

Wisdom

...for life's path



Selected Verses from

PROVERBS & ECCLESIASTES

Senior Bible Quizzing
EXPERIENCED PART 2

2022

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Word²U

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PROVERBS 26

Living in a “No Toxicity” Zone

In Proverbs 26, Solomon addresses foolish people, lazy people, gossipers, and liars. Most likely, Solomon spends time on these topics to help us identify these negative traits.

Many of the traits he identified could be referred as toxic in today’s vernacular. Toxic people disrupt our peace and drain us emotionally, and spiritually, if we are not careful. They are simply destructive in close friendships and intimate relationships. While there are many characteristics that could be associated with toxic people, an article from *Psychology Today* links toxicity to three fundamental personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Let’s start with simple definitions of each.

Narcissism is associated with exaggerated feelings of self-importance and superiority, a strong sense of entitlement, and vanity. These people have a deep need for attention and lack empathy for others.

Machiavellianism is a condition linked with being cunning, calculating, cold, and deceptive. These people are plotters and schemers.

Psychopathy is related to impulsivity, lack of conscience, and thrill-seeking. While a little spontaneity isn’t bad, these people are borderline criminal.

Commonalities between these personality types are that they are self-involved, highly opinionated about their personal viewpoints, and unable or unwilling to see their own vulnerabilities. They assume they know what’s best. Additionally, these people are apathetic. They simply don’t care what others think. They are also master manipulators, and “talk” people into doing things for them they don’t want to do themselves.¹

So, where does wisdom fit in? Solomon would not have described such individuals had he not been prepared to provide an alternative.

First, wisdom is avoiding toxic people and environments without casting judgment. Our spiritual feelers should raise the alarm when things seem off. We would do well to heed these warnings, regardless how popular, or outgoing, or attractive the person may be. Let the Spirit lead you, not your flesh.

Second, wise people bring others together. They are peacemakers. Unlike toxic people who bring out the worst in a person, wise people seek to bring out the best in others.

Our job is not to diagnose. We’re not psychologists trained to parse out personalities to diagnose mental conditions. Rather, our responsibility is to love others while at the same time guarding our own peace.



101

To Answer a Fool or Not Answer a Fool?

Memorization

Proverbs 26:4

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.

Proverbs 26:5

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Proverbs 26:11

As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.

Proverbs 26:12

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Proverbs 26:13

The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 25:11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 25:7

Do Proverbs 26:4 and 5 contradict each other? Verse 4 seemingly tells us not to answer a fool according to his folly whereas verse 5 instructs us to answer a fool according to his folly. In actuality, the verses describe when to answer a fool and how to respond.

First, Solomon had laid the groundwork in other passages about what he described as a fool. To summarize, these are folks who despise godly wisdom, think their way is right regardless of what God thinks, or who does not even believe in God. In our own dealings with these people, let's allow God to make the judgment call about whether one is a fool or not. Rather, let's check ourselves before we interact with such people.

This leads me to the second, and more important point, in describing how these two verses complement, rather than contradict, one another. Verse 4 warns us against arguing with such a person. If we do, we can easily degrade ourselves to their level. If a fool despises correction and wisdom, what makes you think you can change their mind? In many cases, it quickly turns into a confrontation. No one wins in a confrontation.

In verse 5, however, there are times when you simply must respond. For example, if the “fool” is spewing misinformation or is acting in a manner that is harmful, you may have to expose the foolishness. In this case, it is a response of reproof, not one of debate. They will likely reject the reproof, but you have spoken truth in love. You have provided the facts in a civil way and leave it to them to decide what to do with. You can only be responsible for your own actions, not theirs. Speak truth in love, use few words, and leave it in God's hands.

Prayer

Pray that God gives you the wisdom to understand when and how to respond when foolishness manifests.



102

Traits of the Slothful

Memorization

Proverbs 26:14

As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.

Proverbs 26:15

The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

Proverbs 26:16

The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

Proverbs 26:17

He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.

Proverbs 26:18

As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death,

Review

In Order: Proverbs 25:21, 22, 25, 27, 28; 26:4-5, 11-13

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 25:19

Solomon does not have a high opinion of lazy people. He has described the effects of slothfulness in earlier chapters, such as in Proverbs 12, 15 and 24. In Proverbs 26, he described a bit of a sluggard's character traits. Let's summarize:

- In verse 13, a lazy person makes excuses for not fulfilling his obligations. Some of his excuses are almost comical if they weren't so frustrating to those who depend upon them. In this verse, Solomon gives an example of why a person can't go to work. There's a lion in the streets. Usually, lions are in the brush not in public places. This guy really had to dig deep to find a reason not to go to work.
- In verse 14, a lazy person never grows spiritually. Like a doorknob that seems to show some forward progress when it's turned, they're locked in place. A knob stays fixed inside the door, just as a person who claims they want to change, but just never seems to put forth the effort.
- In verse 15, lazy people are easily wearied. It doesn't take much to wear them down.
- In verse 16, lazy people don't want to learn. They are happy to live in their naïve ignorance.

Hopefully, you aren't any of these, but if you are, shake yourself. There's the Father's business to attend to.

Prayer

Pray that God gives you the insight when you are lagging in fulfilling His purpose for your life.



103

Tabloid Temptations

Memorization

Proverbs 26:19

So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?

Proverbs 26:20

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

Proverbs 26:21

As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife.

Proverbs 26:22

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Proverbs 26:23

Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 26:4-5, 11-18

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 25:28

Who doesn't like a bit of gossip? A little juicy tidbit about someone is like a tasty morsel Solomon says in Proverbs 26:22. All you have to do is to open your news browser to find out the latest celebrity break-up or new relationship, a family squabble, or what they wore to the grocery store.

When I was your age, we didn't have the Internet. (Yes, I'm that old. Don't judge). But boy howdy, you walk through the checkout line at Walmart or the grocery store and your eyes were drawn to tabloids like *National Enquirer* with outlandish headlines such as, "Elvis is Alive and Living in Arizona." You felt the conviction right away, but you still had to sneak over, gingerly take the paper from the rack, and ever so nonchalantly flip through the articles.

What is it about gossip that is so tempting? For many, there is a sense of empowerment when we see people struggle. It puts us in a place of judgment. That's pride, and we know what God thinks about pride. It also breeds division and resentment. Those who are objects of the gossip will find it difficult to trust you or confide in you if they find you have slandered them. We also know how God feels about disunity.

The best thing to do with gossip is avoid it. Leave the tabloids on the rack and look the other way. Walk away when others want to gossip. Defend the integrity of a friend if you must, just have no part in tearing them down.

Prayer

It is easy to be pulled into gossip without realizing it. People want to feel included. Yet, pray that God gives you a sensitivity to recognize gossip and the courage to walk away.



104

An Enemy in Disguise

Memorization

Proverbs 26:24

He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;

Proverbs 26:25

When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart.

Proverbs 26:26

Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation.

Proverbs 26:27

Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.

Proverbs 26:28

A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 26:14-23

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 26:13

Genesis 3 describes the fall of Adam and Eve. In these passages, Lucifer, or Satan, is portrayed as a serpent. Genesis 3:1 says the serpent was the craftiest of all the wild animals. This is proven by the effective way Satan deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. He did this by questioning what God meant when He warned the first of mankind that they would die if they ate of the fruit.

