

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 its 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 work’s 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 pinnacle 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)