

A Time for Verse

Poetic Ponderings on Ecclesiastes

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Introduction

Somewhere along the way, folks developed the habit of dishonesty with God. We speak to him – even of him – in hushed tones, reverently, even when we want to shout at him. Dare we question him? Can God be challenged? Not unless you’re crazy! Who wants to be crazy?

The practice of forced reverence isn’t healthy, wise, or honest. God’s tough. He can tolerate questioning, like Gideon asking for a physical sign. Twice. And that after the first miraculous proof! God stands up well to argument, as when Abraham convinced him to spare Sodom for the lives of fifty righteous men, then whittled down to forty-five, then forty, thirty, and finally ten. God allows us to negotiate, as when Deborah pleaded for a man to lead the army God called her to raise, and when Moses needed a spokesman in his place – a prophet – and God offered Aaron to address Pharaoh.

The Teacher who wrote Ecclesiastes knew this. He knew God trusts our intellect. Well, maybe he laughs at it rather than trusting it, but he certainly tolerates it. Heck, he made it, why wouldn’t he? The Teacher knew God hears our questions. Maybe he also knew God occasionally answers, as he did to Job, “That’s my business, not yours.” But it’s okay. That’s how we talk

to the people we know. And knowing God liberates one's spirit, soul, and body!

Who wants to be crazy? Maybe nobody. But what a liberating truth the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous uncovered, knowing a fundamental step to a sane life is admitting our insanity, confessing we're crazy.

And we can share our audacious ideas freely. *Meaningless*. Dare we judge God's creation? The Teacher did. Everything is meaningless? Well, first let's define "meaning." Perhaps "subject to a reasoned explanation."

How crazy is that?

Chapter One

- 1.1 These are the words of the Teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem.^(NLT)

Solomon the Teacher?
son of David, Jerusalem's ruler,
or son of son of Solomon son of David
of some generation?
Odd statement of credentials,
starting with teacher,
not king, not lineage.
Or did the writer lead with the strongest title?
"Hey, The Teacher here,
and I'll be your Writer for this book."
The slanted light in which we see ourselves
jerks the world to "Huh?"
God named him Jedidiah, God's beloved.
Who named him Solomon or peaceful, complete,
prosperous?
Did The Teacher feel beloved of God?
His words belie peace, completion.
Can prosperity survive without
love, peace, completion?

God, you've told me I'm your beloved.
Teach me to accept the love.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with
me.

- 1.2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!”
 says the Teacher.
 “Utterly meaningless!
 Everything is meaningless.”
- 1.3 What does man gain from all his labor
 at which he toils under the sun?^(NIV)

We sweat. We strain.
Our bodies ache, we're wracked with pain.
Hammerstein understood The Teacher,
knew the spirit of TGIF.
Toil is toil.
Truth at least
for the three thousand odd years
between two writers.
Bodies ache from carpal tunnel.
Meaningless is meaningless.
Sometimes, though, it's not.
Did The Teacher think his toil meaningless?
Did Hammerstein?
I don't.

God, you make meaningful my meaningless life.
You endue tedium with consequence.
Grant me the humility to grant you control and
dominance.

- 1.4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
- 1.5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
- 1.6 The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.
- 1.7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.^(NIV)

Has the time come for a rewrite?
The earth remains, forever?
Ice ages, sun spots,
perhaps The Teacher had wisdom
three thousand years before his time.
They say "some things never change."
They say we're a half degree warmer than
our greatgrands.
Isaiah chimed in "The arrogance of man will be
brought low
and the pride of men humbled;
the LORD alone will be exalted in that day."*
Stewards we must be. Responsibility?
Not ours. Thank God.

Thanks, God.

* Isaiah 2.1 (NIV)

- 1.8 All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.^(ASV)

Yeah, yeah. I know. The trees are budding,
birds fly in formation, sunsets paint the sky.

A child's smile, a bridegroom's tear —

“things” should touch my heart.

So why don't they?

Instead I see the filthy, the tedious, the
reprehensible.

Nobody can spell.

Heck, they can't even string a sentence
together.

I can't count on anybody to do anything right,
to follow through, to see to detail.

And I don't have time.

All things are wearisome. Life is wearisome.

God, shatter my shell so the world can flood
my soul.

I want to feel, even if it's pain. I want to live.

I need to live in your love.

- 1.9 What has been will be again,
 what has been done will be done again;
 there is nothing new under the sun.
- 1.10 Is there anything of which one can say,
 “Look! This is something new”?
 It was here already, long ago;
 it was here before our time.
- 1.11 There is no remembrance of men of old,
 and even those who are yet to come
 will not be remembered
 by those who follow.^(NIV)

The Teacher's words belie the truth,
for we know him, hear him, remember him.

What about me?