There are also questions that banter between Bible scholars about these passages of Scripture. Did animals have the capacity to speak before the Fall? How could Eve have been swayed by an animal? Or, had Satan appeared to Eve as an angel of light, but the passages describe more the character of Satan rather than his bodily form? We'll leave all that to the scholars to debate. These questions have no bearing on our salvation. What does matter is recognizing deception and the subtle ways we can be deceived.

Somehow, Satan had gained Eve's trust. Why else would she listen to his reasoning? He acted as her friend but was, in fact, her staunchest enemy. He HATED mankind because God loved mankind. Recall that Satan was booted out of heaven. Proverbs 26:24 warns us to carefully consider the words of a friend. If they draw you away from God, they are no friend at all. They are destruction disguised with a smile. Take care whose counsel you consider. Don't be easily swayed like Eve.

Prayer

Ask God to give you basic discernment regarding the advice you receive from friends. Is it of God?

PROVERBS 27

What Makes a Good Friend?

Most teens would agree that friends are important. Good friends, however, are especially important during adolescence when forming social connections is critical to one's emotional and mental development. It also has ramifications in the spiritual realm because friends make choices that can affect one's personal walk with God.

But what makes a good friend? Take some time to come up with your answer.

When I searched the web for how adolescents, as yourself, responded to this question, these were a few of the answers that I found:

- A good friend is kind to you.
- A good friend makes you laugh.
- A good friend picks you up when you feel down.
- A good friend is one with whom you can share private feelings and experiences. You can talk to them about anything.
- A good friend helps you grow closer to God.

Solomon has a few things to say about friendship as well. Proverbs 27:6 states a true friend tells you the truth, even when the truth may be painful. In Proverbs 27:10, a true friend never abandons you. In Proverbs 27:17, a true friend makes you stronger.

Jesus is the best friend of all. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5). There is no one who loves you more than Jesus. The Bible says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, KJV).

What are ways to foster your friendship with God?

What Makes a Good Friend?



105

Hard Words for the Heart

Memorization

Proverbs 27:1

Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Proverbs 27:2

Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.

Proverbs 27:5

Open rebuke is better than secret love.

Proverbs 27:6

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Proverbs 27:7

The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

Proverbs 27:9

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 26:19-28

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru
Proverbs 26:18

In the prior devotion, we addressed how enemies can disguise themselves as friends by the crafty way they deceive with their words. Near the opening of Proverbs 27, we are introduced to a true friend, but not in the way we would necessarily care for. Their words can be hard to hear.

Nobody who is truthful would say they like to be rebuked or called out, especially by a friend. But, you see, true friends are truthful to one another. Unlike the enemy who uses flattering words or enticing reasoning, a friend speaks plainly and truthfully, even when it is uncomfortable to do so. Jesus rebuked Peter because he confronted Him about His persistent talk of death. Jesus did not take kindly to Peter's attempt to distract from His plan. Peter took it in stride, though. Why? Because Jesus had proven Himself to be a friend. In time, Peter came to understand the importance of Jesus' death as it applied to his own salvation.

Can you do the same when a friend speaks truth in love that might sting your ego? You can tell when someone cares. There is no condemnation. There is only reproof. There are only words spoken in love from someone who wants to see you prosper. Be slow to retaliate, be quick to listen, and be aware of the love in which the rebuke is spoken.

Prayer

Is there a tough conversation you need to have with a friend? Ask God to give you wisdom, the right words, and a good attitude when you have this conversation.

What Makes a Good Friend?



106

We Are Better Together

Memorization

Proverbs 27:10

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Proverbs 27:18

Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.

Proverbs 27:19

As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.

Proverbs 27:20

Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Proverbs 27:21

As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 26:24-28; 27:1-2, 5-7, 9

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 26:23

Why do we assemble for church? Why is fellowship such an important concept to our Christian walk? Why does it matter who we hang with? The answer lies in Proverbs 27:17 – iron sharpens iron.

There was a time in Israel's history (during Saul's reign) when they were ruled by the Philistines. During this period, the only blacksmiths that could be found were Philistine. They didn't want Israel to have the capability to make swords and spears that could be used as weapons to gain independence (1 Samuel 13:19). In other words, there was no iron to sharpen the swords, so they became dull and useless.

There is a principle in this we can apply to our walk with God. Consider Jesus' method in sending out His disciples. He sent them two-by-two. The church continued this practice. Peter had a John. Paul had a Barnabas and then Silas. One lifted the other. One strengthened the other. Because of this, it is so important that like-believers are not isolated from one another. When we gather to worship, our collective praise elevates the atmosphere to the heavenlies. When we meet with Godly friends, we are uplifted by their joy and wholesome comradery.

We are not designed to live for God in isolation. We are better together.

Prayer

Thank the Lord for Godly friends. If you feel isolated from friends, ask God to make a way for opportunities to fellowship.

PROVERBS 28

No Finger-Pointing Allowed

As a kid, I had a terrible habit of breaking things that I was not supposed to even have in the first place and then hiding them. One time, I “borrowed” my dad’s hack saw to cut a branch and snapped the blade. What did I do? I hid it behind a bunch of junk in the garage. By accident, my dad found it a few days later. As you can imagine, he was quite angry with me. It wasn’t because the blade was expensive; it was because I borrowed something without asking and then hid my mistake from him. Suffice it to say, I had a little trouble sitting down not long after his discovery.

It’s in our very nature to run from trouble. We want to hide from our mistakes or pretend they never happened. Or we want to cast the blame on something or someone else.

Where did this need to finger-point come from? How about man’s original father and mother, Adam and Eve? When God called them out for their disobedience, Adam pointed the finger at Eve. “It this woman you gave me.” Eve blamed the serpent. “The devil made me do it!” [my paraphrasing]. The point is, neither took responsibility for their own actions.

Solomon warns of this in Proverbs 28:13. He said that if we try to hide our sins, we will not succeed. However, if we confess our wrongdoings, we will receive compassion. John, the disciple of love, echoes this truth in his first epistle when he wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

If you make a mistake, don’t hide it. Don’t pretend it never happened. And don’t point the finger at someone else to shoulder the blame.

There’s an old hymn which begins, “Not my brother, nor my sister, but it’s me, O God, standing in the need of prayer.” Paul reminds us, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Take that accusing finger pointed towards something or someone else and turn it on yourself. We find God’s mercy when we humbly confess our own faults to Him.



107

We Need Grace

Memorization

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Proverbs 28:6

Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.

Proverbs 28:9

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.

Proverbs 28:13

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Proverbs 28:23

He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.

Proverbs 28:26

He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 27:1-2, 5-7, 9-10, 17-21

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 26:28

“God helps those who help themselves.” Have you heard this expression? Often, people mistakenly quote it as Scripture. While there are verses that suggest we should put feet to our faith (James 2:26) and that we should be productive (Prov. 6:10-12), this motto originated in ancient Greece. The original saying was “the gods help those who help themselves.”

The primary problem with this adage is that God comes last, not first, in our efforts. The fact is, God helps us in all situations, including those where we cannot help ourselves. We cannot save ourselves. There are simply not enough good deeds that we can perform that could ever be a substitute for Calvary. Further, when trials come our way, we struggle to find peace on our own. We need a Comforter and a Way Maker.

