

A Time
for Verse
Poetic Ponderings
on Ecclesiastes

Barbara B. Rollins



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3301 S 14th Suite 16 - PMB 134 Abilene TX 79605, Abilene, Texas

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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 millennia
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,
cyclical anomalies,
The Teacher's wisdom
epochs and eons 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)