My published writing, more massive than his,
will likely swim in cyberspace and pixels,
unnoticed forever,
dampness, not even a drop,
in vast oceans of words.

And my sons? More durable than words?
They can glorify my name or make all revile it.
So throw in life everlasting, stir up the
equation with
concepts The Teacher never guessed.
What has been will be again.

Life never ends.

Love never ends.

Praise God!

God, you are the same today as you were in
The Teacher's day.
Thank you.

Wisdom Is Meaningless

1.12-14

I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
¹³I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! ¹⁴I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.^(NIV)

Whoa. What happened to verse?

Is this more important? Less?

“To explore by wisdom.”

Armchair travel taken to a new extreme
for the exploration is of the mind, the unseen.

He chose this path – he doesn’t say God
guided him there.

How could he have seen all things?

Did he circle the globe?

Why didn’t he tell folks about the roundness?

“Meaningless” is King James’ “Vanity.”

Is The Teacher calling God vain? Look in a
mirror, buddy.

Chasing after the wind is tedious
only if folks expect to catch it.

God, I surrender all.

I lay down my analytical skills
when it comes to your work, like a soldier
surrendering by setting down his weapon,
waiting to be told what to do, where to go.

- 1.15 What is twisted cannot be straightened;
 what is lacking cannot be counted.^(NIV)

Oh, but I could try, couldn't I?
No. He's right. Even straightened,
bends make weak spots.
And you can't count what's not there
though it's never stopped me from trying.
When this book is finished, I can sell it.
With the money I'll...
I'll count it when it's done and sold.
Now I've 207 verses to go.
Here and now is what I've got.
Yesterday's saved as joys or regrets.
Tomorrow's beyond my reach.
So right now, today, I might affect —
might make joys — for tomorrow.
Or regrets.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.”

- 1.16 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.
- 1.17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
- 1.18 For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.^(KJV)

Wisdom resembles madness and folly.
Chasing folly's more fun, catching's less.

He's being vain again.

Ever want to be a simpleton?

Ever envy a dog's life? Chasing folly.

Hiding bones.

Scratching. Sleeping.

Romping.

Ever envy a dog's life?

The faith of a little child,

simple faith,

no complications, great rewards.

Heaven.

Like riches, wisdom hinders the quest.

Bones stay hidden

for we're too smart to dig

for the fun of it.

God, when you made me smart were you mad
at me? Didn't you know I needed peace?
Let there be peace on earth. And please
count me in on it.

Chapter Two

Pleasures Are Meaningless

^{2.1-3} I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. ²“Laughter,” I said, “is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?” ³I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly – my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.^(NIV)

Spoil sport.
Norman Cousins said laughter could cure you
physically. Mentally, too.
Could it be you confuse cheer with beer?
Is foolish so bad?
We already discounted the opposite,
the wisdom.
Isn't childish the same as foolish?
Surrender's the key. And the key
doesn't work with wisdom's
manipulation.

God, help me discard my sanctimonious
wisdom
and joyfully embrace laying down control
again, as that soldier lays down his weapon in
surrender.
I sit, awaiting your instructions.

2.4-8 I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. ⁷I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!

1.9 So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me.^(NLT)

I, I, I, I, I.

Aye-yiyi-yi-yi.

I acquired. I conquered. I amassed
all the delights of the heart of man.

I had it all, even wisdom.

And still he writes that all is vanity, all is
meaningless.

Yep. Been there. Done that. Felt the same.

God, deliver me from what I want.

Please give me what I need.

- 2.10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.
- 2.11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after
the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.^(NIV)

You like my poetry?
These silly baubles? They're nothing.
Don't look at me. Don't see what I've done.
I know you'll see I'm a fraud.
Your kind words can't be meant,
just platitudes,
white lies playing nice.
How can my work have merit?
A wise woman said
I should love myself
as I am.
She claimed
I'd never like the new
improved
me
otherwise.

God, teach me to love myself
as I love my neighbor,
as I love you.

Wisdom and Folly Are Meaningless

- 2.12 Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,
and also madness and folly.
What more can the king's successor do
than what has already been done?^(NIV)

Wisdom, madness and folly —
a cornucopia of possibilities.
Like a president worried about his legacy.
And my legacy? Yours?
What more can a body do
than what has already been done?
Must each generation top their parents?
Can each generation forge ahead?
In what area?
Madness?
Folly?
Wisdom?
Faithfulness?

God, keep my eyes on the prize, on what
matters.
Set aside pettiness, competition, rivalry.
Let me excel in faith.
And peace.