Solomon said in Proverbs 28:26 that fools trust in themselves. In Proverbs 3:5, Solomon instructs that we are to trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding. When things are going well, we should trust in the Lord’s sustaining power. When things turn south, we lean upon the Lord for strength. Jesus said in John 15 that we can do nothing apart from Him. In other words, we need His grace to help us. Always!

Prayer

Thank God for His grace. Thank God that He helps us even when we don’t realize it. He is always with us

PROVERBS 29

God's Grace and Favor

There are a few places in Proverbs where Solomon touches on disciplining children. Proverbs 29:15 and 17 are no exception. Let's face it. We don't like these verses. "I like my parents mad at me," said NO ONE...EVER!

Yet, there is a reason they are in Scripture. We need to understand that good choices lead to a peaceable end while bad choices reap unpleasant results. God's word lays out plainly how we should live our lives. We know that Jesus is our example for how we should live. We should strive to be like Him every day. We also realize that we cannot do it alone. We need God to help us.

That said, there is something we must understand about God and our choices. We must learn the difference between experiencing God's grace and walking in God's favor.

When we sin, God does not immediately drop down from Heaven with a switch in His hand to give us a good "talking to." No! He is patient and longsuffering. If we realize our mistake and repent, He is gracious to forgive us. This is grace. This is the undeserved favor of God. This is the love of God that covers a multitude of sins.

Yet, when He forgives us, He does not always remove the scars, or rather the consequences, of our mistakes. If, for example, you cheated on a test. You confessed it to God and repented and told your teacher. You've obviously taken steps to make it right. Sadly, you may have to accept a failing grade on the test.

When Samson, in his pride, allowed himself to become entrapped by the Philistines into giving away the secret to his strength, the Philistines cut his hair and gouged out his eyes. In time, God restored his strength. He prayed for one last measure of strength to push the pillars that held up the roof where the Philistines dined. In his death, he destroyed more Philistines than he did in all his life. Yet, God never restored his sight.

What can we learn from this? God's grace is extended to anyone who humbly seeks His forgiveness. Yet, for those who consistently put God first and walk uprightly in His ways, He reserves special blessings. He opens doors that might not otherwise be opened. He gives multiplied grace.

Don't squander your inheritance on momentary pleasures. Don't be so easily tripped up by temporary hardships and offenses. Your unquenchable faith attracts the favor of God. Your unshakable trust in God and in His proving process prepares you for multiplied grace. So, walk by faith into your promises, scars and all.



108

Exclusion through Inclusion

Memorization

Proverbs 29:2

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

Proverbs 29:11

A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.

Proverbs 29:15

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

Proverbs 29:17

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 27:10, 17-21; 28:1, 6, 9, 13, 23, 26

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 27:9

Isn't it funny how people in authority scream for acceptance, but in trying to do so they alienate and exclude? Of late, there has been a widespread movement in our country to normalize alternative lifestyles and repress racism.

As to the former, they have pointed fingers at Christians who take a stand for the wholesome union of man and woman as God had designed. As a result, many have painted Christians as bigots. What is clear is that such opponents of Christian values have no concept of grace. In I Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul lists a number of sins, including these alternative lifestyles. Yet, in verse 11, he writes, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." All Christians have a history, but true Christians remember that life-giving transformation they received when they entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Everyone has access to that kind of experience, despite whatever lifestyle they are currently following. All are welcome at the cross.

As to the latter, racism in any form is evil. Sadly, the more society continues to showcase evidence of racism, the less we see the goodness of the "color-blind". Martin Luther King, Jr said, "I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." How appropriate are these words. We cannot combat racism by aggression. We overcome it with love. If the world refuses to provide role models of love, the church certainly will. Heaven will be a wonderful kaleidoscope of colors and ethnicities.

Prayer

Ask God to deepen your love for all mankind, regardless of the state of their heart. Pray that God uses you to love them without condition.



109

The Priceless Jewels of the Church

Memorization

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

Proverbs 29:20

Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Proverbs 29:25

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

Proverbs 29:26

Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 28:1, 6, 9, 13, 23, 26; 29:2, 11, 15, 17

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 27:21

I Samuel chapter 3 opens, "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions." This is a strong indictment from God, but against whom? As the chapter progresses, we read that God visited young Samuel in the night to dispatch a prophetic word against the high priest, Eli, and his two debaucherous sons. Eli's inability or unwillingness to control his evil boys, who wickedly ministered before the Lord, brought about wrath upon his household and closed heaven to His people. God could not provide vision, prophecy, or fresh revelation to His people because His shepherds were too far from Him to hear Him.

We find a similar situation with the children of Israel during their sojourn across the barren desert out of Egyptian bondage. God had called Moses to the mountain top to scribe the law upon the tablets of stone. While doing so, he was gone for 40 days. In his absence, without a shepherd, his brother Aaron fashioned a calf of gold after the gods of Egypt and the people of Israel danced before the lifeless idol, proclaiming it their deliverer from Egypt. Because of this God nearly wiped out a nation, had Moses not intervened on their behalf.

What happens when the shepherds of God's people are absent or sinful? As Solomon suggests in Proverbs 29:18, God's people are then without direction. In time, they will lose their Godly restraint and die spiritually. Anointed ministers of God are priceless jewels to the church. They pour themselves out like water week after week to ensure the flock is fed on fresh bread. Do not take their office lightly. A good shepherd will not rest until their sheep reach safe pasture.

Prayer

Pray for divine strength for your pastor and his family. Most will never truly know their sacrifices and struggles.

PROVERBS 30

Overcomplicating Simplicity

The simple life. Everyone has an opinion about what that means. Some may picture a big spread on a country estate. Others may have their eyes on subsistence living in remote places around the globe, such as Alaska, or in the mountains far away from civilization. Still, others, may view a simple life as nothing more than unplugging for a while and clearing a few things from the calendar.

Oddly enough, there seems to be as many opinions about how to simplify your life as there are viewpoints about what a simple life means. Here's are the results of a quick Google search:

- 5 Ways to Simplify Your Life, *Psychology Today*
- 16 Ways to Simplify Your Life, *HuffPost Life*
- 20 Ways to Simplify Your Life, *Balance Through Simplicity*
- 26 Easy Ways to Simplify Your Life, *The Blissful Mind*
- 13 Ways to Simplify Your Life and Be Happier, *Life Hack*
- 13 Quick Ways to Radically Simplify Your Life in 2021, *Radical Fire*

Whew! And that was just page one. I should write an article, "One Easy Way to Simplify Your Life from All Others' Advice on How to Simplify Your Life." It would be a short article with just these words, "Stop listening to other people's advice." It may be the shortest (and I dare say simplest) article ever written.

Truth be told, Agur, the accredited author of Proverbs 30, may have found the true secret to a simple life. The verses leading up to the opening of your material (verses 1-3), seem to suggest that he was wearied and worn and felt hopelessly lacking in common sense. Because of this, he asked God for two things. First, help with telling the truth. Second, that he be not too rich nor too poor because either extreme would cause him to fail God. He just wanted to be honest and middle class.

Here we are shopping for gadgets we can't operate, filling our calendars with obligations we can't keep, and striving for financial independence we can never attain (even the rich aren't independent, if they continue to strive for more). Yet, Agur understood one thing – his own vulnerabilities. When he knew these, he knew where he needed to get to work. Learn your weaknesses and ask God for wisdom and grace to sustain you. If you do, a simple life might not be that far out of reach. Otherwise, you might wear yourself out trying to change things about yourself that God wants to work through.



