chase after him while he’s tending the flocks or hound him at the office with incessant phone calls or texts.

Her behavior is impeccable with no hint of impropriety. Her actions in v 1:7 are voiced in v 2:7 “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.”

I suppose we could go off on a tangent about the way many young women dress these days which certainly DOES stir up and arouse “love.” But the wielding and misuse of sexual power is a topic for a different day. And I’m assuming that the way some young men dress these

days may stir something up but what that is I have no idea. Pity? Ridicule? Whatever it is, it isn't as grotesque as old, fat guys in Speedos on the beach.

So what can we learn?

Men, compliment your wives. Let her know that you appreciate her hard work and also, wouldn't it be nice to let her know that you find her beautiful? She needs to know that you would choose and marry her all over again. Think about it. What DO you still find beautiful about her? Spouses often begin to take each other for granted and we stop looking. When you were first dating, I'll bet you were looking quite a bit at your future wife. Go back and do that.

If you're a man whose grown cold towards your wife and can't find anything praiseworthy about her, then you've already grown accustomed to the icy chill of the marriage bed. Make an effort to turn this around – it's not too late – and begin to thaw the ice between you. Praise will get you back to the “banquet hall” (v 2:4) where love dwells, where there are a multitude of intoxicating kisses of the mouth. (v 1:2). If you are feeling body shame and fears about the loss of performance, then, for the love of Christ, share this with your soulmate; go together to seek medical help.

Wives, what can you learn? Men need to be complimented and appreciated too. SHE calls her beloved a king (1:4, 12), a sachet of myrrh (1:13), a cluster of henna blossoms (1:14), and an apple tree (v 2:3) among the trees of the forest. SHE and HE do a kind of call and response. HE says “You are beautiful” (1:8, 15a, 15b) and SHE says back, “You are beautiful” (1:16). HE says “Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women” and SHE echoes back “Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men.” Note: just because she likens him to an apple does not mean it is wise to compliment your husband by calling him a “Fruitcake.”

In v 2:3-6, SHE is describing intimacy but done in a modest way, focusing on the emotional side rather than on the physical side. She feels safe and protected in his arms, lying on OUR bed (1:16), and delighted to be in the comfort of his shadow (2:3). Her angry brothers made her work in the sun without shade but this man provides what she needs and what she longs for.

If you're a woman who no longer feels protected or loved by your husband; a man who no longer satisfies what you need or long for, then what can you do? Seek comfort in the arms of another man? Divorce? Live in cold isolation with, essentially, a roommate that you don't much care for? Same advice as for the men. Begin to thaw that ice.

Mutual respect and admiration is necessary to stoke that furnace of passion. We are to speak the truth in love, not only in the church but also in our marriage.

Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

What we are NOT to do, is speak in a manner that tears others down.

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Rather, we are to heed the advice in Eph 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

How do you speak to your spouse?

Do you say to your wife, "Honey, you need to lose a few pounds," as if it would be some kind of miraculous revelation to her; as if she didn't already know that she is not as lithe as she once was? As if you had the same body yourself as when you got married?

Do you say to your husband, "I get so tired of talking to you when you never listen!" How is he supposed to respond to that? "Oh, I had no idea. I'll give you my undivided attention right now."

Go from judgmental and critical statements to expressions of shared needs and encouragements.

What could the husband say instead of "Honey, you need to lose a few pounds?" Perhaps he could just keep his mouth shut and learn to appreciate that change happens over the years; that the woman he fell in love with is right in front of him still; that the nature of intimacy changes from daily performances of the horizontal tango to simple hand-holding and walks together. She already feels critical of herself so a better approach is to praise her for those things that endear her to him, that make her feel loved unconditionally.

What could the wife say to her husband instead of "I get so tired of talking to you when you never listen!" Perhaps he has learned that whenever she talks to him, it is always in a critical manner. Would the wife want to hear criticism over and over again? Perhaps, if she offers up random affirmational messages, he might begin to trust that his wife isn't ALWAYS critical. Or say "There is something that is important to me to talk about. When would a good time be for us to have a short conversation?" This approach gives him some control of the situation and probably she will find that right now is just a fine time to talk. If the husband says "How about after this game is over?," then the wife should accept that without feelings of resentment and anger. Those feelings stem from a loss of control and no person needs to be in control 100% of the time.

Now if we look at Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

we see a parallel in that God selected Israel from all the nations to love although she was certainly no vision of loveliness. She responded to God's love with apostasy and adultery, yet God continued to extend His love and His mercy towards her. Remember how the book of Hosea ends:

Hosea 14:4-8 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely,

5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;

6 his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

7 They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

8 O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

We know that just as God set His love on Israel, so too Christ has set His love on the Church.

Matthew Henry wrote, "True believers are black in themselves, but comely in Christ."

And Samuel J. Stone wrote this hymn of faith:

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

There are, of course, verses in the New Testament that speak of Jesus' love:
Rom 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . [No one; nothing shall]
separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children
of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

But how often do you narrow your focus to concentrate on God's love for you personally?

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave
himself for me.

Charles Wesley, in 1738, wrote a hymn on this theme:
And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Why should we speak lovingly to our spouses and how should we do that? The answer is in
the gospel: God in Christ forgave us.

As we saw in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything. Winter has passed and
so HE comes bounding over the hills, like you and I used to do in our salad days, and in Song
2:10 tells his beloved to get a move on.

In his poem, "Locksley Hall," Alfred Lord Tennyson limns the immortal words "in the spring a
young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love." From my experience, young men stand
around mooning over girls in the fall, winter, spring and summer with a few days off sprinkled
here and there when they moon over the latest video games.

Anyway, HE eagerly bounds in and informs her in Songs 2:12 that the flowers are blooming (evidently, she hasn't noticed, being caught up in her jewelry and all) and that the time of singing has come. This is the time of singing by the bride and bridegroom, the time spoken of by Jeremiah.

Jer 33:11 the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord:

“Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord.

And here we have the theme of time in Songs – the timing of intimacy within marriage and before marriage.

V 2:8-17 reflect God's timing for intimacy within marriage.

V 2:7 reflects God's timing for intimacy before marriage.

HE issues the same invitation for sexual intimacy twice, once in v 10 and again in v 13. HE will issue the same invitation for intimacy again in v 4:8

We will go ahead and unpack some of these verses.

HE and SHE continue to use animal similes to describe each other. Nice animals, though. Animals with admiral qualities.

So in v 2:14, HE calls her a dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside.

Why is she being inaccessible to him? Perhaps she is shy or is afraid of what will happen next. We don't know but HE must woo her and HE does that in v 2:14.

SHE calls him a gazelle (v 2:9) – swift, and gracious. Not a dangerous predator, like a roaring lion or a grizzly bear. Gazelles are strong but not vicious.

And HE is standing there behind their wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. Is HE some kind of voyeur, peeping through women's windows?

Nah, HE's just eager to get on with things and we see in v 2:16-17 that he has been successful! In v 17 SHE wants him to “be like a gazelle or like a young stag.”

What about those foxes in v 2:15? HE says; “Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.” Maybe they wanted to sell the foxes to Samson; make a few bucks.

Douglas O'Donnell thinks of it this way: Before marriage, SHE had the job of working in the family's vineyard and part of that job was to keep foxes (jackals) out when the grapes were ripe. So the metaphor is that HE is telling her “Get rid of anything that spoils our feasting on fruit together” i.e. put aside your inhibitions about lovemaking. “Our vineyards that are in bloom” – Our bodies are ripe and ready for lovemaking – it is the right time and the right season for love. Let's refresh each other with fresh fruit (v 2:5) and eat our “choicest fruits” (v. 4:16) and be drunk with love (v 5:1).

As an aside, Jesus called Herod a fox; perhaps partly because Herod was ruining the harvest. Luke 13:32 And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.

Note that throughout the Song, eating fruit equates to intimacy.

We remember from Ecclesiastes that everything has a season, including embracing (sex).
Ecc 3:5 a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

Ecc 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

God has made intimacy a beautiful gift for married people. There is a time for intimacy and it is beautiful. Catch your own foxes by sharing with your spouse and banishing them from your marriage bed.

There is also a time to refrain from embracing. Intimacy isn't always about sexual intimacy. Caring for a sick spouse is a form of intimacy. Refraining from sex during long periods of separation (deployment during military service, like Uriah who wouldn't sleep with Bathsheba during wartime). Or perhaps refraining from sex for a time in order to give devotion to prayer as Paul recommended.

We also need to trust God's timing for intimacy BEFORE marriage, as seen in v 2:7.
"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

The intended audience here, daughters of Jerusalem, are the young, unmarried, women who are very much interested in handsome young men. SHE counsels these eager young ladies to rein in their sexual urges until they can be fulfilled with the right person and at the right time. The right person, of course, would be their future husband and the right time is after the God-sanctioned, sacred covenantal rite of marriage. And SHE is serious about all this. SHE adjures them. SHE doesn't say "You might want to hold off on that . . ." or "I think is best if . . ."

Why wait for marriage?

In the U.S. right now, more than 50% of couples cohabit before marriage and 50% of those never get around to getting married. They just continue to live together with a higher risk of separation than married couples. Certainly, birth control is easily available and pretty reliable (or so I'm told by the old woman who lived in a shoe.)

Social consequences involve the chaos of multiple partners, angry confrontations, lack of commitment, single parenting, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases . . . Sounds awful but the newspapers are rife with this stuff.