2.13-16 I thought, “Wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. ¹⁴For the wise can see where they are going, but fools walk in the dark.” Yet I saw that the wise and the foolish share the same fate. ¹⁵Both will die. So I said to myself, “Since I will end up the same as the fool, what’s the value of all my wisdom? This is all so meaningless!” ¹⁶For the wise and the foolish both die. The wise will not be remembered any longer than the fool. In the days to come, both will be forgotten.^(NLT)

“Are we there yet?”
What of the joy of the trip?
Why obsess with the end result?
Can we not see the beauty as we pass?
Can we not build experiences and experience
joys?
Why do we focus only on the end?
If the reward is all it’s about,
why do we try so hard
to postpone it?

God, don’t let me wish my life away.
Show me the sights I would miss if I don’t pay
attention
to
today.

Toil Is Meaningless

2.17-23

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²²What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.^(NIV)

Giving away things seems easier
for the old.

What I treasured at twenty —
would fight to keep —
sixty years later
can easily go to a youngster
who will treasure it.

What if I'd passed it by for fear
of having to
give it up?

Both would be robbed — I of the joy of
holding and passing the joy,
the youth of treasuring it for it was mine.
Meaningless? Worry is meaningless.

God, help me see those people miserable
as The Teacher. Help me to help them love.

2.24-26

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.^(NIV)

God's grinning, I bet.
He treats us all alike,
those who please him – all of us —
and the sinners – all of us.
The difference is our own outlook,
our perception of fairness.
A person in sync with God
gains wisdom, knowledge,
happiness,
by gathering, storing, passing on.
God, help me grin, work, and enjoy.

Chapter Three

A Time for Everything

- 3.1 There is an appointed time for everything. And
there is a time for every event under heaven —
- 3.2 A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is
planted.
- 3.3 A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- 3.4 A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
- 3.5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather
stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun
embracing.^(NASB)

Turn around and turn again.
There was a time before the Byrds.
Turn the page, turn again.
There were the words before the Byrds.
Centuries before. Millennia before.
There was the truth of the words before.
We see our lives through a microscope.
God's huge view telescopes
the microscopic picture —
the whole mural as well as our square inch.
He knows times we need to hate, to uproot, to
throw away.
He loves us through those and
the times to love, to keep, to dance, and to
have peace.

God, thank you for all the times of our lives.
May we remember dancing while we mourn.
May we have peace in times of war.

- 3.6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
- 3.7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
- 3.8 A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.^(NASB)

Obsession.
I had it. I kept it.
It remains here.
No! I will not give up.
I will find it.
It's mine.
I give up seconds,
minutes, hours,
weeks,
months,
years,
but I will find it.
No matter what I miss
looking for the prize.

God, give me perspective.
Give me today
and keep me
from throwing it
away.

3.9-14 What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰I have seen the burden God has laid on men. ¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. ¹³That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. ¹⁴I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.^(NIV)

Ray Stevens, the Byrds, me?
The Teacher's a poet magnet.
The burden is beautiful.
The worker gains that from his toil, that
beautiful burden.
Eternity in the hearts of men,
a beautiful burden.
Understanding? Not a clue. We have no clue
from beginning to end.
Yet with the beautiful burden we are happy,
we do good!
While we live, we do good.
Doing good, we do well.
God's gift is commonplace: eat, drink,
find satisfaction.
Commonplace endures forever.
Magnificent, common, enduring.
What could be added or taken? Nothing.
Let us revere God of the beautiful burden.

Oh, yes! Sing along, for all – the whole kit and
caboodle – really is beautiful
in it's peculiar way. God is beautiful. Thank you,
God.

- 3.15 Whatever is has already been,
 and what will be has been before;
 and God will call the past to account.^(NIV)

What will be has been before,
and our God remembers it.
God recalls the future
like we remember
the past.
He's got the whole world in his hands.
God has the universe
and the time/space continuum
in his hands.
What? Should I worry? Me?

God, give us the power to trust
like a baby
grinning up at the outstretched arms
of a
loving parent.
Amen. So be it.

- 3.16 And I saw something else under the sun:
In the place of judgment – wickedness was
there,
in the place of justice – wickedness was
there.
- 3.17 I thought in my heart,
“God will bring to judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time for every deed.”^(NIV)

God the judge. God the bogeyman.

No!

Judge yes. Bogeyman, no way.

A judge is just.

With Paul we cry, "I do what I don't want to do.

What I want to do I don't do."

Punishment can feel good, cleansing,
righteous.

Just.

Judges are trustworthy. God as judge
is trust.

Lord God, have mercy on me. Cleanse me,
wash me,
free me from the burden of guilt I have carried
all these years.

There's wickedness in my heart.

Please bring
judgment.

Love me enough to set me straight, God.