110

Transparency with God

Memorization

Proverbs 30:4

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?

Proverbs 30:5

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

Proverbs 30:6

Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Proverbs 30:7

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die:

Proverbs 30:8

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:

Proverbs 30:9

Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 29:2, 11, 15, 17-18, 20, 25-26

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 28:26

Proverbs 30 were the words of an unknown Hebrew sage named Agur, the son of Jakeh. He opened the chapter declaring the majesty and might of God. He continued by declaring an unshakeable faith in God's infallible word. Then he gets practical. Very practical.

He determined that there were two things where he needed God's assistance the most. The first is for help to never lie. The second is that he didn't want to be too rich or too poor. Agur understood his own limitations. Despite the endless power of God, despite His unfailing word, Agur understood that he could still fail God. While His word is blameless and without error, Agur was inclined to not tell the truth. Additionally, having too many riches would cause him to forget God, and having too little would tempt him to steal. This is what you call transparency.

The writer of Hebrews instructed us to shake off the sin that so easily trips us up (Heb. 12:1). Agur identified his in Prov. 30:7-9. He also knew that without God, he could stumble and fail. Do you know what trips you up? Have you asked God to help you overcome in these areas? God can do so much in us when we learn to be honest with ourselves and with Him about our weaknesses.

Prayer

Take inventory of yourself. In what area(s) do you falter? Ask for God's grace to meet you in your weakness.



111

What Generation Are You?

Memorization

Proverbs 30:11

There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.

Proverbs 30:12

There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.

Proverbs 30:13

There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.

Proverbs 30:14

There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.

Proverbs 30:17

The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.

Proverbs 30:24

There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise:

Review

In Order: Proverbs 29:18, 20, 25-26; 30:4-9

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 29:17

Agur cited a generation that was rebellious, proud, disrespectful, and vile. He could have been talking about modern society. Yet, this depiction does not need to characterize everyone.

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructed the people of Israel how to raise up a Godly generation. In verse 2, he told parents to teach their children to fear God. In verse 3, he taught of the many blessings of obedience. In verse 4, he delivered the foundational tenet of the Jewish faith – there is one God. In verses 5-9, he described the many ways to teach God’s word to their children.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 22:6 that parents are to train up a child in the way they should go so that as they grow to adulthood, these teachings will never depart from them.

If your childhood is much like the picture that Moses paints in Deuteronomy chapter 6, you have much to be thankful for. You have been raised to appreciate righteousness and integrity. However, it’s possible the generation Agur described were brought up the same way. Ultimately, it’s you who decides to adopt righteousness and morality. Will you be part of a group of young people who carry the torch of this Apostolic faith into the next generation, or will you forsake it when you come of age? The choice is yours.

Prayer

As never before, love God with all your heart. Ask God to give you a passion for truth and righteousness.



112

The Power of Vulnerability

Memorization

Proverbs 30:25

The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer;

Proverbs 30:26

The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;

Proverbs 30:27

The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands;

Proverbs 30:28

The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

Proverbs 30:32

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

Proverbs 30:33

Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 30:4-9, 11-14, 17, 24

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 29:26

Vulnerability. This is a word many of us do not like. It smells of weakness. We'd rather be the picture of strength and independence, but for some reason God loves a contrite and humble heart. The writer of Proverbs 30 chooses some of nature's most vulnerable creatures to illustrate the noblest of characteristics. What can we learn from the ant, coney, locust, and spider?

- **Preparation.** The ant is small but has the strength to carry more than 10-50 times its own body weight. They are wise because they know how to prepare for lean times. We need faith higher than the valley and bigger than the trial. We need a faith that casts our burdens on Him so we can carry our cross.
- **Protection.** The coney, which is a rabbit, digs burrows where they can flee the hunters and predators. There is a secret place in God found only in prayer that no adversary can siege. "When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Ps 61:2).
- **Pact.** The locust cling together. They are unstoppable in number. We can learn much about the principles of unity from the locust. There is power when we come together.
- **Perseverance.** Tear down a spider's web, and she will rebuild it. When God takes things away from our lives, we know He is preparing the way for something greater. We don't crumble. We rebuild.

Prayer

Ask the Lord to help you see the benefits of making yourself vulnerable before God.

PROVERBS 31

The Seven Virtues of Nobility

The Bible is full of examples of extraordinary women such as Ruth, Esther, Rachel, Deborah, Mary Magdalene, and last but not least, Mary the mother of Jesus. Mary was the only woman in the Bible called highly favored (Luke 1:28, KJV).

We can examine the lives of each of these women, dissect their pasts, and explore the significant impact they made on history and the lives of those within their sphere of influence. However, Proverbs 31 seems to summarize most, if not all, of their important attributes of these women.

In these final devotions of Proverbs, we will dive deeper into the virtues of the woman of noble character found in Proverbs 31 which are as follows:

1. Trustworthy
2. Industrious
3. Diligent
4. Generous
5. Fearless
6. Wise
7. Devoted

Consider some prominent women in your life. Could they be depicted as having these attributes? In what ways have they exemplified these virtues?

Whether you're a girl or a guy, we all want to have these qualities. If we were to take these assets and stand them up beside the fruit of Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5:22-23, we might find close correlations. What we would discover is that these are not qualities we naturally possess. Rather, they are nurtured within us by the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (Gal. 5:25, NLT).

Is the Spirit nurturing you into becoming the woman or man of God He longs you to be?



113

The Worth of Your Virtues

Memorization

Proverbs 31:10

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

Proverbs 31:11

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

Proverbs 31:12

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

Proverbs 31:13

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

Proverbs 31:14

She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 30:11-14, 17, 24-28, 32-33

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 30:9

Proverbs 31 paints a splendid picture of a woman of noble character. Before we learn of her characteristics, we are introduced to her value. The writer of Proverbs 31 says her price is far above rubies. There are differences of opinion as to the meaning of rubies in Scripture. Some ascribe to the belief that it is the red gemstone of which we are most familiar today. Others suppose it to be a coral or a pearl, reserving the gemstone we call a ruby today to either an agate or a carbuncle.

Regardless, rubies in any of their various forms are rare and very costly. In other words, the noble woman was more valuable than rare gems or precious treasure. Thus, begins our journey to uncover her worth.

1. **Trustworthy.** Her husband safely puts his trust in her according to verse 11. In verse 12, we find that her intent for her husband and family is nothing but good. There is something to be said about an individual who keeps his or her word. You know that when they have promised to do something, it will be done. God is this way. He is faithful in all His ways.
2. **Industrious.** In many of the verses, beginning at verse 13, the noble woman is busy caring for her family. She rises early and goes to bed late to ensure her family is clothed, fed, and honored. There are many things that can occupy your time. However, is what you are doing building up your precious faith, maturing you, helping others, and forwarding the Kingdom of God?

Prayer

Do you know your value? If you feel you have lost your usefulness and purpose, ask God what He thinks of you. You are the apple of His eye.