Other Scriptures tell us that there are serious consequences if we don't wait. Spiritual consequences. A seared conscience (Rom 1:18-32), the coming Judgment (1 Cor 6:9,10, Gal 5:19-21)

Songs answers the question in a different way. There is no divine finger wagging or descriptions of negative and dire social consequences. You wait for marriage because marriage is worth waiting for. This is the motive of delayed gratification. Marriage has serious blessings. It is worth the wait.

Did you ever, as a kid, sneak open one of your Christmas presents early because you just had to know what it was? And then, on Christmas, when you "officially" got the present, you

weren't really excited at all? You not only cheated yourself out of a special experience but in its place, you had a niggling sense of guilt. Your wedding night should not be like this.

Delayed gratification isn't just about waiting for marriage. For the Christian, it means holding out for the promises of God. It means being like the five wise virgins, keeping your lamps burning, ready for the call to come to the marriage feast (Matt 25:1-12). It means waiting for the crown of righteousness to be awarded on the day of judgment (2 Tim 4:8). Delayed gratification is foundational to the Christian ethos.

So okay. All the foregoing is fine and all but let's say that ship has sailed. You gave in and didn't wait. Or maybe you didn't have a choice. You will find people that will judge you. You will find people that will commiserate with you. Some people will remember their own struggles at that time in their life and perhaps would have made the same choices. But what about God? We already know that He didn't approve. What now?

Fortunately for all of us, the Bible makes the point that we CAN trust God's forgiveness through Christ.

Gal 4:3-4 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

What are the elementary principles of the world? Just do it! Success at all costs! You deserve pleasure. You're worth it. Competition. Keeping up with the Joneses. Lavish lifestyle. Worry about it later (good for building credit card debt)

Focusing on the sexual "elementary principles of the world," virginity is mocked in our movies and in our society. Pornography is in our movies and elsewhere rampant. Marriage ceremonies sometimes don't even mention God; I doubt He even gets an invitation. Divorce is no big deal. And so forth.

Are we unfazed by these "elementary principles?" Can you live in a pigsty and not get muddy?

Thankfully, knowing that we are prone to be sexually sinful, God has sent His Son to heal the sick, free the slaves and forgive the debtors.

So what about the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7:36-48,50? The one who washed Jesus' feet with her tears? The Pharisee, Simon, thought that if Jesus were really a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this was. But Jesus didn't say "Ew, Simon, you're right! She's probably got some loathsome disease. Get thee behind me, you skank!"

Jesus didn't, of course, say that. He DID say to Simon that her sins, which were many, were forgiven because she loved much. Then He tells the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

So if you are a man or woman who didn't wait for marriage to engage in some gland-to-gland combat, then trust in God's forgiveness. Jesus didn't come to save perfect people, He came to save sinners and that includes you and me and also all those who might judge you harshly.

1 Cor 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

If you are in Christ, then you are experiencing the wondrous love that surpasses all understanding, the love of Christ the Bridegroom who has come in that love to offer forgiveness and eternal life to all who claim in faith "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

Have a great week!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

I'm embarrassed to admit that I rushed home from church to read this first installment. Now I need to actually go read the chapters. 😬 That was "altogether lovely"!

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Amen brother! Marvelously well spoken!

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! What a wonderful read!!!

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:

I am like Marc, I got so absorbed in your synopsis, I haven't read the chapters yet. I feel like I ate the sumptuous dessert before the main course. Thanks for sharing your insights and your gift with words.

Comment:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you all!

Eph 3:20 Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Comment:

Shelia Welte:

My husband of almost 22 years (I know, mere babes in this crowd, right?) spent a wonderful season a few years back wooing me with a devotion book for couples called "Songs in the Key of Solomon". It was fun and I LOVED looking forward to what was next...it incorporated date nights and adventures mixed with purposful conversation. ❤️ Thank you, sincerely, for this introduction. Looking forward to reading through Song of Solomon...I am sure the 3rd time will be just as FUN as the first two! 😊

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

I'll have to check out that book! My bride and I will shortly (Dec 13) be celebrating 42 years!

Shelia Welte:

Ours will be 23 years on the 21st of December! December is a good month to keep each other warm! 😊

December 14: Song of Solomon 3-4 (K. Crittenden)

Week 50

Poetry Reading for 12/14/17

Song of Solomon 3-4

Good morning, Lovebirds!

In this week's episode of HE and SHE, (Chpt 3), the blushing bride awakes to find her husband gone! And so she goes off in search of him. But without the rolling pin. When MY blushing bride awakes to find her husband gone, she rolls over and goes back to sleep. I'm sure it secretly grieves her, though.

Our concept of a demure and proper wife might be found in the poem "The Betrothal," by Edna St. Vincent Millay:

Oh, bring me gifts or beg me gifts,
And wed me if you will.
I'd make a man a good wife,
Sensible and still.

We've seen that wife in Proverbs 31. But Songs brings out another characteristic of a good wife that Proverbs didn't mention. SHE isn't going to be still; she gets out of bed dressed in her nightie and goes looking for her husband, "the one my heart loves." That phraseology reminds me of John referring to himself as the disciple that Jesus loved.

SHE also isn't going to be sensible, because she is out at night roaming the dangerous streets looking for him. Fortunately, watchmen were out patrolling the streets (remember, there weren't any of the streetlights in those days which nowadays make our modern streets safe places for a woman to wander alone in her nightie at night.)

Anyway, back then, the streets weren't safe. (Gen 19:1-11, Judges 19:15-30). But SHE throws caution to the wind and goes out anyway.

Why?

Because she wants him again. She goes from the intimate private setting of their bed, out into a public space, finds "the one my heart loves", grabs hold of him, and doesn't turn him loose until they are back into another intimate setting for making love.

In Songs, note that the admonitions to the daughters of Jerusalem to abstain from love until the proper time, is juxtaposed right after verses describing heightened sexual activity. (2:7, 3:5, 8:4)

Songs seems to be addressed to those who are married and the young women who are soon to be married. But isn't it forgetting something? What about those who, for whatever reason, never marry? I think more and more people fall into this last category – they want to pursue their careers, Mr. or Miss Right never comes over the horizon, their parents lock them in the basement. . . Does the Bible address this situation? I think the Bible tells us that sex is a gift reserved for the covenantal relationship of marriage between one woman and one man. Period. What do YOU think?

So what do we know about sex?

God made both men and women; sex is a part of God's good Creation.

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God wants people to have sex.

Gen 1:28a And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth . . .

God wants people to have sex within marriage; not outside of it. This involves 2 people, not more. No sister wives, no concubines, no threesomes, no orgies.

1 Cor 7:2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.

God wants us to glorify Him with our bodies. This precludes any whiff of sexual immorality.
1 Cor 6:20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

And what does Songs bring to the table (or bed)?

Just this: A godly woman can be sexually aggressive. That's right, the Proverbs 31 wife can be sexually aggressive.

The Bible isn't saying explicitly in Songs, "Wives, be like THIS wife". However, in other places, we read the stories of Sarah, Hannah, Esther, and Ruth. Also in Proverbs 31. The Bible doesn't explicitly say "Wives, be like this woman" there either. But the stories are instructional.

It is not always necessary, men, to be the initiator.

SHE is not sitting in the Victorian parlour in shape-hiding, barbed-wire flannel, closing her eyes tightly, gritting her teeth, clenching her fists and thinking of England when it is time to do her wifely duty. Rather, SHE is aggressive and eager for the fray. And she goes out, quite vulnerable to danger, to claim the reward of love.

Now, if you are a person who has been sexually abused in the past (or was an abuser) and therefore cannot now fully enjoy lovemaking with your spouse without reliving the horrors of the past, then I urge you to follow the advice in Songs 2:15, catch that nasty fox that ruins the vineyard by covering your violation with shame and guilt; root it out through appropriate methods such as therapy, openness with your spouse and prayer. The gifts of God are to be enjoyed by both men and women and you are deserving of His healing.

After the injunction to the daughters of Jerusalem in v. 3:5, we suddenly have a visitor arriving in v6! Oh no! My hair must look a mess! Solomon himself is coming to town! The richest ruler anywhere! Just look at his royal accouterments! He's got sixty warriors, fierce fighting men, the best in Israel who protect Solomon. Even his father, David, had only thirty men. (2 Sam 23:13-39).

How *dégagé* he sits in his carriage, which is tricked out in the best materials money can buy; the same materials that were used in the building of the tabernacle (Ex 35) and the temple (1 Kings 5,6). No doubt it featured oversized chrome spinner rims and a hydraulic suspension as well to wow the homies.

The king rides into town in all his glory! (Psalm 45)

This is nice and all, but how does it relate to vv 3:1-5?

Note the contrast between the wife who goes out at night into the streets unprotected and vulnerable, and the image of Solomon, riding along in broad daylight, protected by his impregnable carriage and his small army of mercenaries.

Note also the contrast between the fabulous wealth of King Croesus . . . I mean Solomon . . . with the simple and unassuming means of our husband, the herdsman, the guy who grazes flocks (Song 1:7), "him whom my soul loves."

And again the contrast between the joy of Solomon's wedding day (don't ask me which one) when his heart rejoiced (he doesn't have to wait anymore), and verse 3:5 where the daughters are told to wait for their own wedding day.

Later on, in Song 8:11-14, another contrast is made between Solomon with all these vineyards (lots of women), and our heroine's lone vineyard which is hers to give.

Solomon is not the focus of Songs; rather, he is brought in to be used as a foil, something to be used to compare against for the purposes of edification. With all his pomp and circumstance, pageantry and ostentation, his marital life with all of his wives and odalisques led to disaster whereas the simple love between our simple bride and groom lead to the conclusion that their love was greater than Solomon's in all his glory.

