

THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

SESSION #19: Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

TEXT:

v. 1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless.

v. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

v. 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

v. 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

v. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

v. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

v. 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

v. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

v. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

v. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

v. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

INTRODUCTION:

(Charity: A Collection of Poems by Gail T. Burton by Gail T. Burton)

THE CONTRACT

I chanced the other day to read,
in the Bible's gospel word,
"The wage of sin is death," it said,
in case you haven't heard.

Now that contract seems a bit too harsh,
the terms a bit too square.
The contract may not match your wish,
it's a tough one; but it's fair.

p. 2

(Charity: A Collection of Poems by Gail T. Burton by Gail T. Burton)

THE VISION

I dreamt one night my life on earth
 had marched its final beat
 and all at once I found myself
 before God's judgment seat.
 With pride I showed my goodly deeds
 with ease I'd win my case
 but when I saw the judgment book
 I read of my disgrace.

I viewed with shame my earthly deeds
 in red recorded there
 the heavenly script of every tongue
 the world my sins to share.
 Row on row the page was filled
 the print was small but clear
 'till word on word the phrases merged
 to paint one crimson smear.

I felt the question in my heart
 and tears came to my eyes,
 "what right had I to look at God
 and to His glory rise?"
 Then there beside me came a voice
 with boldness spoken clear,
 "I come," it said "to plead his case
 and quiet his trembling fear."

He said: "I've seen his list of sins,
 each point I now concede,
 the record's clear and true it states
 that sin has been his creed.
 But this one fact I must relate
 for on it stands his case
 he's asking not for justice here
 but pleading now for grace."

"One day he fell upon his knees
 and gave his life to me,
 he placed his faith and trust in me
 as I died upon a tree.
 He opened up his child like heart
 for me to take control

to grant forgiveness for his life
and set his every goal."

"I know he failed, as You knew he would,
when You placed him in my care,
he's just a man with little strength
to thwart the devil's snare.
I didn't count the times he slipped,
they're all forgotten now,
for he prayed for grace and added strength
as on his knees he'd bow."

Her deserves no less than eternal death
for the way he lived his life,
it's the wage he's earned by what he's done
in a world of sin and strife.
But he's justified if the price is paid,
and I paid his price instead,
for every sin a drop of blood
each deed a tear I shed."

Then the Master's hand brushed down the page
the crimson smear erased,
and brilliant whiteness filled the sheet
the awful stain replaced.
And then beside my name I saw,
six words were written there,
I read the phrase with grateful soul,
"A child of God, Joint Heir."

pp. 3-5

(Forever, Erma: Best-Loved Writing From America's Favorite Humorist by Erma Bombeck)

"Love Is" List for a Gusto Husband—February 14, 1982

Some women married sentimentality.

Every Valentine's Day these women get a \$1.50 card at their plate with a heart on it and a present expensive enough to be called in on the charge card.

I married gusto.

At the birth of our first child, my husband leaned over, punched me on the arm and said, "Way to go, kid."

If you're going to live with gusto, you have to look for the little expressions of love that come each day. The following is a Valentine's Day message for such a man. If you are a gusto husband, clip it out, mount it on a lacy doily and kiss your wife when you give it to her. It might save your marriage for another 15 minutes.

LOVE

Love is climbing out of a warm bed at night and checking to see if all the doors are locked when you think you hear something.

Love is giving you the pizza with the two slices of pepperoni on it when I love pepperoni.

Love is acting excited over a \$72 needlepoint canvas you bought when we both know you haven't finished the quilt, the pillow top, the kitchen curtains and the latch-hook rug.

Love is being mad at the kids at the same time you're mad at them.

Love is moving the car seat up as far as it will go when I get out, so you don't have to do it.

Love is painting a room together and letting you have the roller once in a while while I do the windowpanes.

Love is never remembering what birthday you're celebrating.

Love is learning how to make coffee and where the cups are.

Love is pretending to be jealous of your old boyfriend who became a priest.

Love is never going on a diet when you're fat.

Love is giving you the woman's section of the paper to read first when the sports news is in the same section.

Love is refraining from telling you how the thermostat works.

Love is a lot of little things that add up to caring. It doesn't always add up to three little words. Sometimes, it adds up to six: I got your tank filled today.

Happy Valentine's Day!

pp. 193-4

(The Humor of the American Cowboy by Stan Hoig)

*"To understand ranch lingo all yuh have to do is to know in advance what the other feller means an' then pay no attention to what he says."*¹

¹Philip Ashton Rollins, *The Cowboy: His Characteristics, His Equipment, and His Part in the Development of the West* (Reprinted.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 237.
p. 17

Another cowboy on a very hot day decided to go for a swim. When he had shucked his clothes, he walked to the edge of a cliff overlooking a stream and dove in. Just as he jumped, a drought dried up the stream. But he was in luck, for a sudden flash flood roared down the dry creek bed. The cowboy landed safely in the water but, by the time he came up for air, a Norther had swept in and frozen the surface into solid ice. He surely would have drowned had not the sun made a quick appearance and evaporated the stream dry again. As it was, all the cowboy got out of it was a bad sunburn before he could get his clothes back on again.⁶

⁶Told by J. Frank Dobie, as quoted by Paul Bolton in "Texas Tall Tales," *Life*, November 1, 1943.
p. 40

There is a story of a certain "Lame Johnny" whose only claim to immortality was a mouth big enough to plop a cantaloupe into. Lame Johnny made the mistake of stealing a horse, was caught, and toted off to Boot Hill. Someone in the group felt that even a horse thief should have an epitaph, and finally one grizzled old cowman came up with this:

"Lame Johnny"
Stranger, pass gently over this sod.
If he opens his mouth, you're gone, by God!

p. 97

(Collected Verse of Edgar A. Guest by Edgar A. Guest)

The Mortgage and the Man

This is the tale of a mortgage and a dead man and his son,
A father who left to his only child a duty that must be done.
And the neighbors said as they gathered round in the neighbor's curious way:
"Too bad, too bad that he left his boy so heavy a debt to pay."

Day by day through the years that came, the mortgage held him fast—
Straight and true to his task he went, and he paid the debt at last;
And his arm grew strong and his eye kept bright, and although he never
knew,
The thing that fashioned a man of him was the task he had to do.