114

Busy Hands, Blessed Life

Memorization

Proverbs 31:15

She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

Proverbs 31:16

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

Proverbs 31:17

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

Proverbs 31:18

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

Proverbs 31:19

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

Proverbs 31:20

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 30:25-28, 32-33; 31:10-14

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 30:24

We continue to explore the virtues of the noble woman.

- Diligent.** We certainly understand the industrious nature of the noble woman, but there is a careful persistence to her work that we find in verses 17-19. She is not just busy; she is fruitful. Paul instructs the Colossian church, "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people" (Col. 3:23, NLT). When we have the right motivation, our efforts yield good fruit. Purpose in your heart that what your hands set out do, they do it with Godly diligence.
- Generous.** The virtuous woman did not just consider her family. She helped the less fortunate as well. According to Galatians 2, Paul was encouraged to remember the poor by Peter, James, and John, whom he called the pillars of the church. This, Paul says, he was eager to do. Throughout Jesus' ministry, He had compassion on the outcast and the impoverished. He even recognized the offering of a poor widow woman who gave two mites at the temple. If you have been blessed, then bless others.

Prayer

What can your hands do to help the less fortunate? You don't need to be rich to make a difference in their lives. Ask God to reveal a way you can be Jesus to the downtrodden.



115

A Traveler's Courage

Memorization

Proverbs 31:21

She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

Proverbs 31:22

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

Proverbs 31:23

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

Proverbs 31:24

She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

Proverbs 31:25

Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.

Proverbs 31:26

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 31:10-20

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru
Proverbs 30:33

We continue to unveil the virtues that the writer of Proverbs 31 reveals about the virtuous woman.

5. **Fearless.** In verse 21, she is not afraid when the bitter winds bite and snow cloaks the ground. She and her household are clothed. The KJV version renders this last phrase as “clothed with scarlet” whereas other translations render the phrase to mean “doubly clothed.” In a spiritual sense, there is harmony between these two translations. In Creation, God performed the first animal sacrifice when He clothed Adam and Eve’s shame. Their meager attempts to cover their bodies with the fig leaves were insufficient. At Calvary, God again covered man’s sin through the shedding of blood, but this time it was the Lamb of God who bled. We have no fear of what man or devils can do to us. He has removed our filthy rags of self-righteousness and clothed us in His righteousness, fashioned by sinless blood.
6. **Wise.** There is something to be said for experience. The noble woman had traveled many miles and lived long enough to see the salvation of the Lord in a strange land. When she opens her mouth to give guidance, what flowed from her lips were words laced in kindness and encouragement. The longer we walk with God, the sweeter our words should become.

Prayer

Sometimes, we have to borrow the faith of the elders who have walked many years with God to make it through some tough times. If you are struggling with a situation, seek the counsel of a Godly saint. Ask the Lord to restore your faith through their testimony.



116

The Final and Most Important Key to Nobility

Memorization

Proverbs 31:27

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Proverbs 31:28

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

Proverbs 31:29

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

Proverbs 31:30

Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.

Proverbs 31:31

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 31:15-26

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru
Proverbs 31:14

We conclude our exploration of the noble woman's virtues with, perhaps, the most important virtue of them all.

7. **Devoted.** In verse 31, we are reminded of a well-known fact of life: we age. Our skin loses its luster and it wrinkles. Our hair grays, or for some of us (ahem, guys!), it falls out. Our pace slows and our energy wanes. Proverbs 16:31 says, "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life." More beautiful than a face that graces the cover of a fashion magazine is a life devoted to God. The years we walk with the Lord imbues our spirit man with the character of Jesus Christ. We imitate His trustworthiness, fruitfulness, compassion, faithfulness, and wisdom. We don't grow salty as the people of the world might. We grow sweeter as the days go by. This is an allure that fashionistas and beauty professionals cannot replicate. It is a loveliness that comes only by the Spirit working within us moment by moment, day by day, and year after year.

Take time to inventory your personal experiences. Whether you are a girl or a guy, you can exhibit the virtues of the noble woman portrayed in Proverbs 31. Pray that they become more ingrained in your spiritual DNA with each day that goes by as you're living a life of devotion to the Lord.

Prayer

If there are virtues that you lack or are weak in, God can help. Be transparent before Him. Let Him do the work in you that you, in the flesh, cannot do on your own. It is only by Christ's Spirit that we become more like Jesus.

ECCLESIASTES 1 & 3

Nothing New Under the Sun

As a teen, I struggled with Ecclesiastes. While accredited to Solomon, the book takes a much different tone than Proverbs. Proverbs provided great insight into the traits of the wise and foolish. I could read the verses and compare them to my life to see if I measured up. With Ecclesiastes, from the opening chapter, it appeared to me to be one huge complaint on an enormous “emo” level.

My problem was I read the book with the wrong vantage point. I read it as if to say, “There’s nothing new under the sun. Nobody is going to remember anything you did anyway. So, what’s the point?” I encourage you to stay away from this viewpoint. As I grew older, the wisdom of Ecclesiastes grew more apparent.

While Proverbs compares people, Ecclesiastes compares perspectives. The phrase “under the sun” is found nearly thirty times in Ecclesiastes, but not found in any other book of the Bible. Solomon was writing about “earth-bound” perceptions. Nothing has changed with mankind since the beginning of time. Although temptations have changed, our struggle with temptation remains the same as it did with Adam and Eve. Men’s heart is still inclined to carnality. Furthermore, despite advances in technologies and innovation, man seems to have forgotten the lessons of the past and is bound to repeat the same mistakes. We’ve gotten smarter, faster, and more productive, yet discrimination, apathy, animosities, and immortality are just as pervasive today as they were in the days of Noah.

Nevertheless, Solomon only addresses these perpetual issues to drive home the true message of this book. Overall, the world may not change, but we can. We can take a more “heaven-bound” perspective. Solomon concludes with this thought – fear God and obey His commands for He is the judge of all mankind (Ecc. 12:13-14). Said differently, what you do for God is not limited to this state of existence. It has eternal ramifications.

As to a personal change or transformation, Paul said if anyone be in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has been replaced by the new (2 Cor. 5:17). Even heaven and earth will be made new. Jesus said in Revelation 21:5, “Behold I make all things new.”

If you’re satisfied with the status quo, keep living as others on this earth live. Keep ignoring the lessons of the past so that mistakes can be put on replay. However, if you want a change, you must see the Change Maker. His name is Jesus, and He is the Author of our new birth experience (John 3:3-6; Heb. 12:3). He can rewrite your history and bring lasting change.



117

Changing Seasons

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 1:9

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:10

Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.

Ecclesiastes 1:11

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

Ecclesiastes 3:9

What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?

Ecclesiastes 3:10

I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 31:21-31

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru
Proverbs 31:20

The Jewish calendar is calculated quite differently than our Western calendar. The Western calendar has a fixed number of days per each of its twelve months, adjusted in leap years. The Jewish calendar is based on three astronomical events – 1) the rotation of the earth on its axis (a day), 2) the revolution of the moon around the earth (a month), and 3) the revolution of the earth around the sun (a year). These events are triangulated to determine the months and dates of the year. It is possible to have thirteen months in an annual Jewish calendar. Now you know why Easter, which is fixed to the Jewish Passover, changes from year to year.²

In our Western mindset, we depend on fixed dates on the calendars and rigid periods of time (e.g., hours, minutes, and seconds) to dictate our priorities. The Jewish people are trained to fix their eyes to the heavens to determine their seasons. In Luke 12:56, Jesus says people can interpret the weather based on signs in the earth and sky but cannot interpret present times.