So what do we have now? We have the bride, who seeks her husband, finds her husband and brings him home, joined together with something greater than Solomon.

Douglas O'Donnell finds a connection to this with Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Zacchaeus climbed a tree because he was seeking Jesus. He found Jesus and took him home, from a public setting to a private setting. Zacchaeus accepted Jesus into his heart; so Jesus said (Luke 19:9-10) "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Of course, Jesus is the one who came to seek the lost, including Zacchaeus. We all were roaming the city at night, vulnerable and lost, subject to the snares of sin which lay crouching at every doorstep. For us, Jesus is a Godsend; we can find Him easily and bring Him home to dwell in the privacy of our own hearts.

There is another thought about Songs. Suppose, say, you were new to the idea of Christianity; someone gives you a Bible and tells you to start reading 1 Chronicles. How far would you read? Yeah, me neither. But suppose you started with Songs? Now THAT would hold your attention. Songs then acts as an entryway to the more complete love story that is the entire Bible. God's love for us.

Paul tells us that the entire Old Testament was written to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ. 2 Tim 3:15 "and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

The Wisdom literature is there to bring people in to Christ. All of us are interested in the difficult questions with which the Wisdom books grapple. Why bad things happen to good people. What the meaning of life is. Whom I should marry. What is morality?

Songs is certainly a celebration of passion but it also functions as an interdiction to sexual immorality. And it serves to point us to the Beloved, Jesus, who is greater by far than Solomon.

I know that some of you like hearing conversion stories so here is one about David Suchet, the actor who portrayed the Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, as recounted in a sermon by Sinclair Ferguson.

“One night, Suchet was in a Manhattan hotel room when, for the first time in his life, he had the overwhelming desire to read the Bible. He knew the Gideons leave Bibles in every hotel room, so he searched the room, but he couldn’t find one. Determined, he went out and searched the city streets and squares looking for an open bookstore. He finally found one, bought a Bible, brought it to his room, and opened it randomly to Romans 8.

Rom 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Upon reading this, he was converted.”

He sought. He found. He brought home.

And, after much seeking ourselves, we finally find: Chapter 4

Without further ado, HE and SHE stop looking at Solomon’s procession and close the curtains. As powerful and rich as Solomon is, I doubt if he could have attained the deep intimacy of our simple couple.

So we’re back to the cuddling and cooing, lowing and mooing, gazing into each other’s eyes and whispering sweet nothings, which again are mostly comparisons to various beasts, fruits and the kinds of pleasing scents that fill the shelves at Lush to such redolence.

Essentially, chapter 4 is this:

HE: Wanna?

SHE: Woo-hoo!

Note: Marc just called. He said, (rather curtly), “Lissen up, Petal! Me an’ da’ boys thinks youse kin do a better job wit’ Chapter 4! Capisce?”

So OK. Let’s try again.

Jesus said, (not curtly at all), “You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you . . .” quite a few times in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-48). He was contrasting one thing to another in each instance. We can use this teaching tool.

Songs, chapter 4, shows us that there is nothing so beautiful, so rewarding, so refreshing, so ecstatic as love and lovemaking under God’s guidance. And we can contrast that to sex under the guidelines (or lack thereof) of the world today.

You have heard the world say “Show everything; tell everything,” but the Word says “Show him; tell her.”

In today’s world, pornography is easily available everywhere because there are people who DO choose to show everything. You may think that girls are forced into this but that is not always

the case. It's a way of escape from their mundane lives; a ticket out of Hicksville to the Big City. There is a lack of shame in nudity; not only that but bodies are no longer considered holy. The sacredness is gone. Overtly, you can see whatever body part you want. A little more covertly, the bare midriff, the short-shorts and the painted-on clothing are an invitation by schoolgirls for intimacy. They may not think so but I don't think boys have changed that much since I was one. HE also thought very highly and erotically about his bride's navel (v 7:2). I doubt that she flashed it to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the village.

Young girls (and young men!) of course don't want to hear this. They want to be empowered as women, free to express their physical beauty however they want. Deep down, they know they are not going to be this physically attractive forever. They are fully aware (or should be) that youth and physical beauty is fleeting at best and they want to capitalize on the power that their sexuality affords them while they can. God's rules, then, are dusty and antiquated, set in place by dour, sexless old men and hopelessly outdated. The world says "Strut your stuff!" The Word says "Keep it for your husband." A possible teen discussion topic?

The world also encourages a Kiss-And-Tell attitude. Our TV programs, like Desperate Housewives, feature married women sharing their love lives and gossiping about their friends' lovers. And what don't we know about the affairs of Bill Clinton or Bill Cosby or the sexting of Anthony Weiner or the many liaisons of JFK? This stuff fills our airwaves and fills our brains. It is becoming the new normal of society; the societal standard. "It's just sex. Everybody does it." Girls who don't "put out" are deemed cold and prudish. Boys who remain virgins are probably deeply flawed in some respect.

Songs 4:1-7 maintains "Show him and tell her." Show your husband, and him only, your woman's body and in turn, husbands, pick your jaw off the floor, find your brain and tell her how beautiful she is. Then show her.

We read that SHE is dressed in a veil (4:1), a necklace (v 4:9) and all that long, lustrous dark hair (4:1). Nothing else is mentioned and the little that she has on adds greatly to her sexuality. My, but it's warm in here! I remember in the TV show M.A.S.H., Hawkeye Pierce singing "I dream of Jeannie in a cellophane bikini." That's a song that guys can relate to.

Before this man, the love of her life, that SHE trusts wholeheartedly and unabashedly, she is not ashamed to be naked. In fact, she enjoys it.

Gen 2:25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

And the husband appreciates his wife . Songs 4:7 "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you."

What a wonderful thing to hear! I love it when my wife says this to me.

Is SHE perfect? She knows she isn't. She calls herself a "rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys" (2:1). But love is blind and HE isn't fazed by any imperfection. So he starts his visual (and tactile?) journey down her body, praising her eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck and breasts, arriving at Songs 4:7.

HE has paused in his journey at her breasts and then says 4:6 "Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go away to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

One might be reminded, by the blind love shown by this simple husband, of God's blind love for us in Christ. This is called the doctrine of forensic justification. We are made beautiful by Christ's atoning death on the Cross.

Also, Ephesians 5:25-30, where, by Christ's sacrifice, He presents the Church to himself "holy and without blemish."

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body."

For more information on the doctrine of forensic justification, so you can talk about it with folks you meet in the grocery checkout line, see:

<http://www.gracesermons.com/robbeeee/imputed.html>

You have heard the world say: "Sex means nothing." But the Word says, "Sex means unity."

Sexual intimacy means spiritual union.

So where does the idea that "sex means nothing" come from? In a talk entitled "King of the Bed: Should Faith Meddle with Our Sexuality?", Dr. Stanton Jones made the following points: First, evolutionary materialism says that material reality is all there is. Thus, life is just a blind, ruthless struggle to propagate our genes. You may have heard of (or read) the 1976 book "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins, which presents a gene-centered view of evolution. So genes are driving our particular bus and, (secondly), when you mix in the attitudes of the sexual revolution and the freedom from consequences offered by advances in birth control, why then you get the idea that sex means nothing. Sex is a biological act; ethically neutral. This is our society's viewpoint today. If you are hungry, eat something. If you are horny, hook up.

But we know that in God's plan, sex means unity – deep, personal, emotional, and spiritual union. This unity is what is expressed by verses 4:8 – 5:1

Matt 19:6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

Songs 2:16 My beloved is mine and I am his . . ."

You have heard the world say, "Sex is a god." But the Word says, "Sex is not a god, but rather a blessing from and a bridge to God."

Well, sex certainly has figured into pagan worship all along (temple prostitutes, asherah poles (Asherah was a fertility goddess)) and in today's society, sex has its very own temples of worship (strip clubs, brothels, adult book stores . . .) and you can worship her on your computer at numberless adult sites. Sex is the darling deity of consumerism, and is trotted out by marketers to inflame our lust and then morph that lust into desire for some product. As seen on TV. The high priests and priestesses of Sex are our entertainment figures, such as Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke who introduced the concept of twerking. And what a fine addition to our culture THAT is.

My dad worshiped at that temple and left his wife and kids. He got it mixed up. He thought "Love is god," not "God is love."

C. S. Lewis said "Love, having become a god, becomes a demon."

But God does not suffer fools or idols gladly.

Deut 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

God first!

Sex is a blessing from God. But, as pleasurable as it is, it acts as a bridge to God because sex alone cannot satisfy us. Sex acts as a pointer to something even more beautiful, pleasurable and satisfying – God!

Dan Allender and Tremper Longman write, “God gave us sex to arouse and satisfy a hunger for intimacy. Sexuality arouses a desire for union. Sexual consummation satisfies the desire, but it also mysteriously creates a hunger for more – not only for more sex, but also for a taste of ultimate union, the final reconciliation with God.”

The garden imagery in Songs is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, where man lived in union with God. The bride and groom in Songs find a way to be in the presence of God through their love and lovemaking. Those who accept Christ by faith are invited to the wedding feast held in the city of God where they will see His face (Rev 22:4)

Augustine called this reality “totus Christus”, the whole Christ. Christ, along with His church will enjoy God in the consummation. Our experience of physical sex in this life is but a pointer to something beyond.

C. S. Lewis said it is “only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune which we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.” Lewis was talking of the beauty to be found in books, music, art but it applies to sex as well.

Is there sex in Heaven?

Matt 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Sex is not needed or even desired in Heaven because to know God is to need nothing.