Honor and fortune crowned his brow till the day he came to die,
But he said: "My boy shall never work against such odds as I.
I have planned his years, I have made them safe, I have paid his journey
through."
And the boy looked out on a world wherein there was nothing for him to do.

His hands grew soft and his eyes went dull and his cheeks turned ashy pale,
For strength which isn't employed by day, with idleness grows stale.
"He is not the man that his father was," the neighbors often said,
"And better for him had he been left to work for his meat and bread."

Oh, the race dies out and the clan departs, and feeble grows the son
When they come at last to the dreadful day when all of the work is done.
For manhood dies on the roads of ease where the skies are ever blue,
And each of us needs, if we shall grow strong, some difficult thing to do.
pp. 434-5

In our last study on the life of our hero, King Solomon, we saw him "GREASING THE SKIS" for a slide in the pit.

Let us just REVIEW for a moment a few things that will be relevant to the passages that will come before us in this final section of our study.

It would be good for us to remember that Solomon ruled as king for FORTY YEARS. That kingdom was divided into several SECTIONS. It took King Solomon:

1. FOUR YEARS to consolidate his kingdom,
2. SEVEN YEARS to build the temple, and
3. THIRTEEN YEARS to build his palace complex.

This gives us a TOTAL of TWENTY-FOUR YEARS.

This leaves us with SIXTEEN YEARS and we have been looking at the choices that Solomon made for the investment of this time. He has spent an awful lot of his energy and efforts on buildings and other great projects throughout the land.

We left our hero:

HEALTHY,

WEALTHY, and

WISE

in the last study we had together. He is at the top of his game.

1 Kings 10:23, 24

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

There are FOUR MAJOR CONCERNS that have to do with Solomon's relationship to the Lord and to the law.

These FOUR AREAS OF DISOBEDIENCE are:

1. multiplying silver and gold,
2. multiplying lives,
3. multiplying horses, and
4. importing these horses from Egypt.

Nehemiah 13:26

Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women.

How wonderful it would be if Solomon would just meditate upon the inspired words of his father recorded in:

Psalms 119:37

Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
renew my life according to your word.

Psalms 16:11

You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Wiersbe says:

God made life for enjoyment and investment (1 Tim. 6:17-19), but Solomon decided to turn it into experiment. He tested his heart with pleasure (vv. 1-3), works (vv. 4-6), and the acquisition of wealth (vv. 7-9), and he discovered that they did not satisfy. These things can bring a certain amount of enjoyment while you are doing them, but when it is all over, you feel empty (vv. 10-11). *Enjoyment without God is only entertainment, not enrichment*; you cannot live on entertainment.
p. 437

DeHaan observes:

The pleasure-seeking pattern of modern man corresponds precisely to Solomon's experience. In Ecclesiastes 2 he tells us that after he could not find spiritual peace or meaning for life through the use of his reasoning powers, he first tried sensualism, then great human achievement, and finally the refined pleasure of the arts.
p. 38

Delitzsch titles these 11 verses that we will be considering in Ecclesiastes 2 in the following way:

The Unsatisfying Nature of Worldly Joy, ii. 1-11.

After having proved that secular wisdom has no superiority to folly in bringing true happiness to man, he seeks his happiness in a different way, and gives himself up to cheerful enjoyment.
p. 232

J. Vernon McGee says:

In this chapter we will find Solomon following another course to find satisfaction in life. This is a popular route for modern man who seeks satisfaction in pleasure.
p. 23

MacDonald calls this section:

The Pointless Pursuit of Pleasure and Prestige

Having failed to find fulfillment in intellectual pursuit, Solomon turns in chapter 2 to the pursuit of pleasure (v. 1). *It seems reasonable that one would be happy if one could just enjoy enough pleasure*, he thought.

Pleasure, by definition, means the enjoyable sensations that come from the gratification of personal desires. So he decided that he would live it up, that he would try to experience every stimulation of the senses known to man. He would drink the cup of fun to the full, and then, at last, his heart would ask no more.

But the search ended in failure. He concludes that pleasures under the sun are empty. His disappointment is echoed in the verse:

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah, the waters failed.
E'en as I stooped to drink they fled
And mocked me as I wailed.¹

B. E.

p. 21

Jeremiah 2:13

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Patrick & Lowth say:

Being thus disappointed, therefore, in the expectations I had of happiness from much wisdom and knowledge, and beholding many men look jollily who had none at all, I resolved to leave off those troublesome cares and labours, and to follow my pleasures: saying to myself, Why dost thou vex and torment thy mind to no purpose? let alone these crabbed studies which hasten old age, and indulge thyself in all those sweet delights which youth desires: try what satisfaction mirth and joy can give thee: and for that end take no thought for the future, but enjoy to the height the present goods of this life; which accordingly I did: but believe me, though this promised much at first, it performed little, but left me more void of contentment than it found me.

p. 121

In my own commentary I make this observation:

A friend of mine who had read the biography of the late Erroll Flynn told me that the actor had been in the habit of having everything he owned decorated with question marks. Question marks adorned his limousines, tailored shirts, bathrobes, and abounded throughout his house. I wonder if using those question marks was Flynn's way of expressing his search for significance in life. Like many men, maybe he was simply asking, "Is that all there is?"

p. 52

Veldey points out that:

. . . grief often causes a man to plunge into pleasure. Today in the midst of perplexities and disillusionments people are madly seeking pleasure to relieve the monotony of life. Solomon has tried wine, women, and song but has all turned to ashes in his hands.

p. (unknown)

I think it would good for us to reflect upon one of Jesus' parables that is relevant at this point:

Luke 12:16-20

And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'

v. 1 I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless.

In The Bible Knowledge Commentary we read:

Solomon stated that in his quest to find something worthwhile in life . . . he experimented **with pleasure**. But he concluded that it was futile or **meaningless** because it was foolish and accomplished little or nothing.
p. 981

Solomon has gotten his eyes OFF SERVING THE LORD and UPON HIMSELF.

The words:

"I,"

"me,"

"my," and

"myself"

occur THIRTY-FIVE TIMES in these 11 verses.

"I THOUGHT IN MY HEART."

The word "HEART" occurs FOUR TIMES in this passage.

Could it be that it is experiences like these that cause Solomon later to write:

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

I like the way the *New Living Bible* translation presents this verse:

Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.