Living for God, we go through seasons. Some seasons try our faith. We rebuff these seasons. They bring harsh weather and dryness. Yet, these are the times that are meant to strengthen us. Rather than relying on your “tried and true” calendar, train your eyes toward the heavens in whatever season you are in. See how God is moving in your season.

Prayer

Ask God to give you grace in your seasons of tribulations. His grace is sufficient to sustain you.



118

To Know the Unknowable

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

Ecclesiastes 3:15

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

Ecclesiastes 3:16

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.

Ecclesiastes 3:17

I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Review

In Order: Proverbs 31:27-31;
Ecc. 1:9-11; 3:1, 9-10

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru
Proverbs 31:26

James said, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14, KJV). Solomon says much of the same thing in Ecclesiastes 3, but it's in the context of infinity.

Men work within the small amount of time that they have been given, but their efforts are mere fragments of an unknowable and eternal puzzle. We are mortals who only see a small fraction of God's plan. We cannot see the end from the beginning and how all the dots connect, but we grapple to understand the unknown. Is this all there is? Is there more to my existence after this life? Does my work really matter on a grander scale?

Since death was passed onto man, he has been in a quest to reclaim immortality – in both existence and in contribution. Yet only God holds the license on incorruptibility. His doings alone are timeless and infinite. In our current fragile frame, we may never truly understand the purpose behind certain things that have happened in our lives or how we are connected to the larger body of God's grand and artistic work. Yet, He has made it that the need for immortality is bound up in the heart of man. Know that your life has purpose and an eternal weight in glory. Seek to know the Architect of eternity. Trust that anything you do for God will not be wasted.

Prayer

It takes faith to believe that what you do matters. Pray that nothing hinders you in fulfilling your God-given purpose.

ECCLESIASTES 4

All for One and One for All

The theme of Ecclesiastes 4 in your material is unity. What is unity and why is it so important?

David writes in Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” The New Living Translation of the Bible replaces the word unity with harmony.

Classical music may not be a genre you particularly enjoy. Yet, it’s hard to ignore the talent of an orchestra made up of seventy to one hundred musicians who expertly blend the melodies of their instruments into artful resonance. Or, how about a group of talented singers who combine their voices and evoke an emotional connection with their audience? Or consider a painter who pulls from a palette of colors to create a pleasant feast for the eyes. Their works are harmonious. This is what unity looks and sounds like.

One of the most popular chapters of the Bible is I Corinthians 13 – the great love chapter of Scripture. “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (I Corinthians 13:1, NIV). Many in Christendom point to this, and the following chapter of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, to argue that the gifts of the Spirit are no longer necessary or are rarely used. Sadly, they miss the true message of these chapters, as well as the entire letter.

Let’s back up to I Corinthians chapter 1 where we find the purpose of Paul’s letter. “I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose” (I Corinthians 1:10, NLT).

The issue with the church at Corinth was not necessarily about the gifts of the Spirit. They had a unity problem. The church was split into factions – followers of Apollos versus followers of Paul. As a result, they were abusing the gifts of the Spirit to overshadow and out-manuever their brothers and sisters in the Lord. In other words, they were at odds, and they lost their focus of existence – to reach the unbelievers of Corinth.

Now, contrast the church of Corinth with the church of Philadelphia as recorded in Revelation 3. About the church in Philadelphia (which means “brotherly love”), Jesus said there was a door opened that no man can close. To the victorious over oppression, they would become pillars in the temple of God.

How important is unity? God cannot operate in an atmosphere of discord. If God cannot operate in the church that is meant to be a healing place, then that church is ineffective in the Kingdom of God. An ineffective church becomes nothing more than a car without an engine. It lacks the power to move with the Spirit.



119

Strength in Numbers

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 4:9

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

Ecclesiastes 4:10

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:11

Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

Ecclesiastes 4:12

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 1:9-11; 3:1, 9-11, 14-17

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Proverbs 31:31

Deuteronomy 32:30 states, "How could one person chase a thousand of them, and two people put ten thousand to flight?" This statement alludes to an important principle – there is strength in numbers.

When God looked upon His Creation, He called it good except for one observation: His created man, Adam, was alone. God said it was not good. Because of this, God fashioned Adam a helpmate in Eve. However, we don't need a spouse to understand the importance of having another person at our side with whom to walk through the many seasons of our lives.

We are creatures who need relationships. We're not lone wolves who go off on our own to hunt for food. We need community. The church is a community. We worship together, we pray together, and we do life together.

Solomon says that a threefold cord is not easily broken. Let me give you another example. A three-legged stool is stronger than a two-legged stool. God is our strength and we rely on Him, but there are times when we need someone to help us, encourage us, and fight with us. Others need you for the same reasons.

We're all created differently. Some enjoy solitude more than others. However, we all need a friend (and to be friend) at some point in our lives. Go on that youth trip. Go out to dinner with the young people after service. Call up a friend from church and hang out for a day. The fellowship and laughter you get is like the third leg on the stool. It lifts you up and gives you the support you may not even know you needed.

Prayer

Are you naturally shy? Ask God to give you courage to include yourself in activities. Are you naturally outgoing? Ask God to give you a sensitivity and a persistent to include those on the periphery.

ECCLESIASTES 5

Stay Clear of Broken Promises

He was born to a 16-year-old runaway. He never knew his father who fled the scene before he was born.

When he was a small child, his mother married an abusive, heavy drinker. His stepfather was known to go on drinking binges and disappear for days. His mom was not much different. She would leave the young lad to fend for himself or with a variety of babysitters to go barhopping. When he was just five years old, his mother was arrested for robbery and sentenced to ten years in prison. A few years later, she was paroled, and the young boy and his mother were reunited. However, she continued her abusive parenting habits. Soon, he began to get in trouble with the law, too.

His most well-known crime occurred in 1969 when he was in his mid-thirties. He orchestrated the murders of seven people over two days, including the pregnant actress, Sharon Tate. This man's name was Charles Manson.³

Charles Manson has gone down in history as one of the vilest people in America. Yet, his life could be characterized as one filled with broken promises. His mother, who vowed to care for him, could not wrestle her own demons long enough to fulfill on her obligations. This may have had a significant impact on Manson's life that later negatively altered a community and the country.

To be clear, his example is not one given to either justify or condone his actions or those of his accomplices. Nor is it to disparage his mother. Rather, it is to illustrate the importance of keeping one's promises.

If we're honest, we've all broken a promise at some time in our lives, intentionally or unintentionally. We are prone to obligate ourselves beyond our willingness or capacity to fulfill on those promises. Not so with God. His promises are "yes and amen."

But, what about the promises we make to God? It is one thing to renege on a promise with our fellow man, but it's quite another to renege on a commitment made to God. Moses said, God is not like man that he should lie (Number 23:19). God expects us to fulfill on our promises. Having trouble finding God's favor? It might be good to think back on a promise you've made to God that you have not seen through.

Because of our propensity to go back on our word, Solomon warns in Ecclesiastes 5 to be careful what obligations we make with God. Don't be rash. Use few words. Think before you make a promise to Him. Also, don't use promises as a bargaining chip. "I'll do this God if you do that." God sees through that.