Have a good week!

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Thank you, Kevin. You have such thought-provoking posts. The marriage-covenant between Christ and His church really helps us to understand our own relationships to our spouse. "I have betrothed thee unto me for ever; and, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." He is not ashamed to own the loving covenant, becomes a kind and tender husband, speaks affectionately to her, calls her his spouse, gives her grace. All which strongly engages her to be faithful to him. (A Proverbs 31 wife actively seeking Him.) I love this song which is applicable for today's lesson. "How beautiful the radiant Bride who waits for her Groom with His light in her eyes." — The wife is radiant because her husband's rays are in her eyes. Light symbolizes holiness & faithfulness. She is espoused to Him and that faithful, holy union is what makes her beautiful. "All the beauty of the saints is derived from Him, and they shine by reflecting His light; it is the beauty of the Lord our God that is upon us," Ps. 90:17

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjo78EsQy3M>

“How Beautiful”

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:

Thank you, Kevin! Great thoughts and analogies!

December 21: Song of Solomon 5-6 (K. Crittenden)

Week 51

Poetry Reading for 12/21/17

Song of Solomon 5-6

Good morning! Shall we take another stroll in the garden?

By the way, the reason I post on Wednesdays instead of staying in my own lane and posting on Thursdays is because I’m on the West Coast. By the time the first tendrils of sunlight are coaxing the birds from their slumber, most of you are off to work or having lunch. And I know that many of you (well, one of you) likes to do your reading in the morning while I’m either still asleep or sitting like a zombie with a cup of coffee, staring out the window into the darkness.

Before we get back into the volatile subject of horticulture with our two experts, let’s take up the question of divorce. Remember, Songs has practical applications for us; it’s not just another steamy, bodice-ripper of a book.

Matt 19:9-10 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

10 The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

The disciples’ reaction is realistic; they can’t just marry “for as long as love shall last”, or until somebody better comes along, or until their spouse doesn’t make them happy anymore or until the mother-in-law becomes a pain in the tuchus, or if the spouse is cold in bed or abusive or develops a serious illness, or has kids, or gains weight or becomes lazy or develops a beer belly or doesn’t cook like Mother

Beginning in Songs 5:2, we begin to see the realism of marriage creeping in, the husband’s insensitivity (5:2), the wife’s sleepy selfishness (5:3), the violence of men (5:7) and the disdain of women (5:9).

“Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;” – Shakespeare

So. What’s happening here in Songs? HE has gone out with the lads and is out pretty late. SHE got tired of waiting for him so she locked the door and went to bed. HE forgot his key so knocks on her door. And yes, this is a double-entendre. They had planned an intimate evening but HE just popped out for a quick one with the boys. And stayed out too late. Meanwhile, SHE had prepared herself, washing, primping, donning her slinky negligee from Victoria’s Secret, . . . and then waiting. And waiting. Her good mood is dissipating quickly. No sweeties for him tonight.

HE gets home and, typical male, is ready to enter the lists of love. But the door is locked. Hmm. With the small portion of his brain that is still receiving blood flow, it finally dawns on him that she is upset for some reason. You know how women get. He decides to sweet-talk her into opening the door. (Song 5:2) "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." He appeals to her maternal instincts by telling her how cold it is outside; he's standing outside the door cold and shivering.

She remains unsympathetic.

SHE: "Do you know what time it is?! Why didn't you call?"

HE: "Time? Call? I left my Rolex Datona in my Sunday pants and telephones won't be invented until 1876! And I don't have a dime anyway. Did I mention that it's cold out here?"

SHE: "Listen Buster! I'm comfortable right where I am. I don't want to put my robe on again and get my feet dirty. Go sleep it off somewhere else!"

Being the silver-tongued rogue that he is, HE finally manages somehow to get her to change her mind, so she relents and gets herself ready for lovemaking again. SHE opens the door but now HE has disappeared again! So now she has to go out and find him. Again!

She wanders around, looking for him in the city streets and finds the watchmen, just as before. This is a different crew, though, and they treat her badly.

SHE is possibly wondering if she married the right guy. Maybe she should have listened to her mother.

The daughters of Jerusalem suddenly pop up like the fairy godmother in a Disney movie, out of nowhere. SHE asks them to help her search for her husband and tell him that his wife is sick with love. They, in return, ask, "What's so special about THIS guy? Men. Meh. They're all the same."

Well, THAT'S cold. First SHE gets injustice from the very men who are supposed to ensure justice and now the women, her wedding party, are sniping at her. SHE needs a pint of Häagen-Dazs and a sizeable box of tissues.

But instead of that, she chooses to defend her man with a spate of sententious similes that amount to an almost ethereal apotheosis of her husband. Wow!

The writer of Songs was a clever man. But we already knew that, the author being Solomon and all. Plus, being inspired by You-Know-Who.

Verses 8-16 comprise a poem within a poem, which is evident by its use of chiasmi.

The dictionary tells us that a chiasmus is "a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form; e.g. 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.'"

You see what they did there? Best and happiest ---→ happiest and best

Another example: "Each throat was parched, and glazed each eye." Which is how I'm feeling about now. I'm gonna have a nap. See you in a bit.

Later that same afternoon . . .

Ok, where were we? Oh yes, we seem to have fallen into a chiasmus. Anyway, a chiasmus is a common literary device in Hebrew poetry, used to make a point. The center of the poem (vv 11b-15a) describes the man's body parts. This description is enveloped by the same or similar words that parallel each other.

Othmar Keel divides it as follows:

- a. v. 8b O daughters of Jerusalem ... tell him ...
- b. v. 9ac How is your beloved better than . . .
- c. v. 10b outstanding among ...
- d. v. 11a His head is purest gold
- d'. v. 15b [his feet are] gold
- c'. v. 15d choice as . . .
- b'. v. 8b This is my beloved
- a'. v. 16d O daughters of Jerusalem

And what is at the center? Gold. SHE is saying that from the top of his golden head to his golden tippy-toes, HE is magnificent, pure, precious, rare, valued and, like gold, HE is superior to all others. HE is a keeper, worth going after even in the face of danger.

Note that SHE tells the daughters of Jerusalem in v 16b that HE is not just her beloved. HE is her friend. Would your wife say that about you?

What a friend we have in Jesus.

Okay, her answer satisfies the ladies but they have another question (6:1): "Where is he?" They want to help her look for him. Well, guess what? HE seems to be right here now. A real will-o'-the-wisp, this guy.

Anyway, all seems to be forgiven and love is in the air and so we're back to spooning and mooning. This couple has returned to their Edenic Garden and its pure God-given joy.

Good for them. What about us? What lessons are here for us?

Get real. I think that all prospective marriage partners need to get a sense of the realities of marriage. This would ideally be done through pre-marital counseling by a long-term, married person. Don't rely only on your unmarried or newly-married friends or take what you see in movies as gospel.

A woman I know was giving a speech at a club meeting when her husband of 50 years walked in and presented her with a large bouquet of red roses. She noticed that there were only 37 roses and queried him about it, saying, "Why only 37? We've been married for 50 years." He answered, "Well, they haven't ALL been good years."

Marriage presents difficulties and challenges to be met. That is the reality of marriage. It's out of the scope of this study to launch into the subject of marriage counseling; a study for a different time. But expect difficulties when two sinners come together in a fallen world. The ideal of a perfect marriage is no better an idol than sex is. Only God is God. And marriage is part of His plan for us. By working together through the challenges of marriage, letting

marriage stretch and refine us without breaking the covenantal bond, we become sanctified. That is the reality of marriage.

A recommended book for those in a serious dating situation is: "Things I Wish I'd Known Before We Got Married," by marriage counselor Gary Chapman (2010, Northfield Publishing).

A second lesson for us is the denial of self. No sane person walks down the aisle into marriage thinking that they won't have to sacrifice some things; namely and foremost any feeling of entitlement, or superiority, to their spouse. And no sane person marries an egocentric . . . person (← euphemism), which is why pre-marital counseling is good. See previous notes.

Sure, couples can argue about money, about having kids, about long visits by their in-laws, about household chores and Why Can't You Pick Up After Yourself?! But we live in a culture of entitlement and the difficulty in learning to humble ourselves into a submissive attitude leads to problems with intimacy. Selfishness is not unique to our culture or time, however. We catch a glimpse of it here in Songs. HE is selfish, wanting things to go his way, as if HE wasn't the one who ruined their plans by staying out too late. HE is the husband and SHE needs to get used to it.

SHE also exhibits selfishness by her unwillingness to inconvenience herself to let him in the door. She uses the word "I" several times. So they are both selfish to some extent.

But they both move beyond their selfish attitudes in 5:4 to the extent that love is aroused, enough so that when HE goes missing, SHE is ready and willing to really inconvenience herself by going out looking for him. SHE has stopped focusing on herself, her comfort and her convenience, and is completely focused on her husband.

6:3a "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine"

Such a change in attitude between 5:3 and 6:3. And this is a lesson for us all.

So we have the lessons of getting real and denying self. Going further, we have three steps towards intimacy: open eyes, open mouth, and open door.

Open eyes: Do you remember how you saw the person that is now your spouse when you first met? Look at your spouse that way now. Rekindle that arousal and passion.

Daniel Estes writes: "In marriage, it is easy to lose sight of how special one's spouse is. The inexorable duties of life can dilute the delight of intimacy, so that what used to provoke excitement now evokes only a yawn. Indifference is a lethal blow to intimacy, because it communicates that the relationship is not as valued as it should be."