- 3.18 I said in my heart, It is because of the sons of men, that God may prove them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts.
19For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no preeminence above the beasts: for all is vanity.
- 3.20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
- 3.21 Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?^(ASV)

Jesus loves the little children,
furry, scaly, man or beast.
We don't deserve God's love.
Who's to say we get it more than the
creatures?
Why not enjoy work? Life's too short not to.
We need not worry, need not plan,
need not take charge.
That's God's job, and he enjoys it.
I'm content to enjoy my job and
leave the driving to God.

God, make it true. Give me contentment.
Love me as unconditionally as my dog does.
Help me to love —
and trust —
you that way,
too.

- 3.22 Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him back to see what shall be after him?^(ASV)

“I rejoice in my works.”
I did a good job.
My work’s excellent.
Boy, does that feel wrong.
Aw, it’s nothing.
Anybody could have done this.
It’s flawed, you know.
See this tittle? It’s off a smidgen.
The works sub-par, you know.
No. There are flaws,
but I worked hard.
I can do better later,
as I continue to learn,
to grow. But this is okay. It works.
It holds its own.

God, thanks for giving me talent.
Help me to know I discredit you
when I disavow my God-given
abilities.

Chapter Four

Oppression, Toil, Friendlessness

- 4.1 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that
was taking place under the sun:
I saw the tears of the oppressed —
and they have no comforter;
power was on the side of their oppressors —
and they have no comforter.
- 4.2 And I declared that the dead,
who had already died,
are happier than the living,
who are still alive.
- 4.3 But better than both
is he who has not yet been,
who has not seen the evil
that is done under the sun.^(NIV)

God, you are our Lord as we
toil in this your world, through the
good, the bad, the ugly, the glorious.
You are our Lord who welcomes us to
the great family reunion in the sky
or some alternative site you have for Heaven,
a place our forebears – and we – could not
imagine.

You are Lord of those yet to be, those
who exist only as a figment of your imagination
before they take on a life we can comprehend.
You are our comforter in each stage and age.
When we are oppressed and cannot see,
we can stop and feel your presence,
your love,
your fatherly support.

Thank you, God, for being
God who is, God who was,
and God who will be
and for loving your children of all time.

- 4.4 And I saw that all labor and all achievement
spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is
meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
- 4.5 The fool folds his hands
and ruins himself.
- 4.6 Better one handful with tranquillity
than two handfuls with toil
and chasing after the wind.^(NIV)

Envy, the incredible
green
hulk.

The ultimate dearth of self esteem.

Resentment. Fists raised.

Eating poison to kill
someone else.

Tranquility, the vast
azure
ocean.

The pentacle of self esteem.

Acceptance. Hands filled.

Sharing five loaves
with 5000 with
plenty left.

God, take my resentments, my envy.
Replace them with benevolence, with joy, and
with a handful of tranquility.

- 4.7 Again I saw something meaningless under the
sun:
- 4.8 There was a man all alone;
he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,
yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
“For whom am I toiling,” he asked,
“and why am I depriving myself of
enjoyment?”
This too is meaningless —
a miserable business!
- 4.9 Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their
work:
- 4.10 If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!
- 4.11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep
warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?^(NIV)

The more we get together, together,
together, the happier we'll be.
Isolated is alone with myself.
Lonely is alone among you.
Solitary is alone with God.
Amoebas except for the moment of creation
stand isolated, alone, lonely.
Homo sapiens socialize.
Lie down with me. Keep me warm.
Inside
where the loneliness dwells.

Thank you for company,
for companionship,
for understanding.
Thank you for being my companion and my
God.

- 4.12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.^(NLT)

Loner.
All by myself, alone.
Standing on the sideline,
watching the action,
acting absorbed,
busy,
so you won't speak.
Loner. Lonely. Lonesome.
I stand in the corner,
sit to the side,
a wall at my back,
silent, unasking, protective.
You'd take my back? You'd help conquer
the fear, the fearsome?
And you, too?
I'm honored.
I'm enlivened.
Unbroken.

God, help me to know
help's there,
I don't have to stand alone.
Give me courage to accept
what's freely offered.

Advancement Is Meaningless

4.13-16

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. ¹⁴The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. ¹⁵I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. ¹⁶There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ^(NIV)

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.

Chapter Five

Stand in Awe of God

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. ²Don'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.^(NLT)

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. ⁵It is better not to vow than to make a vow and
not fulfill it. ⁶Do 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?
⁷Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.
Therefore stand in awe of God. ^(NIV)

Sleep like a baby.
Two hours, cry, attention, sleep.
Restful? Well, yes.
For a baby's sleep lacks fear,
prosper's 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.

Riches Are Meaningless

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. ⁹The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.^(NIV)

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! ¹¹The 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!^(NLT)

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. ¹⁴Money 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. ¹⁵We 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. ¹⁷Throughout their lives, they live under a cloud – frustrated, discouraged, and angry.^(NLT)

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. ¹⁹Moreover, 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. ²⁰He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. ^(NIV)

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.

