

Crackling thorns under a pot.
Laughter of fools.
Who's the fool? Isn't it the one not
taking delight in the crackling and the
laughter?
But joy comes too in words that sting
for the sting comes from truth.
Truth,
no matter how painful,
yields joy
like the crackling of thorns
under the pot.

God, give us joy when we see
the meaningless
parts of life,
when sounds, sights, smells
give little pleasures.
Make me a laughing fool,
at least
part of the time.

7.7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and
a gift destroyeth the heart.^(KJV)

Mad as Hell.
Not going to take it any more.
Cruel, unjust treatment,
oppression.
You don't have to treat me
like this, God!
I resent it.
I resent life.
I resent you.
What brought me here?
What happened?
I had everything I wanted.
I could
be
somebody!
The oughts, the shoulds, the talent —
they got in the way, destroyed me.

It's not the gifts you gave,
it's my insecurity in my ability
to use them
that destroyed my heart. God,
thanks for the gifts. Give me confidence
you'll use them — and me.

7.8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.^(KJV)

Patience is better than pride.
How true it is!
I've been proud. God took my pride away
and made me happy instead.
God gave me patience to wait for
the good stuff.
But the gift that destroys,
you bet.
Been there, received that.
Too much. Too lavish.
Insecurity wrapped,
and the giver keeps it like
the gifted.

God, what a gift!
Keep giving me patience. Keep dousing my
pride.
Just love me like you always have
but let me realize it. Thanks.

- 7.9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.
- 7.10 Do not say, “Why were the old days better than
these?”
For it is not wise to ask such questions.
- 7.11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing
and benefits those who see the sun.
- 7.12 Wisdom is a shelter
as money is a shelter,
but the advantage of knowledge is this:
that wisdom preserves the life of its
possessor.
- 7.13 Consider what God has done:
Who can straighten
what he has made crooked?^(NIV)

Doctors? Engineers?
How straight should it be?
Would The Teacher have written this
in the 21st Century?
Maybe today he'd think money might
buy sufficient care to
preserve the possessor's life.
Did God make crooked stuff?
If God knows as much more as
we know than The Teacher,
who knows?
Just God.

Lord, I'm lacking knowledge
and trust. I probably can't
handle the knowledge, so
if you will,
just give me the trust.

- 7.14 When times are good, be happy;
but when times are bad, consider:
God has made the one
as well as the other.
Therefore, a man cannot discover
anything about his future.
- 7.15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen
both of these:
a righteous man perishing in his
righteousness,
and a wicked man living long in his
wickedness.
- 7.16 Do not be overrighteous,
neither be overwise —
why destroy yourself?
- 7.17 Do not be overwicked,
and do not be a fool —
why die before your time?
- 7.18 It is good to grasp the one
and not let go of the other.
The man who fears God will avoid all
extremes.^(NIV)

Overrighteous. Overwicked.

Overwise. A fool.

Why not “overfoolish?”

Are there degrees of foolhardiness?

Fear God so you will avoid extremes.

But what about the church at Laodicea?

What about “would that you were hot or cold
but you’re neither so I’ll spit you out?”

Damned if we do and damned if we don’t?

Hey, The Teacher suggests we all go to the
same place.

Grasp one, hold onto the other.

Choose your position without

becoming a robotic follower

of an outspoken leader.

Fear God, and be yourself.

God, I want to see the big picture,

to work for the right causes.

Lead me to your causes and give me
the wisdom and power to do your work.

7.19 One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town!^(NLT)

Don't dress that way – people will talk.
Don't say things like that – others won't
approve.

The rules of our parents?

The practice of our adult lives?

One cannot rule a country based on the polls.

Leadership means standing in front and,
well,
leading.

God, help me listen to you
rather than the voices of disapproval
all around me.

Let me know the right
then fearlessly pursue that course.

- 7.20 Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.
- 7.21 Don't eavesdrop on others – you may hear your servant curse you. ²²For you know how often you yourself have cursed others. ^(NLT)

What you think of
me
is none of
my
business.

What I think you should do
is none of
my business.

From the skin in,
I can change.

From the skin out,
that's beyond my control.

You and me,
God.

That's all I have to please.

Me
and
You.

7.23-25

I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, “I am determined to be wise.” But it didn’t work. ²⁴Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. ²⁵I searched everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness.^(NLT)

We may with advantage
at times forget
what we know.*
My head gets in the way,
wants to control,
wants to dictate,
demands at least to sit as lifeguard
to watch over what God does
in me, to me,
as though I had more sense,
as though I could manage
me or anything else.
I don't understand this stuff,
this living.
I need to act as if I do
while God takes the reins
and carries me
beyond my wildest dreams.

God, help me forget what I know,
to make room for
believing what I cannot fathom.

*Publilius Syrus

- 7.25 So I turned my mind to understand, to
investigate
and to search out wisdom and the scheme of
things and to understand the stupidity of
wickedness
and the madness of folly.
- 7.26 I find more bitter than death
the woman who is a snare,
whose heart is a trap
and whose hands are chains.
The man who pleases God will escape her,
but the sinner she will ensnare.
- 7.27 “Look,” says the Teacher,
“this is what I have discovered:
“Adding one thing to another to discover the
scheme of things —
- 7.28 while I was still searching
but not finding —
I found one upright man among a thousand,
but not one upright woman among them all.
- 7.29 This only have I found:
God made mankind upright,
but men have gone in search of many
schemes.”^(NIV)

Grrr.

A woman needs a man
like a fish needs a bicycle.

Grrr.

Still...

A leader cannot be tethered to
an over-possessive or manipulative
partner.

There's truth behind the idea
behind every leader there's a good
spouse,
even if he's a husband.

God, help me understand
I tend to reach the level of those around me.
Lead me to associate with great people
and to listen to an awesome God.

Chapter Eight

- 8.1 How wonderful to be wise,
to analyze and interpret things.
Wisdom lights up a person's face,
softening its harshness.^(NLT)

Dogs know good people.
People can, too.
We become on the outside
as we are inside.

God, fix me, inside and out.

Obey the King

- 8.2-4 Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. ³Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. ⁴Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?"
- 8.5 Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm,
 and the wise heart will know the proper time
 and procedure.
- 8.6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter,
 though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.^(NIV)