Open mouth: Not to insert foot but to praise your spouse. Songs teaches us HOW to speak to each other. They praise each other. Not that we need to do that exclusively but have we stopped praising each other at all? That behavior is not only for courtship; it keeps a relationship in good health.

Open door: Let's review what 1 Corinthians says about marriage.

1 Cor 7:1-5 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not

have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul quickly adds that this is a concession, not a command.
1 Cor 7:6 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this

The “open door” policy is a way of opening the door for your spouse to take pleasure in your body EVEN if you aren’t necessarily in the mood. It’s a way of saying “My spouse’s needs and desires become mine.” It’s an attitude of selflessness.

Douglas O’Donnell (whose commentary I am using as a guide), tells us that Matthew Henry introduced his commentary on the Song of Songs by writing: “When we apply ourselves to the study of this book we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, put off our shoe from off our foot [we are on holy ground, but we must also] . . .forget that we have bodies.”

Songs is all about body parts; why must we forget that we have bodies? Why must we interpret Songs only spiritually and not literally? Why, when I read about breasts in Songs, must I interpret that, as Matthew Henry does, as the Church’s “pious affections towards [Christ]”?

We will take this up next week! See you then.

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

Thanks, Kevin. I appreciate your posting early because I'm one of the early readers. I've appreciated all your posts and want to thank you for all your efforts and input to this study. God bless you and yours

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Beverly! I had you in mind specifically for posting early. A little birdie told me that you liked to read in the early morning. :-)

Comment:

Steven Wright:

Thank you brother Kevin! Superb presentation as usual! And you know I like "them thurh big words!"

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Hah! You use more 50-cent words than I do!

Comment:

Butch O’Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!!!!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

You are welcome, Butch! And thank YOU for your faithful efforts!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
5:11 "His hair is wavy." --Rats!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
My hair was wavy once. It waved goodbye to me. ;-)

Comment:

Marc Hermon:
6:5 " His hair descended!" --YES! Back in the game!

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:
Still smells of goats, though. Jus' sayin'. That's why there's balm in Gilead.

December 28: Song of Solomon 7-8 (K. Crittenden)

Week 52
Poetry Reading for 12/28/17
Song of Solomon 7-8

Good Morning, and welcome to the last study for the Poetry section of the 7 Bible Studies effort!

But first, a word to our sponsors:

Thank you, Marc et al, for stepping out in faith to offer a complete unknown this opportunity to be a reader leader. My knowledge of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon has been greatly, greatly expanded. Your stated purpose was to have us spend more time in the Word. I can tell you that I spent a LOT of time there. I also want to single out your wife, Ginger, who has been such an encourager and cheerleader for us all. I hope someday to know half as much about the Bible as she does.

My thanks also go to the other reader leaders who have faithfully guided us all, for 52 weeks, through some complex material and made it accessible. I'm sure we have all benefitted immensely through these efforts.

Everyone who commented on these studies with questions or answers has edified us all, so big thanks go out to you too!

And, of course, I thank God, in whose vineyards we continue to labor, for not only supporting us all thus enabling us to persevere in our efforts but for keeping us mindful of the appropriate words to express His will for our lives. May we always find ways to be in tune with His word.

And now, back to the show:

Last week, we raised the question:

Songs is all about body parts; why must we forget that we have bodies? Why must we interpret Songs only spiritually and not literally? Why, when I read about breasts in Songs, must I interpret that, as Matthew Henry does, as the Church's "pious affections towards [Christ]"?

So, I've thought about breasts all this past week (purely for the purpose of edifying you all) and the answer to the question lies in Neo-Platonic dualism. It was taught by Orpheus that the body is "the tomb of the soul," and labeled by St. Francis as "Brother Ass." The body, then, is a necessary evil. Soul good, body bad. In fact, one of the early and influential commentators on the Song of Songs was Origen of Alexandria who wrote, "I advise everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passions of this bodily nature, to refrain from reading the book and the things that will be said about it." In other words, Don't Read This Book if you are still breathing.

So, essentially, THAT part of God's Word is, what, not good for us?

So many Christians held (and perhaps still hold) the view that sexual pleasures, both without AND within marriage, were sinful desires, that Bertrand Russell was moved to criticize Christianity's attitude toward sex as "morbid and unnatural."

In fact, here's a tidbit of information that you can casually toss out at your next black-tie soirée. On the table for discussion and vote at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) was the proposal that all clergy give up not only having relations with their wives but even living with their wives. That perspective took hold and celibacy became the supreme symbol of piety whereas marital relations were seen as inherently sinful. Which rather flies in the face of what Paul was talking about in 1 Cor 7. But, it is a truism that a camel is a horse created by a committee.

Later on, Augustine softened that stance somewhat by munificently saying that sex was only to be engaged in for the purpose of having children. I'm guessing that some people began having a lot of children.

But we find no devaluing of the human body within Scripture. I mean, really!
We have the incarnation.
We have the bodily resurrection.
We have the approval of sensual delights, such as Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

There is no dichotomy between body and spirit, between honoring God through heartfelt prayer and honoring God through your heartfelt relationship with your spouse.

And this is the message brought to us by the Song of Songs. That the human body is good, just as God pronounced it at Creation.

"Both bodily beauty and pure passion are good." - Written on one of God's Post-It notes.

These two themes, bodily beauty and pure passion, are themes running through the Song. We start by looking at bodily beauty.

Douglas O'Donnell says "My core idea for that theme is this: all of creation, especially the beauty of the human body, points to the beauty of the Lord, our Creator. So by saying 'bodily beauty' I ultimately have God in mind. I want to arouse your affections toward him by looking at her, the beautiful bride of Solomon's Song."

We are warned about the dangers of beauty:

Prov 31:30a Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,

Prov 6:25 Do not desire her [the adulteress] beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;

We are also counseled to notice and value the abundant beauty around us.

Gen 12:11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance,

Women are described as "beautiful" in the Bible. Sarah (Gen 12:14), Rebekah (Gen 24:16), Rachel (Gen 29:17), Abigail (1 Sam 25:3), Tamar (2 Sam 13:1), Esther (1:11, 2:7), and the daughters of Job (Job 42:15).

We must not be hostile or dismissive of beauty in all its forms, especially as extolled in the Song of Songs.

Leland Ryken notes, "beauty is everywhere – in the exalted poetry, in the pictures of nature, [and even] in the attractiveness the lovers find in each [other's bodies]"

HE sums her up in verses 6:8-9 – SHE, this Shulamite, is unique and awesome.

And in verse 10, HE anticipates the famous lines from Romeo and Juliet:
But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Song 8:10 "Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?"

Is there a theological connection? Sure.

Giovanni Leone said (and I'm not sure how old he was when he said this): "The strongest evidence to prove that God exists is a beautiful woman." Probably, as a freshman in college, he had just walked across campus and fallen in love three times.

Such ethereal beauty, in fact all the beauty of Creation, points to the surpassing Beauty and Glory of our Creator.

What can be known about God is as plain as day to us if we just look at the world around us, as Paul explains:

Rom 1:18-25 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,
25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

We look in gratitude beyond the beauty of this world to the One who made it and acknowledge His works. Similarly, we look beyond the beauty of the human body, the body made in God's own image, to God Himself.

Let's now take a look at pure passion.

At the end of chapter 6, the friends beseech her to come back so they can admire her beauty. HE then asks them a question, And WHY might you want to do that?

Song 6:13

Friends

Come back, come back, O Shulammitte; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!

He

Why would you gaze on the Shulammitte as on the dance of Mahanaim?

Mahanaim is a war camp east of the Jordan River (Gen 32:2)

HE then goes on to describe her various assets, going this time from the feet to the head. V 7:6 How beautiful you are and how pleasing, my love, with your delights!
He's describing ALL her delights. And vv 7:7-9 describe his passion for her.

And this passion is shared by the bride as well. See vv. 6:11,12. Pomegranates, with their many seeds, were seen as symbols of fertility. SHE wants to see if now is the time to rouse and awaken desire. The answer, in vv 7:9b-8:4 is yes. For us but not for you, O daughters of Jerusalem. (8:4)

Pure passion is patient. V 8:4 (and 2:7 and 3:5) tell us that pure passion waits for the proper time as well as the proper person. The time is after entering the covenantal bond of marriage and the person is one's spouse.

Within those strictures, pure passion can be pleasurable.

In v 8:1, she wishes that she could kiss her husband in public as brothers and sisters could without public censure. And in v8:2, she voices her desire to bring him to her mother's house and wear him out.

Note the contrast between Lady Folly, she of Proverbs, and our Lady Wisdom.

Prov 9:13 Folly is an unruly woman; she is simple and knows nothing.

And Folly says, "Let's keep our passion secret, because we know it's wrong."

Prov 9:17 "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!"

SHE, on the other hand, without a trace of blushing, says, "I'm proud of our love and I want everybody to know about the depths of our intimacy."

Song 8:2 I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house— she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates.

So we have that:

1. Pure passion is patient. It waits for the covenant of marriage and the one and only spouse.
2. Pure passion within marriage is filled with God-given pleasure untainted with guilt.

And now –

3. Pure passion (love) PROTECTS against sinful passion (lust).

The Bible often juxtaposes love and lust to show us that we have a choice and an antidote.

We see this in Paul's writings where he first talks about love and then admonishes us to avoid lust.

Rom 13:8-14 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.[c]

And we also remember this from Proverbs:

Prov 5:15-20 Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well.
16 Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?
17 Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.
18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
19 A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.
20 Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?

As Paul House says, "Satisfaction with one's long-term love will negate succumbing to short-term surrender to temptation."