Listen to these verses from the inspired pen of his father, David:

Psalm 57:7

My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.

Psalm 9:1

I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonders.

Psalm 86:12

I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever.

"I THOUGHT IN MY HEART, 'COME NOW, I WILL TEST YOU WITH PLEASURE.'"

The word "PLEASURE" occurs here in verse 1, then in verse 2, and again down in verse 10.

The purpose of the "TEST [is] TO FIND OUT WHAT IS GOOD."

Hubbard says:

Like an eager boy at the county fair, pockets bulging with six months' allowance, he roamed from booth to booth tasting the goodies designed to heighten the senses. With wine he cheered his body while dulling his feelings of anguish or despair (2:3). With slaves, he eased his load of work, while increasing his sense of power (2:7). With wealth he enhanced his feelings of security, while indulging his every whim (2:8). With entertainers he whiled away his evenings, while satiating his drives in sexual pleasures (2:8).
p. 33

"I THOUGHT IN MY HEART, 'COME NOW, I WILL TEST YOU WITH PLEASURE TO FIND OUT WHAT IS GOOD.' BUT THAT ALSO PROVED TO BE MEANINGLESS."

The word "BUT" forms the CONTRAST and gives us the RESULT of the "TEST":

"THAT ALSO PROVED TO BE MEANINGLESS."

Leupold says:

We could paraphrase this typical sentence: "I found no lasting values in this attempt."
p. 59

Wiersbe says:

Today's world is pleasure-mad. Millions of people will pay almost any amount of money to "buy experiences" and temporarily escape the burdens of life. While there is nothing wrong with innocent fun, the person who builds his or her life only on seeking pleasure is bound to be disappointed in the end.

Why? For one thing, pleasure-seeking usually becomes a selfish endeavor; and selfishness destroys true joy. People who live for pleasure often exploit others to get what they want, and they end up with broken relationships as well as empty hearts. *People are more important than things and thrills.* We are to be channels, not reservoirs; the greatest joy comes when we share God's pleasures with others.

p. 34

Lange says of this verse:

I will try whether though wilt feel contented and happy in this new object of thy experience, namely, in cheerful sensual enjoyment, whether, on this path of pleasure and joy thou canst become a [joyful heart].

p. 53

Matthew Henry says:

Solomon here, in pursuit of the *summum bonum*—*the felicity* of man, adjourns out of his study, where he had in vain sought for it, into the park and his garden; he exchanges the company of the philosophers and grave senators for that of the wits and gallants, to try if he could find true satisfaction and happiness among them. Here he takes a great step downward, from the noble pleasures of the intellect to the brutal ones of sense.

p. 793

In my commentary I ask you to:

Recall that at mid-life Solomon is upset by three nagging facts: he sees no gain in life, there's never anything new under the sun, and no one is going to remember his futile actions anyway (1:9-11). From that foundation of desperation, he's going to begin to search for a phenomenon I call the "Success Syndrome." He'll try to escape the drudgery of the everyday and make it big personally and professionally. And the "Success Syndrome" demands that he dally with the "Three W's": work, wine, and women.
p. 55

Many times WORKAHOLICS are the way they are because of:

GUILT,

FEAR OF FAILURE, or

SETTLING FOR MATERIAL GOALS rather than spiritual ones.

Jim Conway in his work Men in Mid-Life Crisis says:

This new god is called indulgence. It is the god of pleasure, luxury, gusto, comfort, ease, sensuality—the god of hedonism.

The reasoning goes something like this: "I've worked hard all of my life. I obeyed my parents when I was a little kid, did what I was supposed to do in school, went to church like a good little boy, went to college, got a good job, got married and settled down as society expected, started a family, bought a house in the suburbs, even managed to get a second car. I took out life insurance and started retirement funds. I became respectable in the community, was a member of [the] P.T.A., the JayCees, and the local church board. I worked hard at my job; I'm now vice-president in charge of sales in a four-state area.

"I've paid for braces, piano lessons, four different stages of bicycles and memberships at the Y. I've footed the bills for all kinds of trips and vacations, and I'm carrying a big load to make sure my kids get a good college education.

I'm tired of doing all this. It's time that I get some pleasure out of life. It's time for me to indulge myself. I'm going to follow a new life-style that does not include God and sacrifice. I am going to start using money for my own pleasure, my own leisure, to get me the kind of freedom that I want. I am going to use my life and time and money and energy to get me the kind of intimacy and sex and pleasure that I want. God has talked to me all my life about serving other people, giving to other people, supporting other people. Now it's time I get some of that!"

p. 130

(Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On! II by Texas Bix Bender)

One good thing about being a cowboy is that you just don't have time for golf.
p. 93

One old cowboy described his life as wine, women, and song and he didn't sing much.

Golf is like a love affair: if you don't take it seriously, it's no fun; If you do take it seriously, it breaks your heart.
Arnold Daly

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

Jack Benny: "Give me my golf clubs, the fresh air and a beautiful partner, and you can keep my golf clubs and the fresh air."

(Source Unknown)

One writer said:

Our desires always increase with our possessions. The knowledge that something remains yet unenjoyed.

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

Red Stegal, cowboy poet of the Internet said:

"Growing up in West Texas you learn to never complain about rain or work because you're going to run out of both sooner or later."

(Cactus Tracks & Cowboy Philosophy by Baxter Black)

They looked around and said, *"Bax, we need to get rid of some dead wood and yer the only thing floating."*

p. 1

Dennison in his book Shock It to Me Doctor says:

The unfulfilled longing of the pleasure-seeker is expressed tellingly in a song made famous by Barbara Streisand:

The merry-go-round is beginning to taunt me
Have I stayed too long at the fair?
There's nothing to win and no one to want me
Have I stayed too long at the fair?

Such a longing isn't surprising in view of Solomon's confession. Fortunate is the person who discovers that he is more than an animal to be ruled by passion, who can fill his emptiness with the spirit of God, who realized that Paschal was right in saying, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which only God can fill through His Son Jesus Christ."
p. ?

Hebrews 11:25

choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;

v. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

In verse 2 we have a VERDICT and a QUESTION.

VERDICT:

"LAUGHTER," I SAID, "IS FOOLISH."

QUESTION:

"AND WHAT DOES PLEASURE ACCOMPLISH?"