Chapter Six

6.1-2

I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: ²God 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. ⁴It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. ⁵Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man – ⁶even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?^(NIV)

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?^(NIV)

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.

Chapter Seven

Wisdom

- 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.^(NIV)

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.^(NIV)

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 Laodícea?

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)

Who but the king would say this?

Who can say to him

“What’s that you’re up to?”

Somebody foolish.

Somebody brave.

Somebody unafraid of death.

Or worse.

Sometimes a statesman would,

a patriot,

a person who listens to God first

then dares to follow.

God, teach us to pick our fights

but to be willing to fight for you.

- 8.7 Since no man knows the future,
who can tell him what is to come?
- 8.8 No man has power over the wind to contain it;
so no one has power over the day of his
death.
As no one is discharged in time of war,
so wickedness will not release those who
practice it.^(NIV)

Wickedness will not release.
How do you break free?
Only with the aid of a higher power.
The higher power can give you power.
Power over the wind to contain it?
Maybe.
Power over the day of your death?
Absolutely.
Not to change anything,
but to have serenity.
Power to be in the presence of peace.
Peace doesn't release you, either.

God, hold me in your peace.
Let me always remember you're
tougher than wickedness.

8.9-10

All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. ¹⁰Then too, I saw the wicked buried – those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.^(NIV)

“When in the course of human events
it becomes necessary....”*

Tough times bring out the best —
and the worst —
in us.

But wait a minute. Go back to the first,
to “When.” To The Teacher’s “a time.”

Simple words?

No. Not simple, not here.

When’s it when? Who told the
scared patriots in Philadelphia heat?

“With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine
Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our
Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”*

I’m scared now like they were then.

God, I feel like Isaiah. Woe is me.

But if you say so, here I am.

Send me.**

* US Declaration of Independence

** Isaiah Chapter 6

8.11-13

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. ¹²Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. ¹³Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.^(NIV)

It's not FAIR!

Do you hear me? It's not FAIR!

A defendant before the bench with five cases
pleads to one or two with dismissals
for the rest. What?

Commit one and get two free?

A bargain!

One judge gives twenty years,
another, ten probated for the
same
crime.

It's not fair.

Me? I deserve three days
in an electric
chair.

It's not fair any of us get lenience.

I get relief from fear,
freedom from guilt,
joie de vivre.

Unrepentents feel that three days
every day.

Grace. Such a great gift, God.
I'm so glad you don't give me justice.

8.14-15

There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.
¹⁵So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.^(NIV)

What, me worry?
Sometimes it feels like
simple people have it easy,
they don't understand
the nuances. Or the themes.
They just live lives, not of quiet desperation,
but of simple joy.
The adoration of a dog,
warmth of the sun,
gentle soaking rain.
Would that I didn't understand
what's happening some days.
Yet the dog loves me, the sun's warm,
rains still fall.
Intellect doesn't stop the good stuff.
It just diverts my attention.

God, thanks for small joys.
Help me to enjoy the joy.

8.16-17

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth – his eyes not seeing sleep day or night – ¹⁷then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it. (NIV)

We cannot really comprehend it
but that doesn't stop our trying,
does it?

So the Bible supports
punishment as deterrence?
Slap the other guy's hand and I'll behave.
Actual innocence bugged The Teacher
long before DNA testing.
Eat, drink, be glad,
even if innocent and imprisoned.
Be glad, and have joy,
no matter what.
What doesn't matter.
Where's unimportant.

You and me, God.
Together. In Sync.
That matters.

Chapter Nine

A Common Destiny for All

9.1-2

So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. ²All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

As it is with the good man,
so with the sinner;
as it is with those who take oaths,
so with those who are afraid to take them.^(NIV)

No man knows whether love or hate awaits?

Hey, did he never try loving somebody
who hates him?

Yeah. Tough to do. But worth it?

You betcha.

Love your enemy because it drives him crazy.

Nope. Just do it.

Be good for nothing.

Love your enemy. Pray for who persecutes you.

Be the child of your Father in heaven.

Did Jesus really mean that stuff?

God, forgive me AS I have already
forgiven people who hurt me.

Help me to be freed
from resentment and hate.

9.3-4

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. ⁴Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!^(NIV)

Madness in their hearts.
Despair. Separation. Insanity.
He felt it, The Teacher.
He felt alone.
Alone like me
Alone like thousands.
Desperation. Hopelessness.
The same destiny overtakes all,
all join the dead.
Together.
Hopeless but together.
He knew, though, or sensed
another way.
Hope. A live dog.
Without the insanity. With hope.

Oh Lord, my hope and my redeemer,
thanks for the company here and now,
for the hope.