And Barry Webb says, "To rejoice in the wife of one's youth, to be satisfied by her breasts and captivated by her love is to walk in the path of the wisdom that is grounded in the fear of Yahweh."

Now, more than ever, we need to be grounded in the lessons of godly marriage found in Songs. We are bombarded by Folly with enticements for impure passion on every side, from romance novels that feature illicit entanglements to magazine covers in the supermarket to blatant images on websites.

A Harvard study in the 1980s found that 70% of all allusions to intercourse on television involved unmarried couples or prostitutes. [See the 2016 book by Steve Gallagher “At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry”, \$15.99 at better Amazons everywhere.]

And that was in the ‘80s. Godly sex must be profoundly boring for TV producers and filmmakers, or perhaps they are not familiar with the concept. I think that many people today are innately aware of it, but are not conscious of it. I, for one, would welcome a TV series that showcases the choices between love and lust and showing the protagonists wrestling between the two, then finally making the right choice based on the guidance of Jesus. We all have that struggle in our lives.

Woody Allen, whom you all know to be a prominent filmmaker, said this about his sexual relationship with his wife’s adopted daughter, “The heart wants what it wants.” Such statements by prominent people go a long way towards normalizing this kind of situation.

So we have:

1. Pure passion is patient
2. Pure passion is pleasurable
3. Pure passion is a protection against impure passion
and
4. Pure passion is a promotion of the Passion.

All of us Christians found the beauty of Jesus – His personality, character, claims, teachings, and miracles – to be captivating. Augustine said Jesus is “the beauty of all things beautiful.” We dropped what we were doing to follow Him. We made sacrifices to follow Him. We endure the derision of the world to follow Him. Where He leads I’ll follow. Follow all the way. Follow Jesus ev’ry day.

People often express surprise when I mention that Kathleen and I have been married over 40 years. As if it were so very rare. But the world takes notice and says “Huh. It IS possible for love to last.”

The world also takes notice of the person (NOT JUST WOMEN!) who remains a virgin until marriage. That person promotes the gospel. God isn’t going to say “Well, boys will be boys.”

Pure passion – held in check until marriage and rightly expressed within marriage – is a promotion of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Do you recall the interlude in Job, namely Job 28? The question is raised (Job 28:20) Where does Wisdom come from, then answered in Job 28:23, It will only be found with God, so that the conclusion is Job 28:28, The fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom.

Songs 8:5-7 is similar; some scholars call it the climax of the Song of Songs. The question is raised, What is Love? And three aspects of love are provided which teach us about God’s universal truths about marital love.

Songs 8:5 Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?

Love is . . . Leaning on your husband. The first five words are the same as v 3:6 which refers to the arrival of King Solomon. It implies grandeur, royalty. “Up from the wilderness” is reminiscent of coming up from Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan. A land overflowing with milk, honey, mandrakes, pomegranates, grapes and apples. Who sees this? The daughters of Jerusalem. They see this lovely couple coming home. Is this a picture of an elderly couple returning home and reminiscing about good times in the past? Is this a picture

of a young couple just returning from their honeymoon? Could be either one. But here, she is leaning on her husband. The mood is not eroticism but affection. Leaning is also indicative of dependency. Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms, leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

John 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Truly a sign of affection and dependence.

We, as Christians, lean on Jesus as a wife leans on her husband, not for every little thing but for loving headship, affection, protection and provision. We men need to ask ourselves if we follow the example of Christ in being leanable. Do we provide loving headship to our families? Are there strong bonds of affection? Does our family feel safe? Are their needs met? And do we accept the headship of Christ? Do we fight the need to be dependent on Him? I know I do sometimes.

Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

“the husband IS the head,” not “it would be good if the husband WERE the head.” Husbands – we are in a position of inescapable leadership. We can lead poorly by not serving or sacrificing or protecting or providing or we can lead in a Christ-like manner by doing these things well. We can't sit on the sidelines waiting for a more convenient time. Whatever actions we are taking, we are LEADING. This may be an indicator of a man's suitability for marriage; something that pre-marital counseling might touch upon. Have you noticed that I'm a big fan of pre-marital counseling?

The image here is not the hot, steamy bedroom scenes that have marked Songs so far. This is a picture of mature intimacy, which understands that the climax of love is not, . . .well. . . climaxes, but relationship.

Songs 5:16b This is my beloved, this is my friend, daughters of Jerusalem.

This is a great comfort to those of us who, for some reason, don't have our 25-years old bodies anymore. Over time, (so I hear), things don't function as well as they used to. The person I see in the mirror looks old and wrinkled, with chicken wings, age spots, cellulite, general flabbiness, an alarming increase in mass, frown lines, wrinkles and puppet mouth. Obviously, the mirror is showing my grandfather.

We need our cup of coffee, a nap and a handful of pills before we go grazing for lilies.

But no matter how old our bodies get, our true intimacy, our relationship, grows stronger than ever. And praise God for that.

Love is . . . Bigger than us two.

Songs 8:5b Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth.

Here, Mother comes into the picture. The place where they first felt the sparks of desire is the place they have come back to live; their home which is his mother's house, the place he was born. Mom figures prominently in matters of love; the bride's mother is mentioned in 3:4, 6:9, 8:2 and we see that in 8:2, the mother is “she who has taught me.”

Taught her what?

Well, probably the stuff mentioned in 2 Tim 1:5 “ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

But also, as we remember from Proverbs 30:19b, “. . . the way of a man with a young woman.”

Not to put too fine a point on it, the mother teaches her daughter about sex. And who better to teach the art of lovemaking than an experienced woman filled with wisdom. Certainly better than learning about sex from your equally inexperienced young friends on Facebook or from movies. Or porn. Yes, some women DO watch porn.

Here’s a quote from the NY Times:

“Girls just wanna watch porn. At least, that is the conclusion from a new study by Marie Claire, which surveyed more than 3000 women about their relationship with porn. The research is part of a documentary project by photographer Marie De Cadenet, who says she embarked on the project because “porn is here to stay” and women’s relationship to the subject has been largely underreported.”

And I think one reason for young women watching this stuff is because they are in a vacuum of information about sex and are confused about their roles in a relationship.

So the Wisdom in Songs tells mothers today: Talk to your daughter about sexual issues; address the fear surrounding the wedding night, teach her how to not only please her husband but also to express her own needs, the experience of being pregnant, of giving birth, of caring for a baby. If you, as a mother, feel shame about any of these topics, then you are probably not alone. But that shame will come out in your talks with your daughter. Please think about where that shame comes from; maybe it was passed on to you by your own mother. But it does not come from God.

Remember, your talk should be the kind of talk that you needed when you were young. A talk that isn’t just about the mechanics of sex but a talk that mirrors the feelings of Songs – alive with joy, purpose, and holiness.

It would seem that society today sees love as being limited to two only. Sex is a private matter; nobody else’s business, especially your parents. Sex is experienced on a trial basis, “Let’s move in together and see how it goes.” Such an attitude – cohabitation – does not receive the blessing of the family, nor of the community, nor of the church.

We see today that 50% of marriages crumble and many of the rest are tottering; presumably because they forget or have never learned that Love is bigger than the two.

You might have noticed that in scenes of intimacy in the Songs, the Daughters of Jerusalem seem to be right there as well. What are they? Voyeurs? Peeping Thomasinas? No. They are there for a couple of reasons, one, as students to learn about love and two, as witnesses to witness true love.

The Daughters of Jerusalem represent their society, which approves of this marriage. They are there to witness the bond of love and can remind this couple of that love later on in life when, and if, troubles come. They will say, “Work through this issue because you are in a covenantal relationship and there is no walking away. And we are here for you as a couple because we remember your love for each other.”

“A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words.”

The bride and groom do not stand alone. Neither should you.

The “apple tree” in v. 5 might be considered the family tree, the tree where the bride and groom add their names to the genealogy and look forward to carving their children’s names someday as well. And the grandkids’ names. Life goes on.

When I was going to college, I remember being told that Physics could be a springboard into many other disciplines. But here’s a guy named Tom Gledhill who started as a Physicist, turned from that to become an Old Testament professor, and then became a part-time Poet. THAT’S a long springboard!

Anyway, he describes these verses in poetic form as:

Underneath the fruit tree’s bowers,
Heavy, ripe with golden showers,
‘neath the shades of family tree,
branches of maternal pedigree,
there I stirred your sleeping form,
where your mother brought new birth
in agony of ecstasy writhing.

Love is . . . Wearing Your Wedding Ring Always.

Many of my ESL students from Asian countries do not wear their wedding rings, preferring to keep them at home, protected from the wear and tear of daily life. Wearing jewelry while scrubbing the toilets seems weird. And I get that.

But in our culture, we wear our wedding rings with joy and pride because we wish to announce to the world that we have found our beloved and are expressing the joy of our covenantal relationship with them. On a personal note, the ostentatious display of my wedding ring has saved me from countless onslaughts of beautiful young women looking for love. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

Anyway, the wearing of the wedding ring is a declaration of happy permanence.

Lately, there has been a third ring added to the mix besides engagement ring and wedding ring. This is a “promise ring.” I was confused about the difference between a “promise” ring and an “engagement” ring. So I looked it up and I’ll share with you in case you are also wondering:

“What the promise ring symbolizes between couples is highly individual, but most often it represents love and commitment. That could be a promise to someday become engaged at an unspecified time, perhaps after graduation, the end of a stint overseas or when it’s easier financially.

Promise rings are gaining popularity among couples that may not feel the need to put a label on their relationship or stick to a timetable. For them, a ring is an outside symbol to people who move in together and have no immediate plans for marriage but are clearly in a committed relationship. If an engagement ring comes along in the future, the promise ring often moves over to the opposite hand.”