If you make a promise, keep it (with God and man). Your promise can be very important to another person, including God. If you fail, own up to it. It is important to keep your word.



120

T.H.I.N.K. Before You Speak

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 5:2

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Ecclesiastes 5:3

For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

Ecclesiastes 5:4

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

Ecclesiastes 5:5

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 3:11, 14-17; 4:9-12

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 3:10

“Be not rash with your mouth.” Boy, that is a lesson that most all of us have had to learn the hard way at some point in our lives. If you have lived any amount of time, you have heard the expression, “think before you speak.” It suggests that thoughtless words have a way of getting ourselves into hot water. Some years ago, someone developed the acronym T.H.I.N.K. in an effort to alter negative online social media communications and behaviors. It’s worth a refresher.

T – “Is it True?”

H – “Is it Helpful?”

I – “Is it Inspiring?”

N – “Is it Necessary?”

K – “Is it Kind?”

You know the drill. If you answer “no” to any of these questions, don’t communicate it. To embellish on this thought, your tone is likewise important. Also, there will be times when you must have difficult conversations. They may not be inspiring, but they may be necessary. Even then, be kind, true, and helpful.⁴

Prayer

Pray that God helps you regulate your words within the context of love and compassion.

A City Without Walls

Solomon wrote a great deal about anger in Proverbs, just as he did in Ecclesiastes 7:9. In his writings, he addressed ways to avoid stirring up anger in other people, as well as the destructive nature that anger can have within us and our relationships. So then, what is anger and is it a sin to be angry?

What is anger? Dictionary.com defines anger as a “a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.” *Psychology Today* defines these four types of anger:

- **Justifiable Anger** – a sense of moral outrage at injustices in the world (ex. waste and the environment; persecution of Christians; discrimination).
- **Annoyance Anger** – an event arises in life that brings immediate displeasure (ex. a driver cuts you off on the highway, or someone says something insensitive).
- **Aggressive Anger** – attempts to dominate, intimidate, manipulate, and control another person (ex. bullying, emotional abuse).
- **Temper Tantrums** – intertwined with aggressive anger, a person lashes out in a disproportionate manner to an unpleasant situation where they react in an unreasonable and inappropriate manner.⁵

Is anger a sin? Anger is a human emotion. Even God can get angry. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:26 to be angry yet do not sin. This suggests that anger alone is not a sin. Rather, our reaction to a displeasure or annoyance can be sinful. Additionally, if we allow anger to build into resentment and bitterness, we can develop an unforgiving spirit, and unforgiveness is certainly a sin.

Solomon says as much in Proverbs 25:8, “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Anger can be destructive. It can tear down the walls of restraint and decimate relationships. You’ve most likely experienced the destructive nature of anger in your own life, either as a recipient of another’s uncontrolled rage, or as a donor yourself of unbridled hostilities, or both.

Sadly, when anger is left unchecked, it takes a little piece of our peace. When we allow ourselves to go to the Land of Aggression, we often find that we must exchange a piece of our dignity for a measure of shame in order to find escape. In other words, after all the harsh word bombs have been dropped and objects hurled across the room, our responses often leave us embarrassed, hollow, and regretful. Rebuilding bridges that we’ve torched can be hard. Standing before God to repent over our anger can take every measure of strength we have. Yet, the road of humility is the only way back. It’s just better that we NOT go to the Land of Aggression at all. How do we do this? Through temperance (self-control) which is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Some people more than others need help from God in this area, but we all need the Spirit demonstrating Christ’s love through us.



121

Riding Out the Slumps

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 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.

Ecclesiastes 7:9

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Ecclesiastes 7:13

Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?

Ecclesiastes 7:14

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 4:9-12; 5:2-5

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 3:17

Years ago, I worked in the financial industry. I was an assistant to several well-respected stockbrokers at a renowned brokerage firm. In the area where the firm was located, many of the local clientele were aerospace engineers. These engineers tend to be very logically minded people with an inherent aptitude for numbers. And a vast majority had a love for charts, graphs, and similar data visualizations.

During a market slump, one of the broker's customers had developed a chart that showed that if the downturn continued at its set pace, he would lose half the value of his investment in X number of years. This was too much for someone looking at retirement at about the time his chart had him at half his savings. He decided that CDs (certificate of deposits; a very safe, low paying investment offered by banks) would do better. So, he pulled his money out of the market and off to the bank he went. By the time the CDs expired a year later, the market had rebounded. Had he kept his money in his previous investments, not only would he have earned back what he lost on paper, but he would have earned more than the CD gave him. Except, he was ill-prepared to ride out the lull.

Paul said in Philippians, "for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11, KJV). In good times and bad, he placed his trust in God, rather than in his circumstances. Ecclesiastes 7:14, reminds us that we will have seasons of plenty and seasons of few. There is little that we can do about these conditions. But we can learn, as Paul did, that we do not serve God because of our circumstances. We are in it with God for the long-haul. We will ride out whatever storms life sends our way because Heaven is our goal.

Prayer

It's easy to say we will ride out the slumps, until we are in one. Are you in a slump? Ask God to give you perseverance and to remind you that "this too shall pass."

ECCLESIASTES 9 & 10

Work While it is Day

In the following verses, Solomon reminds us that we all come with expiration dates. We are given a measure of days known only to God. James said that we have no promise of tomorrow; our lives are vapors, here one minute and gone the next. The past is a memory; the future is a hope just beyond our reach. All we have is this moment. In this context, Solomon advised that we should make good use of the time we have.

In John 9:4, Jesus said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (KJV). We have work to do, so whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with all your heart (Ecc. 9:10).

Doing God’s work is a high priority. I’m sure that all believers can agree on this. Yet, as we discuss the need to be productive for the Kingdom of God, it is also important to keep the final goal in mind.

Those who are honest with themselves will admit that they want to know that what they do matters. At times, if we’re not careful, we can doubt that we’re making a difference. This can leave us depressed and unmotivated. We want to be remembered. In many cases, however, the work we do for God is like bread cast upon the water. It takes great faith to believe that it will return to us in abundant measure, even though we do not know when or how.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said that we can tell a good tree from a bad one by its fruit. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20, KJV). This applies to our own efforts in the Kingdom of God. We are known by our fruits, or the lack thereof. Yet, it is important to understand that we are all laborers together with God (I Cor. 3:9). It doesn’t matter if people remember our names. It doesn’t even matter if we receive recognition from men for our labors. What matters is that whatever you do, do it well, as unto the Lord.

For example, do you know the name of the electrician that installed the wiring in your house? For most of us, we don’t, unless we personally know the person. Yet, we trust that when we flip the switch, the lights will come on. What about the guy who brought that package you were expecting to your door? Hopefully, it got to you in one piece and in the time promised, but you probably didn’t even see the carrier.

We are all working for the applause of two nail-scarred hands. In the end, when this life has come to its conclusion, and you stand before God, it matters little how many diplomas hang on your wall, or if any papers were written about you, or if you left a vast fortune. What matters is that you hear these words from the One who sits in the Judgment Seat, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of thy Lord.”

Leave it to God to decide how He uses your work. Just put heart into what your hands do while there’s time.