- 9.5 For the living know that they will die,
but the dead know nothing;
they have no further reward,
and even the memory of them is forgotten. ^(NIV)

He knows better now, doesn't he?
That Sheol, the mindless sleep of the dead,
was seeing through a glass darkly?
“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,
nor things present,
nor things to come,
nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the
love of God, which is in
Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
Nope. Nothing. Hell included.
Seeing through a glass darkly.

God, thanks for remembering me.
Thanks for clear glass sometimes
and faith all the time.

* Romans 8:38-39(KJV)

- 9.6 Their love, their hate
 and their jealousy have long since vanished;
 never again will they have a part
 in anything that happens under the sun.^(NIV)

You know how I imagine Hell?

Sitting around,

nothing to do,

floating on a cloud

strumming a four-string harp

all day

every day

forever

and

ever.

And ever.

For me and lots of folk eternity with God

is bliss.

For some folk eternity with God —

and themselves —

is Hell.

God, I have heaven on earth.

Hold me close, let it last forever.

And ever.

And EVER.

- 9.7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works.
- 9.8 Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil.
- 9.9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun.
- 9.10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest.^(ASV)

Eat, drink with gladness
clothed in white
with the love of your life.
The head anointed with oil
suited David in the 23rd Psalm.
It can't be all that bad.
Aromatic oil, I guess.
Early aromatherapy.
Somehow the meaningless
life in the sunshine
sounds pretty neat.

One day at a time, God.
Let me live day by day by day.
I'll not worry about tomorrow
or distant tomorrows. That's your job.

- 9.11 I have seen something else under the sun:
The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.
- 9.12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will
come:
As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so men are trapped by evil times
that fall unexpectedly upon them.^(NIV)

Grace. A free gift,
undeserved,
unearned,
just a gift.
I need not win the race
nor emerge victorious in battle.
I don't have to strike it rich
or rival Einstein.
I stretch out my hands
and gratefully accept
that which I could never merit.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
Thank you,
God of Peace
God of Love
God of Grace.

Wisdom Better Than Folly

9.13-16

I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me: ¹⁴There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. ¹⁵Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. ¹⁶So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

9.17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be
 heeded
 than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

9.18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
 but one sinner destroys much good.^(NIV)

Poor.

Wise for fifteen minutes of fame,
but poor before and afterwards.

Victorious
but forgotten.

Except by The Teacher.

Except by The Teacher, and you and me.

The powerful king, the small city,
maybe rich, maybe poor, but forgotten.

The wise man poor, forgotten, but
remembered.

God, give me wisdom, please.

If fame comes, too, okay.

But if it's a choice, give me wisdom.

Please.

Chapter Ten

- 10.1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell,
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
- 10.2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right,
but the heart of the fool to the left.
- 10.3 Even as he walks along the road,
the fool lacks sense
and shows everyone how stupid he is.^(NIV)

Dead flies give perfume a bad smell.

More than I want to know.

Dead flies – do they equate to
a little folly?

How many flies, how many lies,
add to up a greater mass
than wisdom and honor?

What is the measure?

The fool walking down the road
demonstrates his nature.

How? To whom?

Can everybody see
or only the wise, the honorable?

Dead flies, bad smell,
and lies.

We cannot long hide our essence.

Examine my heart.

You know who I am.

Let me be who we both want me to be.

- 10.4 If a ruler's anger rises against you,
do not leave your post;
calmness can lay great errors to rest.
- 10.5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun,
the sort of error that arises from a ruler:
- 10.6 Fools are put in many high positions,
while the rich occupy the low ones.
- 10.7 I have seen slaves on horseback,
while princes go on foot like slaves.^(NIV)

Fools equal the poor?

Rich means wise?

Rulers are fools?

Sometimes.

Certainly not always.

We generalize by the person on our mind,
assuming the example typifies the class.

We have names for that.

Blindness.

Intolerance.

Bigotry.

We have cures for that.

Tolerance.

Perception.

Love.

God, remove my prejudices.

Free me to see people as your children,
my siblings,
even when I'd prefer to be an only child.

- 10.8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it;
 whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten
 by a snake.
- 10.9 Whoever quarries stones may be injured by
 them;
 whoever splits logs may be endangered by
 them.
- 10.10 If the ax is dull
 and its edge unsharpened,
 more strength is needed
 but skill will bring success.^(NIV)

It's safer to stay home than to get in a car.
Trusting only in myself
refusing to make
friends
prevents friends from hurting me.
I can work decades at a tedious job
or dare to try my dream profession.
The first provides a living;
the second, life.

God, give me the skill to sharpen my ax
and the courage to use it.