So I'm guessing that a promise ring is an announcement to the world that you are "clearly in a committed relationship" without being clearly committed, which is what an engagement ring is for. An announcement to the world that you are shacking up with somebody. Obviously, I'm too old to understand or appreciate young love.

SHE now says: Songs 8:6a Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm;

Back in THOSE ancient days, even before the 1-room schoolhouse, a person's seal was the guarantee of their identity. I don't know if women had seals or not. It acted much as our driver's license or passport does today. The seals were often made of precious metals with ornate inscriptions and were sometimes called signet rings. (Haggai 2:23, Gen 41:42, Jer 22:24).

My seal would say something like "This is the property of Kevin Crittenden, son of Herbert Crittenden, Jr., who has a Class A license allowing him to drive an 18-wheel ox-cart."

So: "Place me like a seal over your heart" – A request for mutual, lasting possession, deeply and privately;

"like a seal on your arm." – Externally and publicly – the wedding ring.

And the reasons are given in vv. 6b, 7a.

"For love is as strong as death" – permanence
"The very flame of the Lord" – permanence as well.

This is an example of a Hebrew poetic device known as synonymous parallelism; the second word makes the first word more prominent. Love and jealousy are parallel as are death and the grave.

. . . love is strong as death,
jealousy is fierce as the grave.

6b It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.

7a Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

We have water vs. fire. Usually, enough water will quench any fire. But this is no ordinary fire. This is the very "flame of the Lord," the fire of divine Love. Unquenchable.

Love is like death and the flame of the Lord. It is permanent. Why?

Songs 8:7b If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.

Beatles 19:64 Money can't buy me love.

Songs is saying that it is foolish to try to put a price on love. Love is not for sale (except in certain parts of town where Lady Folly lives) and how much comfort can you get, snuggled up in bed, to bars of gold and sacks of silver? None of that stuff is permanent, anyway. You can't take your wealth with you. Again, there are no U-Hauls attached to hearses.

Matt 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Prov 16:16 How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!

Solomon is actually making fun of himself here. (See Eccl 2:1-10; Song 8:11,12) All his treasures, his wealth, his silver and his gold.

This is also a jab at our culture where everything has its price, as typified by the movie "Indecent Proposal," in which a billionaire offers \$1,000,000 to a young married couple for one night with the wife. I haven't seen the movie but I do see that it lasts for 2 hours instead of 2 minutes. So I guess the couple was tempted. Very reminiscent of Mephistopheles, that billionaire.

How might YOU be tempted by the offer of \$1,000,000? (Tax-free).

You recall that Paul wrote those stirring words about love in 1 Cor 13:4-7. He wasn't saying to himself, "I should write something that people will use in wedding ceremonies 2,000 years from now." Rather, his letter was one of correction to the Corinthians who, as Paul had been informed by Chloe's household, were divided and compromising with the pagan world around them. The church lacked love and so Paul spelled it out for them.

1 Cor 13:8a Love never fails

Love is permanent. Married love is marked by exclusivity and lifelong commitment. It is a seal placed upon the heart and upon the arm.

Similarly, there is a permanence to our covenantal relationship with Christ. 'Til death do us part. And beyond death! 1 Cor 15:55 Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?

Our hope is in the resurrection – both Jesus' and ours.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

We are "sealed" by the Spirit for the day of redemption.

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

God's love for us is permanent and unquenchable!

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

God's love for us is impermeable, His mighty shield protects us.

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's love for us does not need a promise ring.

G. K. Chesterton, writing to Frances, who would one day be his wife, said "You say you want to talk to me about death: my views about death are bright, brisk and entertaining. . . The transformation called Death may be something as beautiful and dazzling as the transformation called Love." In Jesus, love has conquered death; therefore, death is merely the doorway to eternal life and eternal love; that unquenchable flame of the Lord, freed from sin, freed from sickness, freed from temptations and freed from trials.

“One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, death, thou shalt die.” – John Donne, “Holy Sonnet X”

We now come to the end of the Song of Solomon, vv. 8:8-14, which begins by teaching us not only WHY one should remain a virgin until marriage but also HOW to go about doing so. Short of being a castaway on a deserted island, in this culture of Anything Goes, remaining chaste is rather difficult nor is it respected. A man who remains a virgin has his masculinity questioned and a woman who remains chaste is dumped unceremoniously into the category of ice queen.

Songs 8:8-9 We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown.
What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?
9 If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her.
If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.

The text doesn't say, but this is probably the brothers speaking which would fit the chiasmic structure of Songs. Or it could be the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Anyway, they are saying that SHE is just entering puberty; her chest isn't developed yet, and so they are asking what they should do for her on the day SHE is spoken for.

Ezek 16:67 I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.

The brothers vow to protect their sister's purity.

If she is a wall, then she is firmly deciding to stay a virgin. A wall is a barrier, impenetrable and impregnable. Their method of birth control was abstinence. Period.

If she is a door, it implies easy access – the loss of virginity and possibly promiscuity. “Can't You Hear Me Knocking?” – Rolling Stones. Do you have any doubt about what that song is about?

So . . . if the friends (older siblings) see her vacillating on the issue and beginning to act like a revolving door, open 24/7, they will circle the wagons before it's too late. They will enclose her with panels of cedar. They will act to protect her modesty.

And, if she has kept herself pure under their watch, they will build towers of silver on her – they will reward her virginity with their full blessing and support. She will be rewarded for her victory.

Would that we all had such caring friends.

But now the bride speaks in v 8:10. She says, “Hmmp! I'm not flat-chested! For your information, I developed early and abundantly; in fact, I have a balcony that you could do Shakespeare from. And, I'll have you know, when I enter a room, my breasts get there a full minute before I do!”

Song 8:10 I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers.
Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.

SHE is proud that she is a wall – SHE has kept herself pure for her husband, even though she was well-endowed early on and was no doubt pestered by the men. This woman gets street cred and bragging rights for holding out, and she is proud (and rightly so) of that fact.

This point, the importance of maintaining virginity until marriage, seems oddly placed here at the culmination of an erotic love song. But it fits with the primary purpose of the Song, along with the adjurations given in 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4. Remember that the audience is young, single women, just as Proverbs was mostly advice for young, single men.

Since this is about waiting for the right time (marriage), then two questions are tackled here:

- 1 – How one waits
- 2 – Why one waits

It should be mentioned, before we proceed, that the Bible holds no double standard. It's not okay to think that a woman should be a virgin until marriage but men will be men and are almost expected to sow their wild seed willy-nilly. Nope. A man's virginity is just as valued as a woman's.

Psalm 119:9a How can a young man keep his way pure?

1 Tim 5:1-2 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

In all purity.

So EVERYONE is to remain a "wall" until the marriage bed when the "door" can be opened.

How one waits:

The answer is given in our text with the Bible-Backed Five-Point Protection Plan, namely:

1. Family
2. Peers
3. Community
4. Self
5. Knowledge

The first three are external societal protections. They come from without.

Vv. 8:8-9 discuss family protection. Older brothers protect their younger sisters. Dads protect their daughters, sometimes greeting the would-be swain with shotgun in hand. It's a not-so-subtle message: "Mess with my daughter and my friends, Smith and Wesson, will hurt you". This protection (although exaggerated somewhat) is a Biblical worldview, albeit not currently favored in our society, where young women are often without effective fathers and their brothers are busy chasing women of their own.

We catch a glimpse of peer protection in v. 10 with the bride's boast of her virginity. Also in the bride's refrain when she exhorts the virgins to stay virgins until the right time. The newlywed bride seeks to protect her peers.

The idea that love is bigger than us two touches upon the concept of community protection. These girls are governed by the laws given in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which laws frown upon sex before marriage. Such a loss of virginity was not tolerated.

What about now? If one of these supports is lacking in your life (maybe your family could care less if you shack up with somebody), then you can increase your protection through one of the other sources, perhaps your peers and your church family. Spend your time with like-minded people – people who share your values. We unconsciously tend to adapt ourselves to the

mindset of those we hang with, much as I would develop a Southern Drawl if I moved to Alabama. Y'all.

And if we hear the voice of reason coming from many sources, rather than just one, we will be more conducive to listening.

Point 4 is Self; Self-Resolve. You need to resolve to stay a wall because otherwise, you become the default, which is a swinging door in this culture. You can have concerned family, peers, and church family, all pulling for you but sin often befriends us in solitude and so we succumb if we don't consciously make a real effort to stay wary. Our bride is saying "Dear family and friends. Although I really appreciate your concern for me, I must tell you that I have taken a vow to be chaste. It may not always be easy to keep but I promised myself not to put myself in potentially compromising situations or relationships. I always plan for an escape route in case I am in the wrong place or with the wrong boy. But this guy, my beloved, is a special man to me. And we have both resolved to wait to consummate our love until marriage."

Point 5 is knowledge. Young women and men should know about sex and sexuality. They should be aware of what is about to happen to them as they enter puberty. Songs is a book of knowledge. It talks about the human body, the pleasures of intimacy and the purity that rightly belongs around such pleasures. It teaches us that the facts of sex (the birds and the bees and the storks and the cabbage patches) are all godly topics. Can you say the word "breasts" in the context of the church without feeling shame? God uses it. He designed them, bless His heart!

So, if you think about it, church and family are the proper places for children to learn about the godly approach to intimacy. Otherwise, they will learn about intimacy from the culture that we happen to live in, where Lady Folly holds sway.