122

When Our All is not Enough

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 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 the grave, whither thou goest.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Ecclesiastes 9:12

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Ecclesiastes 9:13

This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:

Review

In Order: Ecc. 5:2-5; 7:8-9, 13-14

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 4:12

Bill Gates. Steve Jobs. Ralph Lauren. Michael Dell. Mark Zuckerberg. Besides being well known entrepreneurs and billionaires, what do they all have in common? None of them finished college.⁶

Please do not read this as a reason not to further your education. Rather, it is an example of what Ecclesiastes 9:11 seems to refer to. We cannot rely on our strength, talents, skills, intellect, or education alone to award us victory and a successful life. Sometimes, success comes to people just being at the right place at the right time. If you don't believe me, just think about a few social media influencers who are filthy rich, not because of any talent or skill they possess, but because they've got the most followers.

We must remember, as believers, that God views success much differently than the world does. Jesus was never the wealthiest. He had no army. He wrote no books. He had no pedigree. He did not rub shoulders with the elite and powerful. Yet, He turned the world upside down. No other person in all of history is more followed than Jesus. Not even the Kardashians (there, I said it!). What we learn from Jesus is that this life is fleeting. We are pilgrims in a strange land.

We work, and we give it our all (Ecc. 9:10). Still, at the end of our life, people may not remember our name, but Jesus will. How do I know this? He's got our names written down in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Prayer

Ask the Lord to help you keep the long view. We have work to do, but let's not lose sight of the end goal: Heaven.



123

Forgotten Memories. Cherished Memories.

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 9:14

There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:

Ecclesiastes 9:15

Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

Ecclesiastes 9:17

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.

Ecclesiastes 9:18

Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Ecclesiastes 10:1

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 7:8-9, 13-14;
9:10-13

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 5:5

Repeat after me – people forget. My older sister is one of those people who can remember so many events from our childhood and people we grew up with. So often, she'll share a story, and I struggle to remember any of it. Many times, an old acquaintance will mention a name and I play dumb. Later, I'll go to my sister and ask, "Who is so and so?" She'll tell me all about them: who they were friends with, where they sat in church, or a story about them. Sometimes it helps. Sometimes it's just useless. I simply can't remember.

Sadly, I'm sure there are people whom I've shared company who have the same reaction when they hear my name mentioned. "Who? Doesn't ring a bell."

Do you remember the color of the third outfit you opened on Christmas morning ten years ago? Details gets erased. Memories get forgotten. Even good deeds we've done, or others have done for us gets shoved so far back in our subconscious, it can never be retrieved. That's okay because the important stuff stays with us, like the values that our parents taught us, a life-changing encounter with God, a comment or lesson from another that altered our life's trajectory. Sure, we may forget some of the details, like dates or what we were wearing, but experiences that have a profound impact on us lingers. Cherish these memories. Make more in your life.

Prayer

Ask the Lord to help you to never forget His calling upon your life. Make Him first in all things.

ECCLESIASTES 11 & 12

Don't Lose Sight of the Prize

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty" (NLT). After all his behavioral studies of mankind and all his expansive knowledge and wisdom in which he expounded upon, he returned full cycle to where he began the Proverbs: fear the Lord (Prov. 1:7) and obey the Lord (Prov. 1:33).

Our walk with God ends as it begins – with a repentant heart and in submission to Him. We tend to overcomplicate grace. We have a natural inclination for fresh insights and new revelations, but God designed this walk of faith to be simple enough that even a child can understand.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. (I Cor. 1:26-27, NLT)

The world wants something flashy, but our Savior came into the world through humble beginnings. The enemy confuses, but God is not the author of confusion. He made man and woman. He separated the land from the sea. God made the animals unique – fowls of the air, fish of the sea, and beasts of the field. He placed distinction between light and darkness. Man, on the other hand, has confused the genders, grouped men with animals in some mythical evolutionary chain of events, and calls evil good and good evil.

Let's not get lost in the minutia. We exist because of the gospel, or good news, of Christ. Jesus died, was buried in the grave, and rose again on the third day. Likewise, we die to sin through repentance, we are buried with Jesus in baptism, and we rise to walk in the newness of life. We have been given an eternal promise, the down payment of that glorious inheritance being His Spirit in us.

A masterpiece of simplicity.

When you feel yourself getting pulled deeper into the weeds, remember this: Fear (revere) God and obey His commandments. Go back to Calvary and remind yourself that Jesus did all that for you because He loves you and wants to spend eternity with you.

Leave the complications, debates, politics, and offenses for someone else. You just don't have time to get detoured by the immaterial and irrelevant. Let God sort out man's heart. Just keep trusting and praying. Keep pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14).

Don't Lose Sight of the Prize



124

No Better Time than the Present

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 11:4

He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

Ecclesiastes 11:6

In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Ecclesiastes 12:9

And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

Ecclesiastes 12:10

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 9:10-18; 10:1

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 7:14

Moses stuttered. Noah was a drunk. David was too young. Abraham was too old. Samson had a serious thing for the ladies. Elijah was a recluse. Gideon was a coward. Joseph talked too much. Jonah refused to talk at all. And let's not get started on those band of twelve misfits who followed Jesus around.

Yet, what did they all have in common? God used them. Yep, hang-ups and all.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 reminds us that we can't wait until fair weather to work for God's kingdom. If we waited for the perfect time, the perfect helpmate, the perfect job, the perfect ministry, thirty letters behind our name, and a white picket fence, to do anything useful with our lives, we're going to be looking back with regrets.

Waiting for that minister's license to preach behind a pulpit? Why not start a Bible study or a small group in the meantime? Holding out for that big job offer after you get that fancy diploma? Put some of those skills out there now and join the media team, door greeter team, worship team, or teach a Sunday school class. I'm sure the church can find use for a smart and enterprising young person as yourself.

Prayer

You have talents and skills God can use. Don't believe it? Ask God and see. There's a place for you.



125

Now What?

Memorization

Ecclesiastes 12:11

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

Ecclesiastes 12:12

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Review

In Order: Ecc. 9:14-18; 10:1; 11:4-6; 12:9-10

Mixed: 1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 9:13

“Much study is a weariness of the flesh.” Can I get an Amen? If you’ve come this far, you’ve come to the end of your memory work for the year. Congratulations! Okay, 30 second time-out for a praise break! Hallelujah!

Now what? Surely there’s more days or weeks left in the quizzing season. It’s all finetuning from here. Yet, there is one more thing that you would be remiss to forget. But before we get to that....

Take some time to reflect on the year. Jot down some thoughts. What experiences do you remember? What scriptures impacted you in a powerful way? Did something inspire you, change you, convict you?

If you’ve come this far, you’ve invested a lot of yourself into the work this quizzing season has brought. Would it be safe to say you’re not the same person you were when you started? You’re better. So much better because God has become richer.

The verses that you learned were not just to win trophies, or go to tournaments, or make new friends (although all those things are good). Rather, the verses should be absorbed deep into your spiritual DNA.

So, what is the one thing that you don’t want to forget?

You, young person, are our future! You’re holding the torch. Burn brighter for Jesus than any of the generations that came before you.

Prayer

Now what? That would be a great question to ask God. What are the next steps He has ordered for you?

Review Following Memorization

DAY	IN ORDER	MIXED
126	Ecc. 11:4-6; 12:9-14	1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 10:1
127	Ecc. 12:11-14	1 Kings 3:5 thru Ecc. 12:10
128	None	All Material

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