Proverbs 14:13

Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief.

Solomon then raises the QUESTION:

"AND WHAT DOES PLEASURE ACCOMPLISH?"

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Solomon's question, **And what does pleasure accomplish?** is again rhetorical, expecting a negative answer (cf. 1:3).
p. 981

DeHaan says:

Solomon soon found that a continuous round of revelry brought only short-term dividends. In a later passage he concluded that laughter is like the crackling of burning thorns (see Ecc. 7:6). They blaze forth with great promise but last only a moment, giving off little heat and leaving nothing more substantial than a few cold, gray ashes. His brief pleasures were more than offset by the inevitable gloom that followed when he was alone with his thoughts.

p. 38

MacDonald says:

Billy Graham tells in *The Secret of Happiness* of the disturbed patient who consulted a psychiatrist for help. He was suffering from deep depression. Nothing he had tried could help. He woke up discouraged and blue, and the condition worsened as the day progressed. Now he was desperate; he couldn't go on this way.

Before he left the office, the psychiatrist told him about a show in one of the local theaters. It featured an Italian clown who had the audience convulsed with laughter night after night. The doctor recommended that his patient attend the show, that it would be excellent therapy to laugh for a couple of hours and forget his troubles. Just go and see the Italian clown!

With a hangdog expression, the patient muttered, "I am that clown." He too could say of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"
p. 22

Delitzsch says:

In the midst of the laughter and revelling in sensual delight, the feeling came over him that this was not the way to true happiness, and he was compelled to say to laughter, It has become mad (*part. Poal*, as at Ps. cii. 9), it is like one who is raving mad, who finds his pleasure in self-destruction; . . .
p. 233

Hubbard says:

You can be sure that the wise man enjoyed himself a good bit while working toward his negative conclusion.

After all, part of pleasure's lure is that it offers to *heighten our senses*. We are made to enjoy a tender touch, a tasty morsel, a tangy beverage, a graceful figure, a delicate perfume. From the standpoint of our senses, we might conclude that pleasure is what we were made for. The Preacher sought to test that view of life by abandoning himself to pleasure. He gave his senses every chance to thrill and tingle, to stir and soothe. Would he uncover life's full purpose by arousing his sensitivities?
p. 32

Hubbard says:

It has another snare. *Pleasure satisfies only during the act.* Repetition is a key to pleasure. One drink, one sexual fling, one contest won, one project accomplished, one wild party—none of these, nor all of them put together, can be enough to bring satisfaction. The quest for pleasure is like eating salted peanuts; it is impossible to stop after the first bite. One bite leads to another because the first leaves no lasting impact. To reflect on the delights of the first peanut is far less gratifying than to reach for the second. And on it goes. Far from comforting us, each act of pleasure leaves us thirsty for the next.

p. 36

A QUART of PLEASURE TODAY takes a GALLON TOMORROW to get the same affect.

The ANSWER to this drama is found in:

Philippians 4:19

And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

What Man Will Do for Fun

Dinosaurs had brains the size of walnuts. Horses have to be forced to leave a burning barn. Our cat is so dumb, it'll climb up a tree and not know how to get back down.

But when it comes to all-out, world-class, drop-dead stupidity, nature may never have spawned a dumber creature than a human being in search of amusement.

Human beings are the only creatures who will voluntarily leave an air-conditioned home and drive 500 miles to spend a week with spiders in a musty cabin, wearing damp bathing suits and eating food that tastes like charcoal lighter. They are the only ones who will get out of a perfectly comfortable bed at four o'clock in the morning, load \$600 worth of equipment into a \$12,000 boat and tow it to a lake so they can spend an entire day trying to catch a fish they have no intention of eating.

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

(God's Little Devotional Book for Leaders by Honor Books, Inc.)

**The most wanted of
all days is that on
which one has not
laughed.**

n n n

A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.
Proverbs 15:13 NIV

The world always looks brighter when viewed with a smile:

*Laugh a little now and then
It brightens life a lot;
You can see the brighter side
Just as well as not.
Don't go mournfully around,
Gloomy and forlorn;
Try to make your fellow men
Glad that you were born.*
(Author Unknown)

It actually takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile. Beyond that, laughter has other very practical therapeutic results. It sends endorphins to the brain, which bring about a sense of well-being and calm. It energizes the body. It releases one's mind from depression and turns it toward goals, dreams, and triumphs. It makes time go by faster and menial chores more enjoyable.

Furthermore, when shared with friends and family, laughter builds relationships. At the end of a busy, tiring day, a happy home is a refuge for each family member, young and old.

Find a reason to enjoy a hearty laugh today!
pp. 38-39

I tried the broken cisterns of pleasure but all the waters failed and mocked me as I wailed.

v. 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

Solomon now describes the FIRST PART of the TEST to find out what is good:

1. "I TRIED CHEERING MYSELF WITH WINE" and
2. "EMBRACING FOLLY."

Drinking is all part of that pursuit. The lie from the pit is "you can find joy in a bottle."

(Breaking Free—From the Bondage of Sin by Henry Brandt)

It was Shakespeare who exclaimed, "Oh, God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains."

Drunkenness is a sin against God.

p. 59

(Inspiring Quotations compiled by Albert M. Wells, Jr.)

Drink has drained more blood, hung more crepes, sold more homes, plunged more people into bankruptcy, armed more villains, slain more children, snapped more wedding rings, defiled more innocence, blinded more eyes, twisted more limbs, dethroned more reason, wrecked more manhood, dishonored more womanhood, broken more hearts, driven more to suicide and dug more graves than any other poisonous scourge that ever swept its death-dealing waves across the world.

—**Evangeline Booth**

p. 6

The old cowboy was right when he said:

"Drinking causes a man to see double, and to think that he is single."

(Never Walk Away: Lessons on Integrity from a Father Who Lived It by
Crawford W. Loritts, Jr.)

