

Whippersnapper. Upstart.  
Charisma?  
Foolish youth, tossing out the past.  
Visionary,  
lacking old expectations  
so able to see?  
Mystic or misanthrope?  
Hard to tell.  
At first.  
Time tells.  
Life tells.  
Those who come later know  
what earlier folk  
learned the hard way.  
Live by opinion polls,  
die by opinion polls.

God, Socrates said  
“Be as you wish to seem.”  
Help me to win your popularity poll,  
not the media’s.

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# Chapter Five

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## Stand in Awe of God

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5.1-2

As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut. It is evil to make mindless offerings to God. <sup>2</sup>Don't make rash promises, and don't be hasty in bringing matters before God. After all, God is in heaven, and you are here on earth. So let your words be few.<sup>(NLT)</sup>

Take the cotton from your ears  
so you can hear God.  
Put cotton in your mouth  
for you have nothing to teach Him.  
When did Sunday dresses  
become t-shirts and cut-off jeans?  
Who let people start applauding in church?  
Holy, holy, holy.  
Holy is his name.

Lord God, teach me to pray,  
and teach me that listening is worth more  
than telling in prayer.

- 5.3 As a dream comes when there are many cares,  
so the speech of a fool when there are many  
words.
- 5.4-7 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in  
fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your  
vow. <sup>5</sup>It is better not to vow than to make a vow and  
not fulfill it. <sup>6</sup>Do not let your mouth lead you into sin.  
And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My  
vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at  
what you say and destroy the work of your hands?  
<sup>7</sup>Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.  
Therefore stand in awe of God.<sup>(NIV)</sup>

Sleep like a baby.  
Two hours, cry, attention, sleep.  
Restful? Well, yes.  
For a baby's sleep lacks fear,  
prosperes in trust.  
A infant's sleep escapes care,  
nestles in faith.  
Promises unkept, debt unpaid,  
what could that mean?  
We sleep to nightmares  
then cry for our missteps  
until from humbled hearts  
our cares fall away  
when we stand in awe of God.

God, I've messed up my life. Fix it, please.  
Show me again the peace, trust, and love  
I once felt  
before I tried to run my life.

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## Riches Are Meaningless

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5.8-9

If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. <sup>9</sup>The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.<sup>(NIV)</sup>

Bureaucrats and poor you'll always have.  
Taxes on tariffs on taxes.  
Laws mandate fairness despite common sense  
while the poor dig through garbage for food.  
People help people  
with minimal waste.  
Nations waste dollars  
to give poor folks dimes.  
Why go through bureaus, agencies, nations?  
Is person-to-person too hard?  
Maybe. Up close and  
personal is  
just  
so  
personal.

God, grant me the courage to love your  
people,  
to see through the dirt and despair.

5.10-11

Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! <sup>11</sup>The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth – except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers!<sup>(NLT)</sup>

So, how do you get it?  
True happiness.  
Fly first class?  
Go to exotic places?  
I've tried the second,  
not the first  
exactly.  
Fun while it lasts.  
Sort of.  
Gift giving?  
Sometimes. And sometimes I resent  
the gift I gave.  
Life's easier with it, the money.  
But with enough, not with  
too much.

Thanks for the money.  
I know it's in trust. So use it —  
and me —  
as you will.

5:12

People who work hard sleep well, whether they eat little or much. But the rich seldom get a good night's sleep.

5:13-15

There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. <sup>14</sup>Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, and everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children. <sup>15</sup>We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us.

5:16-17

And this, too, is a very serious problem. People leave this world no better off than when they came. All their hard work is for nothing – like working for the wind. <sup>17</sup>Throughout their lives, they live under a cloud – frustrated, discouraged, and angry.<sup>(NLT)</sup>

Evil grows from strong roots  
nourished with wants, desires, envy of

Joneses.

If I had a million, I'd be content.

Oops, make that ten.

Hey, hers is bigger than mine!

Foul! Unfair.