I'm not saying that it should be easy to talk about sex with your children. My mother could not and did not. I learned from the culture, from peers who were just about as ignorant as I was, from the pages of Henry Miller, and from the Playboy magazines that my equally geeky friend in 7th grade had stashed in his closet. Yes, Hugh Hefner taught me about sex. Sex was a thing of shame, some secretive thing that people did but nobody talked about. So we all pretend that sex is something that only other people do and ignore the fact that God not only condones sex within marriage but considers it a wonderful gift, so why should we be ashamed of it? Is it our Puritanical heritage?

Puritan - a person with censorious moral beliefs, especially about pleasure and sex.

And, to be clear, I am not advocating at all that we should talk openly about this area of our lives. That is private between a husband and a wife. We just don't need to feel shame.

Anyway, the 5-Point Protection Plan is how one waits.

And now, Why one waits.

Ps 119:9-10 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

Our text shows us that peace and freedom come as blessings to those who wait. We see the blessing of peace in v10 again – "Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment." She is saying: "I kept myself pure. Then we got married and made love. And then my beloved saw that I found peace." Thoughtful girl, that.

The Hebrew word here is “shalôm” which means completeness, wholeness, total well-being or, in general, peace. And this word “peace” plays nicely as a foil to earlier images of walls, towers, battlements – the things of war.

Have you ever contrasted two wedding ceremonies – the first between two people who have been living together and finally decided to tie the knot and the second between two people who have made the choice to remain pure until marriage? Which event brings you, the witness, more peace and more joy? Which marriage do you think will be better able to withstand the trials of life?

Douglas O'Donnell says “Over the past two decades of Christian ministry, I have never had a young man or woman confess to me, ‘Pastor, I stayed a virgin. Then I got married and lost my virginity on my wedding night. And boy was I dumb. What was I thinking? Oh, I feel so guilty. I’m so not at peace about this foolish behavior of mine.’ I’ve never had that happen. But let me tell you, on a very serious note, that half the people I have counseled have confessed something like this: ‘I was so foolish. I feel so guilty. When it came to sex, I played by my own rules, and right now peace is far from my heart. What can I do to find peace?’”

Paul was forgiven for his sins – and he called himself the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1:15) – but forgiveness does not bring forgetfulness. I doubt that he was ever completely at peace with his past.

So – try not to have a “past” that will erode your peace in the future.

Our equation is this: Purity (following God’s timeline) = Peace

We have peace and freedom as reasons to wait. Freedom is implied in vv 8:11-14.

Song 8:11-12 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.

12 My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred.

The thousand pieces of silver is a small fortune and 200 pieces is still a handsome sum. Baal-hamon is a few miles south of Megiddo (several days journey north from Jerusalem.)

So we have a contrast between the vast wealth of Solomon, who rented out his vineyards to tenant farmers, and the bride’s vineyard. The reference might be to Solomon’s mighty harem – 700 wives and 300 concubines. That man must have shopped for Viagra by the truckload at Costco.

SHE speaks in these verses as if addressing Solomon himself. She says, “You may be a rich dude with your shiny striped pants, top-hat and cane, and all your fancy-shmancy wealth and wall-to-wall women - but I and my beloved know more about true love, the love between one woman and one man, than you do. Keep your wealth; I prefer love.”

And now we come to vv. 8:13-14 where Solomon exeunts stage left leaving the bride and groom to address each other.

HE

13 O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice; let me hear it.

SHE

14 Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

HE is inviting her to speak and she does, once again issuing an invitation to intimacy. And now, lest we become voyeurs, we will take our leave of them.

One man. One woman. One marriage. That's godly peace and freedom.

Are we done? Are we there yet? Was it good for you too?

Almost. But I see you wondering to yourself – “Sure, this is nice and all but what has it got to do with eschatology?”

The word “eschatology” comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means “last.” Eschatology is the study of the last days or the end times, death, resurrection, judgment.

We see in v14 that, as Duane Garrett phrases it, “She is calling on him to make love to her.”

That is the end of the book. Not the actual consummation - “And then he began rooting for truffles in my garden.” Not the declaration “And, finally, my beloved is mine and I am his.” Not even another adjuration to the Daughters of Jerusalem – “Put a lid on it, sisters!”

The book ends with her arms outstretched towards him. Thus, the book ends with the same kind of longing that we saw at the beginning in v1:2 “Let him kiss me.”

This longing leaves the reader longing for more. The Song is not done. Love is not done. God is not done. And so we have this eschatological angst – What will happen next? Well, next comes Isaiah and the prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles and then the Book of Revelation.

Rev 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” –

The bride has prepared herself by remaining pure.

Rev 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Bridegroom, Jesus, says “Surely I am coming soon.”
The Bride, the Church, says “Come.”

Note that the Bible ends in the same manner as the Song ends. With anticipation. With longing. With waiting until the right time, when the marriage has taken place.

We extend our arms out, waiting in eschatological angst, for the return of Jesus, at which time “the yearning for love [that] fills the cosmos” can finally be met.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 WAITING for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Soli Deo gloria!

Comment:

LuAnn Woody:

Thank you, Kevin, for your well-researched comments flavored with just the right amount of humor. I am sorry Tom is not with us to enjoy your writing, but on the other side of the veil, Lord willing, there will opportunity to rejoice together.

Comment:

Butch O'Neal:

Thank you, Kevin!!!!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

Coming soon to our next two week meeting! "Thoughts on the Song of Solomon" by Kevin Crittenden. For spiritually Mature Audiences only!

Comment:

Marc Hermon:

As far as Ginger goes, she has been my radiant bride and love of my life for over 25 years and as the joke has been spread around the church I usually introduce myself as "Ginger's husband"! I happily bask in her glow!

Replies:

Ginger Hermon:

My love! Basking in my glow! 🥰 AKA: Just another romantic Thursday reading Kevin's post in the Song of Solomon!



Kevin Crittenden:

Ginger Hermon - This picture warms my heart! If we were doing a Bible study through pictures, this scene would exemplify the joyous and Godly relationship that improves and matures throughout a lifetime of marriage.

Comment:

Ginger Hermon:

Kevin: first of all you are incredible at embellishments. Despite, thank you for the kind compliment. I'm embarrassed to admit this is the first I've read through the Bible (& I've been taught since infancy). I'm well versed in many books but have fallen short in my life to honor reading the Word. We've done a handful of 6 month NT readings as a family but this year has made a significant impact and been life-changing for me. I'm now fully committed to reading

daily. "Man shall not live by bread alone!" This study grew from you all helping me to stay accountable to now longing with great anticipation for more. Anyhow, I'm eternally grateful to you and everyone in this group. I can't thank you enough for the weekly vocabulary lessons, pain in my cheekbones (laughter), and incredible insight on the big picture and fine-tune details from each Thursday study. Truly I've been richly edified from your tireless efforts! Very thought-provoking! Thanks for sharing your life with us- your perspectives from not being raised by a spiritual leader during youth and for your honesty in reasons of accepting the plan of salvation later in life. We are so grateful for Kathleen winning you over to Christ through her love and example. 1 Peter 3:1. Grateful for your 42 years together! Enhanced and made noble your Song of Solomon posts! 💕 Once again thanks for Job, Proverbs, Ecc., & SofS! Keep teaching & writing - you have a gift!

Replies:

Butch O'Neal:
AMEN!!

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you! And yes, as I think of it, Kathleen is indeed one of the most incredible women I've ever been married to.

The mark of a worthwhile study, for me, is IF it helps somebody to make a decision to examine their long-standing beliefs and/or change their lives if that is called for. This year-long study from everybody has had that effect on me so again, thank you!!

Comment:

Beverly Schoonover Wattenbarger:

Thanks, Kevin. You certainly do have a talent for writing and an incredible vocabulary and knowledge. Looking forward to 2018. God bless you and your family.

Comment:

Charles Fry:

<"You are Beautiful" gif>

Replies:

Marc Hermon:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=iFZVXeJwTf4>

"I Stand in Awe of You"

Kevin Crittenden:

Marc, Charles - Back at 'ya!

Comment:

Lowell Hermon:

Impressive, Brother!

Comment:

Craig Hensley:

This is an interesting topic. The linked article has an interesting take on this book. It, of course, is not the only argument for allegorical interpretation, but it is well thought out in my opinion. Much like Kevin Crittenden's well thought out work above.

<https://www.christianity.com/bible/books-of-the-bible/intended-allegory-song-of-solomon.html>
"Is There Intended Allegory in the Song of Solomon?"

Replies:

Charles Fry:

Long ago I read Watchman Nee's little book on the Song of Songs as a prophetic parallel for Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22ff) or really Christ and the believer, and thought it quite good. Not perfect, but quite good.

Comment:

Yvonna Hartman:

Thank you Kevin for all of your work. I have enjoyed reading your comments and looking up the definitions of words that I have never heard of and loved your humor. I do hope I meet you and your wife some day before this life ends, but if not I look forward to meeting you in heaven.

Replies:

Kevin Crittenden:

Thank you, Yvonna. Are you also in the Midwest? It is not out of the realm of possibility that we come out that way sometime; I'm not much of a traveler but that's a topic for a different time. And, of course, if you've never been to California, then you will be in for a treat if you travel here. We attend the San Jose Church of Christ along with Butch. Charles visits us from time-to-time from his home congregation in Bakersfield; I think that Butch and I have almost persuaded him to try suspenders again. However, Charles isn't as interested in his personal sartorial splendor as he is in edifying our congregation and encouraging the brethren. I'm on to give my first sermon sometime in March on the topic of glossophobia in the Bible. :-)