Some old sayings have been passed down from one generation to the next among the Loritts. One of them is "You never walk away from home," a philosophy that gave this book its title. Another is "You take care of your family first."
p. 50

That brings me to what I consider to be the definition of a fool: *A fool is a person who refuses to live and to behave in light of what he knows is right and becomes a willing slave of his impulses.* Fools have willfully chosen to reject what they know is right to do. Instead, they live by what feels good and what is expedient.
p. 67

Somewhere along the line we have bought the myth that the goals of life are happiness and personal fulfillment. Therefore, if ever we find ourselves in a place where we feel less than happy or fulfilled, we think we have to change our address. In truth, real fulfillment is the by-product of obedience and faithfulness. It is the completion of the assignment that brings deep joy.
p. 77

(God's Little Devotional Book for Men by Honor Books, Inc.)

**Conquer yourself
rather than
the world.**

n n n

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled.
Titus 2:6 NIV

In *Gone With the Wind*, at the funeral of Gerald O'Hara—a heavy drinker who dies in an alcohol-related accident—his prospective son-in-law gives this eulogy: "There warn't nothin' that come to him from the outside that could lick him. He warn't scared of the English government when they wanted to hang him. He just lit out and left home. And when he come to this country . . . he warn't scared to tackle this section when it was part wild and the Injuns had just been run out of it. He made a big plantation out of a wilderness. And when the war come on and his money begun to go, he warn't scared to be pore again. And when the Yankees came through Tara and might of burnt him out or killed him, he warn't fazed a bit and he warn't licked neither. . . . That's why I say he had our good points . . .

"All you all and me, too, are like him. We got the same weakness and failin'. There ain't nothin' that walks can lick us, any more than it could lick him, not Yankees nor Carpetbaggers nor hard times nor high taxes nor even downright starvation. But that weakness that's in our hearts can lick us in the time it takes to bat your eye." The world of "self" is truly the toughest frontier!
pp. 126-7

(The Power of Personal Integrity: Becoming a Person of Character in a Drifting World by Charles Dyer)

I grew up listening to the music of Peter, Paul, and Mary. I did not always agree with their political views, but I appreciated their candor. Time had grayed their hair, but it hasn't diminished their ability to focus on the state of society. In their twenty-fifth anniversary concert (a staple on PBS) Noel Paul Stookey delivered a monologue on our growing obsession with ourselves, and he did so by observing the ever diminishing focus of attention as represented in the titles of our most popular magazines.

In the 1950s the magazine of choice was *Life*. The name represented the breadth of interest in our society. We focused on all of life. Then in the 1960s another new magazine appeared: *People*. While it's true that people are a large part of life, they are not everything there is in life. In the 1970s another new magazine appeared, and the trend should have been obvious. The new magazine was *Us*. Stookey so humorously notes, "Now, 'us' is still people, too. Only it's not 'them,' it's only 'us.'" Then in the 1980s *Self* hit the newsstands. Stookey comments that any day he expects a new magazine called *Me*. All it will be is twenty pages of aluminum foil in which you can watch your reflection!

pp. 22-23

GOING WITH THE FLOW

"Many Christian families today lack a sense of unified purpose and instead of turning outward, are turning inward—not toward one another but toward self. Instead of having an impact on the world, they blend in. Instead of cutting across the grain of the culture, they go with the flow."

—Dennis and Barbara Rainey
(in *Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem*,
quoted in Christian Book Review,
Sep/Oct 1995)

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

"I TRIED CHEERING MYSELF WITH WINE, AND EMBRACING FOLLY—
MY MIND STILL GUIDING ME WITH WISDOM."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In Solomon's quest to find something worthwhile to do, he even experimented—though deliberately and with restraint, not blindly or in uncontrolled excess . . . [this was] sensual indulgence . . . and with what he would otherwise have characterized as a foolish or frivolous lifestyle (**embracing folly**). He wanted to test the effects of pleasure-seeking and frivolity to **see** if they were really **worthwhile**.
p. 981

Lange says:

The sense is therefore: I did not plunge headlong into coarse, fleshly gratifications, but, . . . I tested with calm reflection, and in a composed way, whether real contentment was to be secured by means of sensual joys.
p. 54

Kidner says:

So he will plunge into frivolity. But part of him stands back from it all—*my mind still guiding me with wisdom*—to see what frivolity as a life-style implies, and what it does to a man. He notes at once the 'paradox of hedonism', that the more you hunt for pleasure, the less of it you find. In any case, he is looking for something beyond it and through it, for this is more than simple indulgence. It is a deliberate flight from rationality, to get at some secret of life to which reason may be blocking the way.
p. 31

"I TRIED CHEERING MYSELF WITH WINE, AND EMBRACING FOLLY—MY MIND STILL GUIDING ME WITH WISDOM. I WANTED TO SEE WHAT WAS WORTHWHILE FOR MEN TO DO UNDER HEAVEN DURING THE FEW DAYS OF THEIR LIVES."

Back in verse 1 he wanted to:

"test . . . to find out what is good."

Now in verse 3 he is pursuing this path of pleasure to find out:

"WHAT WAS WORTHWHILE."

He kind of SUMS UP LIFE with a sobering phrase at the end of verse 3:

"DURING THE FEW DAYS OF THEIR LIVES."

James 4:14-17

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

In my commentary I say:

Quoting many a stewardess [or flight attendant], "Our ground time here will be brief." This sad but true conclusion slaps many men in the face at mid-life.

p. 58

Lange observes:

There is in these words a kind of mournful resignation. Short as is the period of human life on earth, even for this little span of time it is not always clear to man what is really good and beneficial for him; and many, and mostly bitter and painful experiences, are needed to bring him to this knowledge.

p. 55

v. 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

I think it is interesting to highlight the VERBS in the passage. It helps us understand this text by pleasure to find meaning.

1. "I tried" (verse 3),
2. "I UNDERTOOK" (verse 4),
3. "I BUILT" (verse 4),
4. "[I] PLANTED" (verses 4 & 5),
5. "I made" (verses 5 & 6),
6. "I bought" (verse 7),
7. "I owned" (verse 7),
8. "I amassed" (verse 8),
9. "I acquired" (verse 8), and
10. "I became" (verse 9).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

In his inquiry into the value of pleasure he denied himself no avenue through which pleasure might be gained.
pp. 981-2

Here in verse 4 he poured himself into "PROJECTS."

A SLOWER GROUP

A first-grader became curious because her father brought home a briefcase full of papers every evening. Her mother explained, "Daddy has so much to do that he can't finish it all at the office. That's why he has to bring work home at night." "Well, then," asked the child innocently, "why don't they put him in a slower group?"