My stuff.

Stuffed in closets, sheds, drawers.

Stacked stuff on every surface.

I'm suffocating in stuff

but where'd I lose the joy?

I've dug through every pile,  
plowed through each drawer.

The joy's escaped.

Frustration

affliction

anger.

No joy.

Deliver me from stuff. Fill me with joy.

Release me from the bondage of  
my success. Please. Please.

5.18-20

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God. <sup>20</sup>He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. <sup>(NIV)</sup>

Paul learned to be content  
in every circumstance.  
He learned, acquired the skill.  
What a blessing not to have concern  
about the days of life, about tomorrow.

God, keep me occupied  
with gladness of  
heart.

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## Chapter Six

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6.1-2

I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: <sup>2</sup>God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

6.3-6

A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. <sup>4</sup>It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. <sup>5</sup>Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man – <sup>6</sup>even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?<sup>(NIV)</sup>

Dying in the right order.  
Parents, children, then grandchildren.  
The pain of early death  
stands stark, naked, clear.  
The pain of a miserable octogenarian  
never to have known contentment  
passing from emotional pain —  
better to have quality  
no matter how short the life.  
Do not all go to the same place?

God, I know you love me.  
I know you're fair.  
I know the deck's not stacked against me.  
Help me accept with joy and peace  
your gift of grace, offered freely  
whether I accept  
or not.

- 6.7 All man's efforts are for his mouth,  
yet his appetite is never satisfied.
- 6.8 What advantage has a wise man  
over a fool?  
What does a poor man gain  
by knowing how to conduct himself before  
others?
- 6.9 Better what the eye sees  
than the roving of the appetite.  
This too is meaningless,  
a chasing after the wind.
- 6.10 Whatever exists has already been named,  
and what man is has been known;  
no man can contend  
with one who is stronger than he.
- 6.11 The more the words,  
the less the meaning,  
and how does that profit anyone?
- 6.12 For who knows what is good for a man in life,  
during the few and meaningless days he passes  
through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will  
happen under the sun after he is gone?<sup>(NIV)</sup>

Why worry? What good will it do?  
The one thing man tries to do  
leaves him still short of the goal —  
    food and appetite,  
    property and desire for more,  
learning etiquette, succeeding by the rules.  
    Look around.  
    It's enough.  
Seeking more, more rewards like handfuls of  
    wind.  
Cut out the thinking, the reasoning, the  
    arguments.  
    Enough of words. Enough.  
    You'll never figure it out  
as long as you wander the world.  
    Trust him. He's God!  
    Lord of creation, of yesterday,  
    today, and tomorrow.

Open my heart. Let me turn it over to you.  
I don't need to figure it out.

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# Chapter Seven

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## Wisdom

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- 7.1 A good name is better than fine perfume,  
and the day of death better than the day of  
birth.
- 7.2 It is better to go to a house of mourning  
than to go to a house of feasting,  
for death is the destiny of every man;  
the living should take this to heart.
- 7.3 Sorrow is better than laughter,  
because a sad face is good for the heart.
- 7.4 The heart of the wise is in the house of  
mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in the house of  
pleasure.<sup>(NIV)</sup>

Why? How?  
What are you teaching, Teacher?  
Mourning's better?  
All well and good with a belief in  
life after death, but wasn't your thinking stuck  
in Sheol, in nothingness?  
What good comes from mourning  
without that faith?  
Clarity. Understanding of importance.  
Knowing what's trivial.  
And what's not.  
Belief in goodness without any proof,  
absent logic or reason or confirmation.  
Somehow death carries victory.  
Explanations? I've none.  
I just know death affirms life.

Lord God, be with me at my death.  
More urgent, though, assure those who  
love me of your love.  
Assure them of the decency of life.  
And me, when I'm the mourner.

- 7.5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke  
than to listen to the song of fools.
- 7.6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot,  
so is the laughter of fools.  
This too is meaningless.<sup>(NIV)</sup>