

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.<sup>(KJV)</sup>

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.<sup>(KJV)</sup>

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?<sup>(NIV)</sup>

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.<sup>(NIV)</sup>

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!<sup>(NLT)</sup>

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 give me courage  
to 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. <sup>22</sup>For you know how often you yourself have cursed others. <sup>(NLT)</sup>

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. <sup>24</sup>Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. <sup>25</sup>I 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.<sup>(NLT)</sup>

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.”<sup>(NIV)</sup>

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.

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## Chapter Eight

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

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

God, fix me, inside and out.

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## Obey the King

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- 8.2-4 Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. <sup>3</sup>Do 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. <sup>4</sup>Since 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.<sup>(NIV)</sup>