- 10.11 If a snake bites before it is charmed,
there is no profit for the charmer.
- 10.12 Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious,
but a fool is consumed by his own lips.
- 10.13 At the beginning his words are folly;
at the end they are wicked madness —
- 10.14 and the fool multiplies words.
No one knows what is coming —
who can tell him what will happen after him?
- 10.15 A fool's work wearies him;
he does not know the way to town.^(NIV)

Words bite.
Give me sticks and stones.
They may break my bones,
but words after words after words
extinguish my anima,
crush my soul.
Why besiege those who matter most
with vile hatred?
Why treat the ones you love as you would
never treat a stranger?

Lord, let the words of my
mouth
and the meditations of my
heart
be
love.

- 10.16 Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant
and whose princes feast in the morning.
- 10.17 Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble
birth
and whose princes eat at a proper time —
for strength and not for drunkenness.^(NIV)

“Eat at a proper time. For strength.”
I’ve often eaten for weakness —
 stuffing my face —
 to bury pain, anger, humiliation.
I’ve eaten for strength, under God’s strength,
 ignoring the compulsion to eat
 but nourishing my body.
Like an alcoholic, I yield to my compulsion
 unless God sets it aside
 by mending the feelings,
 by giving me joy beyond what
 compulsion
 could ever yield.

God, move us beyond patches to
real cures, to comfort that really comforts.
Thank you for this gift.

- 10.18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag;
if his hands are idle, the house leaks.
- 10.19 A feast is made for laughter,
and wine makes life merry,
but money is the answer for everything.^(NIV)

Cause, effect.
Lazy, rafters sag.
Idle hands, leaks.
Stuipd computr games, blown deadlines.
Mañana mentality, irritability,
restlessness, discontentment.
Feasts are fun,
wine makes merry,
but feasts and wine
come with costs.
Who pays?
How great is the cost in lucre,
in lives?

God, yesterday I can't touch,
tomorrow I can't reach.
Today's ours to change —
to change today,
to fix yesterday,
and to craft tomorrow.
Help me, God.
Use me.

10.20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts,
or curse the rich in your bedroom,
because a bird of the air may carry your
words,
and a bird on the wing may report what you
say.^(NIV)

Electronic surveillance.
Microphones snatching words from great
distances.
Little birds on the wing.
Gossip.
Tell someone a secret, and soon
five hundred will not repeat it.
Words bite.
Our own words bite us.
But only when we're so
careless as to say something
we shouldn't.

God, make me as virtuous in private
as I want the world to believe me to be.

Chapter Eleven

Bread Upon the Waters

- 11.1 Cast your bread upon the waters,
for after many days you will find it again.^(NIV)

Bread upon the waters.
Bread. Food, sustenance.
Bread, the basics.
Bread, money, buying power.
Bread, life, hope,
our daily needs.
Bread. Alone.
The side it's buttered on.
So toss it.
Where?
Waters. Muddy, cool clear.
The Roman spa at Bath.
Oceans, streams, down by the crick.
Any waters, that's the point,
waters move, leave, change, evolve.
Beyond my control.

What I value most, what's most basic
to me, I release, I toss,
trusting I'll get it back,
in spades, God. But remind me
the point is I don't keep control,
can't do it for the promise. Just believe.

- 11.2 Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do
not
know what disaster may come upon the land.
- 11.3 If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain upon the earth.
Whether a tree falls to the south or to the
north,
in the place where it falls, there will it lie.^(NIV)

Give and you'll get.
Share, and you'll receive.
Teach somebody to learn the subject.
Cut out the "what if's."
Trust in God's goodness,
in his bounty.
But know it's better to give
than to receive, and giving
enhances the bounty received.

God, I'm centered in me unless
with your help
I have the joy of really participating
in your creation. Help me.

11.4

Whoever watches the wind will not plant;
whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

11.5

As you do not know the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's
womb,
so you cannot understand the work of God,
the Maker of all things.

11.6

Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let not your hands be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that,
or whether both will do equally well.^(NIV)

What if?
Contingency plans
in case
by chance
the worst should happen,
the end of time,
the big one,
global conflagration,
in the eventuality of
the unlikely,
the worrier is likely
not to lose
for, taking no action,
making no plans,
nothing's there,
come hell,
high water —
or good fortune ignored.

I have now, and now only,
but I can trust, work, prepare
for the bounty available,
the promises received.

Remember Your Creator While Young

- 11.7 Light is sweet,
and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.
- 11.8 However many years a man may live,
let him enjoy them all.
But let him remember the days of darkness,
for they will be many.
Everything to come is meaningless.
- 11.9 Be happy, young man, while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of
your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart
and whatever your eyes see,
but know that for all these things
God will bring you to judgment.
- 11.10 So then, banish anxiety from your heart
and cast off the troubles of your body,
for youth and vigor are meaningless.^(NIV)

Shadow makes the painting.
Sorrow colors life, gives it depth.
A child draws with bright colors,
 side by side
and we see it with loving eyes
 so it touches us.
Youth and vigor offer great joy and fun
 perhaps,
but who would go back
 and live it again
 without change?
Life is good. Live it.
 Rejoice in life,
 no matter what.