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

Hubbard says:

Useful, attractive, productive works these were, and satisfying. They began with a dream, took seed with a plan, started to bud as the building and planting began, and came to full flower in the grandeur of a palace and the verdure of a garden.

No one who has ever seen a dream come to fruition can doubt its pleasure—whether on the massive scale of Solomon's estates or in the simple matters of home-grown vegetables and hand-made furniture. To invent, to build, to garden, to paint—all these marvelously human acts can provide incredible pleasure.

The pleasures which heighten our senses and the pleasures which lift us above the routine play a mammoth role in our society.
p. 34

Robert Foster says:

The action verbs of these sentences show the drive and dedicated resolve of this ancient "wheeler and dealer." "I made . . . I builded . . . I planted . . . I got . . . I got . . . I gathered."

Land development . . . city planning . . . easy credit . . . adequate water supply . . . relaxed labor relations—here is the story from the pen of one of the world's first Big Spenders.
p. 3b

Robert Foster also has a poetic piece by George Wallace Scott that is very pointed:

THE FOOLISH TOILERS

Morning, and the din and roar
Of traffic passing by my door
Reminds me that this world of strife
Has once again come back to life;
And hordes of men both weak and strong
Go forth to battle in the throng
Which daily strives with one intent—
To earn its share of nourishment.

Noontime, and a pause is made
To eat a bite, and talk of trade;
Then back again they rush headlong
With cursing, or perhaps a song.
Back to office, field and store—
Back to fight for life once more,
Hoping for success to dawn.
Thus poor mankind struggles on.

Evening, the hour has come
When toilers weary journey home;
Some to squalid unkept stalls,
Others to rich marble halls—
There to glory in their might,
Heedless whether wrong or right,
Never thinking that we plod
ALWAYS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD!

—George Wallace Scott

p. 3a

William P. Barker says:

Love of luxury is habit-forming. Solomon wanted more and more. He was discontented with the present and was ever increasingly absorbed only in his comfort and his own interests.

There is nothing inherently wrong in the possession of money or material things. Money, prestige and power do not of themselves corrupt. It is the love of these that can ruin us. We will never find satisfaction from them. We are not meant to. We are created to live for God. In trying to love any of these lesser gods, we get nothing. So we keep stepping up our devotion to them, needing larger and larger doses to give us what we want. "More money, more power," we tell ourselves. Thus, love of luxury is a wearying cycle. It is an insufficient purpose in life. The letdown is inevitable.
p. 39

Barker says further:

Then luxury and the building craze began to absorb all his time. Many of his projects can still be seen today in the Holy Land. He spent lavishly for water systems, palaces, stables (one in Megiddo could stable five hundred horses). Solomon was no small-bore sheik or run-of-the-mine king. He lived in staggering magnificence. (Even his throne was solid ivory, covered with pure gold.) Solomon accumulated tremendous wealth and power. Instead of being master of these, however, he allowed them to master him. He yielded to the temptation of abusing them, living for luxury alone. He began to use what he had for himself only, for his own whims and pleasures. Slowly he lost a sense of responsibility.

He failed to see that there had to be limits to his expensive building program. Although he personally was rich, Solomon's people were still peasants. They had barely passed from the nomad stage to the farmer stage. With incredible shortsightedness, Solomon drove his country bankrupt.
pp. 36-37

Delitzsch in outlining these next verses says:

The king now, in the verse following, relates his undertakings for the purpose of gaining the joys of life in fellowship with wisdom, and first, how he made architecture and gardening serviceable to this new style of life.
p. 235

Here Solomon states the fact that he "UNDERTOOK GREAT PROJECTS."

In this verse and the next few verses he will OUTLINE EIGHT of these "PROJECTS [that he] UNDERTOOK" in seeking to find meaning in life.

The first and second are here in verse 4:

PROJECT #1:

"I BUILT HOUSES FOR MYSELF."

He got involved in building houses. He drew up the plans and it must have been magnificent. Once the plans were settled upon he began the building of his dream home which we have seen is quite a campus project which took thirteen years to complete.

PROJECT #2:

"HE PLANTED VINEYARDS"—He took up farming.

It was the fruit of these "VINEYARDS" that he produced the wine which he drank.

v. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.

PROJECT #3 was to make:

"GARDENS,"

"PARKS," and

"[plant] ALL KINDS OF FRUIT TREES IN THEM."

Like LADYBIRD JOHNSON who planted flowers and shrubs and trees to beautify the landscape in the city of Jerusalem.

MacDonald observes:

Probably none of his guests had the courage to say to him what Samuel Johnson said to a millionaire who was taking a similar ego trip. After seeing all the luxury and magnificence, Johnson remarked, "These are the things that make it hard for a man to die."

p. 24

v. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

PROJECT #4

"[He] MADE RESERVOIRS TO WATER GROVES OF FLOURISHING TREES."

He got involved in building dams and making lakes in order to have adequate water to irrigate his "gardens and parks and . . . fruit trees."

v. 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

PROJECT #5:

"[He] BOUGHT MALE AND FEMALE SLAVES AND HAD OTHER SLAVES WHO WERE BORN IN [His] HOUSE."

In order to accomplish all these "projects" he needed a lot of hired help—food service, housekeeping, and landscaping took no small number of persons to accomplish these menial tasks.

PROJECT #6:

"I ALSO OWNED MORE HERDS AND FLOCKS THAN ANYONE IN JERUSALEM BEFORE ME."

Solomon has gotten involved in the cattle and sheep business. He brags over the fact that his "HERDS AND FLOCKS" are bigger than anybody else who has been "IN JERUSALEM BEFORE HIM."

v. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

PROJECT #7:

"I AMASSED SILVER AND GOLD FOR MYSELF, AND THE TREASURE OF KINGS AND PROVINCES."

He got involved in the "SILVER AND GOLD" market. We have been aware of this in his relationship with Hiram, the king of Tyre, as they have sent ships to import gold from Ophir.

In my commentary I point out the fact that:

Solomon also begins a play around in the precious metals and commodities markets, amassing for himself gold, silver, and "the treasure of kings and provinces" (2:8). He is successful in all of his ventures, gathering great wealth for himself and probably delivering hefty commissions to his brokers.

p. 61

The *New Living Bible* has a graphic response to Job by Eliphaz recorded in:

Job 22:24, 25

Give up your lust for money, and throw your precious gold into the river. Then the Almighty himself will be your treasure. He will be your precious silver!