God, we can't see the full tapestry of our lives
but we trust you, the master weaver.
 I believe.
Heal my unbelief.

Chapter Twelve

- 12.1 Remember your Creator
in the days of your youth,
before the days of trouble come
and the years approach when you will say,
“I find no pleasure in them” —
- 12.2 before the sun and the light
and the moon and the stars grow dark,
and the clouds return after the rain;^(NIV)

Youth need not be wasted
on the young.
Nature may lead a child
to myopia
but grandparents,
teachers,
occasionally a parent
wise beyond years,
may plant seeds of
prescience, of discernment,
of faith.

Blessed indeed
is the beneficiary
of such a
bequest.

God, let me remember you now,
even when my youth has passed.
Let me remember you in sunlight and gloom,
in fair weather and foul.
Let me find pleasure in each day,
with you.

- 12.3 when the keepers of the house tremble,
 and the strong men stoop,
 when the grinders cease because they are
 few,
 and those looking through the windows grow
 dim;
- 12.4 when the doors to the street are closed
 and the sound of grinding fades;
 when men rise up at the sound of birds,
 but all their songs grow faint;
- 12.5 when men are afraid of heights
 and of dangers in the streets;
 when the almond tree blossoms
 and the grasshopper drags himself along
 and desire no longer is stirred.
 Then man goes to his eternal home
 and mourners go about the streets.^(NIV)

Hurdler,
colonel, engineer,
captain of the band.
Baritone, tinner,
mayor, leader —
you could do everything
but hula-hoop and fix my Timex.
Now muddled of mind,
breathless, a stranger
in your own head,
you plan the ordinary,
relearn the routine.
The chasm gapes.
Daddy, can I be the child again?

Thank you God for an eternal home
where mourners know the pain is gone.

- 12.6 Remember him – before the silver cord is
severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before
the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the
wheel broken at the well,
- 12.7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.
- 12.8 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.
“Everything is meaningless!”^(NIV)

Death comes suddenly,
like a lamp suspended by a cord
falls, shattering.
Slowly like a pitcher oozing water
through cracks
or like a well wheel refusing
to continue its gift of life.
Ashes to ashes,
dust to dust.
God continues.
Meaningless?
How did meaningless
become meaningful?
It has, you know.

God who was and is and is to be,
I trust you.

The Conclusion of the Matter

12.9-10

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.
¹⁰The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

12.11-12

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails – given by one Shepherd. ¹²Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

12.13

Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.

12.14

For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil. ^(NIV)

Of making many books, no end.
I've added to the pile.
Much study wearies the body,
makes the eyes burn,
but sometimes, just occasionally,
an idea springs forward,
a light,
a beacon.

Fear God.
Keep his commandments.
This is your whole duty.
What a glorious duty it is.

Praise God for life as it comes.
Praise him in sorrow, in joy, in loneliness,
from the masses,
hidden in my closet.
Praise God for giving life
meaning
even when it all seems meaningless.

About the Author

David had one son who became king, Solomon, and only Solomon was king over Israel, the only king other than David over all Israel, not merely the northern kingdom or southern kingdom, but this writer speaks of all the kings before him when only David and Saul ruled in Jerusalem over the Jews. He calls himself the “qohéleth” which translated into Greek as *ekklésiastes* and meant teacher/preacher/speaker. Scholars who discount Solomon as the author – among other reasons because he doesn’t use the most common Hebrew word for God – place him in the post-exilic period, perhaps 250 to 200 years before the Christian era. Whatever the time of writing, the prose and poetry is timeless, acknowledging longing in the human soul and, ultimately, the deity and nature of God – that he reveals himself and conceals himself, but ultimately is transcendent and sovereign. God is in charge. So says The Teacher.

About the Author

Barbara B. Rollins, like The Teacher, looks back on life after decades, after pursuing happiness and meaning through various courses – teacher, Christian educator, secretary, lawyer, judge, and writer. Married for decades, mother of grown sons, Sunday school teacher, Rotarian, Toastmaster, genealogist, historian, editor, and publisher, she's experienced the ups and downs of life. A student of the history of Twelve-Step programs, she draws understanding from eclectic literature and correspondents around the world. Her previously published works include a forensic series for children (*Blood Evidence, Cause of Death, Ballistics, and Fingerprint Evidence*), the young adult novel *Syncopaed Summer*, and the anthologies of Silver Boomer Books: *Silver Boomers, Freckles to Wrinkles*, and *This Path*. Barbara is a principal in Silver Boomer Books and makes her home in Abilene, Texas.

May God bless this offering.

These last two pages will be about the other books.