PROJECT #8 is outlined in the last part of verse 8:

"I ACQUIRED MEN AND WOMEN SINGERS, AND A HAREM AS WELL—THE DELIGHTS OF THE HEART OF MAN."

MacDonald says:

A victim of today's sex-obsession felt afterward that she had been cheated. She wrote: "I guess I wanted sex to be some psychedelic jackpot that made the whole world light up like a pinball machine, but when it was all over I felt I had been shortchanged. I remember thinking, 'Is that all there is? Is that all there *really* is?'"⁴
p. 26

I say in my commentary:

In his pleasure-seeking Solomon fully embraces a philosophy similar to what Jim Conway calls the "One More Time" stage. As Conway puts it, suddenly it's "one more time with one more woman . . . the newness, the excitement of a new touch, a new face" (Conway 1979, 148) that may become tremendously appealing to the middlescent man. And as a result far too many men and women, Christians included, join the ranks of those involved in extra-marital affairs.

John Denver's song "Seasons of the Heart" expresses this dangerous mid-life mentality quite well. Consider the lyrics reprinted here:

Of course we have our differences
You shouldn't be surprised
It's as natural as changes
In the seasons and the skies
Sometimes we grow together
Sometimes we drift apart
A wiser man than I might know
The seasons of the heart
And I'm walking here beside you
In the early evening chill
A thing we've always loved to do
I know we always will
We have so much in common
So many things we share
That I can't believe my heart
When it implies that you're not there
Love is why I came here in the first place
Love is now the reason I must go
Love is all I hoped to find here
Love is still the only dream I know.

So I don't know how to tell you
 It's difficult to say
 I never in my wildest dreams
 Imagined it this way
 But sometimes I just don't know you
 There's a stranger in our home
 When I'm lying right beside you
 Is when I'm most alone
 And I think my heart is broken
 There's an emptiness inside
 So many things I've longed for
 Have so often been denied
 Still I wouldn't try to change you
 There's no one that's to blame
 It's just some things that mean so much
 And we just don't feel the same

Love is why I came here in the first place
 Love is now the reason I must go
 Love is all I hoped to find here
 Love is still the only dream I know
 True love is still the only dream I know.

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pp. 52-54

Here are a couple of Proverbs from the pen of Solomon, I'm sure as he reflects back on these experiences. They come from the *New Living Bible*:

Proverbs 5:23

He will die for lack of self-control; he will be lost because of his incredible folly.

Proverbs 27:19

As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the person.

(To Follow Him: The Seven Marks of a Disciple by Mark Bailey)

A young man had a passion for Porsches, and every day he would glance through the classified ads and look for Porsches offered for sale, even though he knew he could never afford one.

One day he was shocked to see an ad offering a brand-new Porsche for only five hundred dollars. Quickly he came to his senses and realized it was just a typo; brand-new Porsches do not sell for five hundred dollars. But the next day, the same ad ran again. The man decided to call the number in the ad, although he felt quite foolish because he knew the whole thing had to be a mistake.

The woman who answered the phone assured him that the ad was correct: a brand-new Porsche for five hundred dollars.

The man just couldn't believe it, but upon arriving at the house, he saw a beautiful, new Porsche sitting in the driveway. He got out and examined it carefully, thinking, *It must not have an engine in it.*

The woman came out of the house and again assured him it was a Porsche, it was for sale, it was brand-new, and yes, five hundred dollars was all she was asking. He test-drove it, and the car ran beautifully. He couldn't believe it. He paid her five hundred dollars and left as quickly as he could, fearing she might have second thoughts.

The car was in mint condition, but it kept bothering him to think he had paid the woman only five hundred dollars. So after driving the Porsche for a week, he called her, identified himself, and said, "Ma'am, are you aware that the book listing on this car is thirty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes," she responded.

"Well," he asked, "why did you sell it to me for only five hundred dollars?"

Without pausing a moment, she answered, "I'll tell you why. Three weeks ago my husband ran off to Bermuda with his secretary, and the last thing he said to me was 'Sell the Porsche and send me the money.' So I did!"

When I saw that little story in *Reader's Digest* a few years ago, I thought, *What a perfect story for illustrating the sixth mark of discipleship.* You see, this sixth mark concerns our possessions—that we may manage them, as the lady did the Porsche, but we don't own them.
pp. 119-20

(Courage for the Chicken Hearted: Humorous & Inspiring Stories for
Confident Living by Becky Freeman, Susan Duke, Rebecca Barlow
Jordan, Gracie Malone & Fran Caffey Sandin)

How well I identify with these lines from Judith Viorst's book,
Necessary Losses.

I'm working all day and I'm working all night
To be good-looking, healthy, and wise.
And adored.
And contented.
And brave.
And well-read,
And a marvelous hostess,
Fantastic in bed,
And bilingual,
Athletic,
Artistic.
Won't someone please stop me?

p. 45

(Cow Pies & Candle Lights by G. T. Burton)

THE CUP BEARER

They brought a Grand Prize muley bull
To give their herd some class,
But the lazy thing just rolled his eyes
When 'ary cow would pass.
Then Randy Jones and Bugger Red
Rode in to see the vet.
They explained to him their problem,
And asked what they could get.

He mixed 'em up a tonic,
And they drenched the bull down good,
Next spring each critter dropped a calf
Like the doctor said they would
Randy mused: "what was that stuff,
The veterinary sent".
"I don't know", was Red's response,
"But it tastes like peppermint".

p. 80

(Coyote Cowboy Poetry by Baxter Black)

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

All my clothes are laundry
All my socks are fulla holes
I've got t.p. in my hatband
And cardboard in my soles.

I've stuffed the want ad section
Underneath my long-john shirt
And my jacket's held together
By dehornin' blood and dirt.

The leather on my bridle's
Been fixed so many times
My horse looks like that fence post
Where we hang the baler twine.

When I bought that horse he was
As good as most around
But when I sold 'im last month
He brought thirteen cents a pound.

I've been unable lately
To invest in purebred cows
Since my ex-wives and their lawyers
Are dependents of mine, now.

See, my first wife took my saddle
The second skinned my hide
The third one got my deer head
And the last one took my pride.

I've had a run of bad luck
But I think it's gonna peak
'Cause my dog that used to bite me
Got run over just last week.

So all I want for Christmas
Is whatever you can leave
But I'd settle for a new wife
Who would stay through New Year's Eve.

p. 174

YOU CAN STILL FLY!

In his book *Hurryin' Big for Little Reasons*, Ronald Meredith spoke of a quiet spring night when the silence was broken by the sound of wild geese flying. "I ran to the house," Meredith comments, "and breathlessly announced the excitement I felt. What is to compare with wild geese across the moon? It might have ended there, except for the sight of our tame mallards on the pond. They heard the wild call they had once known. The honking out of the night sent little arrows of prompting deep into their wild yesterdays. Their wings fluttered a feeble response. The urge to fly—to take their place in the sky for which God had made them—was sounding in those feathered breasts, but they never raised from the water. The matter had been settled long ago. The corn of the barnyard was too tempting!"

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

Verse 8 ends with the phrase:

"THE DELIGHTS OF THE HEART OF MAN."

This certainly is not the "DELIGHTS OF THE HEART" of God.

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

Matthew 6:33

"But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the Lord
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Jeremiah 9:23, 24

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Proverbs 23:26

My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,

v. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

1 Kings 10:23, 24

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.

I wonder if Solomon remembered the fact that this "WISDOM" was a gift from the Lord.

In essence, Solomon is telling us that he has reached the pinnacle of success. He struggled up the corporate ladder and was greater by far than anybody else in Jerusalem. In all of it, his wisdom stayed with him.

(Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On!: A Cowboy's Guide to Life by Texas Bix Bender)

Generally speaking,
fancy titles and
nightshirts are a
waste of time.

p. 37

(God's Little Devotional Book on Success by Honor Books)

**Three qualities
vital to success: toil,
solitude, prayer.**

■ ■ ■

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Joshua 1:8

Charles G. Finney, a young apprentice lawyer, was sitting in a small-town law office in the state of New York early one morning. He was all alone when he sensed the Lord speaking to him.

"Finney, what are you going to do when you finish your course?" He said, "Put out a shingle and practice law."

"Then what?" He replied, "Get rich."

"Then what?" He said, "Retire."

"Then what?" "Die."

"Then what?" And he spoke his next words with a tremble in his voice, "The judgment."

Finney left the office immediately and ran for the woods a half mile away. He prayed there all day and vowed that he would not leave until he had made peace with God. He had studied law for four years, but he emerged from the woods that evening with the high purpose of living to the glory of God and enjoying Him forever. God began to use him in a mighty way, not as a lawyer, but as a preacher. He brought thousands of people to a conversion experience over the next fifty years of his life.²⁷

Any career can be a way of bringing glory to God, as long as you know you are working to further His kingdom, and not simply to build one of your own.

²⁷ *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, Paul Lee Tan, ed. (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979), pp. 687, 688.
pp. 68-69

v. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.

"I,"

"MY," and

"MYSELF"

occur EIGHT TIMES in verse 10.

Solomon speaks of TWO MEMBERS OF THE BODY:

1. "I DENIED MYSELF NOTHING MY EYES DESIRED" and
2. "I REFUSED MY HEART NO PLEASURE."

1 John 2:15, 16

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

Don't be guilty of leaving your heart in San Francisco!

We must also be careful not to follow our hearts. This gets more guys into trouble.

Back in verse 8:

His heart took delight in women.

Here in verse 10:

"[His] HEART TOOK DELIGHT IN [his] WORK."

I did a little study on the "HEART" and I would like to meditate on some of these verses that will be helpful:

"Guard Your Heart"

1 Samuel 12:24

But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your **HEART**; consider what great things he has done for you.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the **HEART**."

2 Kings 22:19

Because your **HEART** was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord.

Psalms 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my **HEART**
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalms 26:2, 3

Test me, O Lord, and try me,
examine my **HEART** and my mind;
for your love is ever before me,
and I walk continually in your truth.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the Lord
and he will give you the desires of your **HEART**.

Psalm 51:10, 17

Create in me a pure **HEART**, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite **HEART**,
O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 66:18

If I had cherished sin in my **HEART**,
the Lord would not have listened;

Psalm 95:8, 10

do not harden your **HEARTS** as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the desert,
For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, "They are a people whose **HEARTS** go astray,
and they have not known my ways."

Psalm 111:1

Praise the Lord.
I will extol the Lord with all my **HEART**
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

Psalm 112:7, 8

He will have no fear of bad news;
his **HEART** is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.
His **HEART** is secure, he will have no fear;
in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

Psalm 119:10, 11

I seek you with all my **HEART**;
do not let me stray from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my **HEART**
that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 139:23

Search me, O God, and know my **HEART**;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Proverbs 3:5, 6

Trust in the Lord with all your **HEART** and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your **HEART**, for it is the wellspring of life.

Ecclesiastes 10:2; 11:9

The **HEART** of the wise inclines to the right, but the **HEART** of the fool to the left.

Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your **HEART** give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your **HEART** and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

Isaiah 57:15

For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the **HEART** of the contrite.

Jeremiah 15:16

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my **HEART'S** delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.

Jeremiah 17:9, 10

The **HEART** is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the Lord search the **HEART** and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your **HEART**.

Daniel 1:8

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Joel 2:12, 13

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your **HEART**, with fasting and weeping and mourning." Rend your **HEART** and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Malachi 4:6

He will turn the **HEARTS** of the fathers to their children, and the **HEARTS** of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Matthew 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in **HEART**, for they shall see God.

Matthew 6:21

for where your treasure is, there will your **HEART** be also.

Matthew 15:8, 18, 19

"This people honors Me with their lips, But their **HEART** is far away from Me.

"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the **HEART**, and those defile the man. For out of the **HEART** come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Matthew 22:37

And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your **HEART**, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

Luke 6:45

"The good man out of the good treasure of his **HEART** brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his **HEART**.

Luke 8:15

"And the seed in the good ground, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good **HEART**, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Acts 5:3, 4

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your **HEART** to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your **HEART**? You have not lied to men, but to God."

Ephesians 6:5, 6

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your **HEART**, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the **HEART**.

1 Timothy 1:5

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure **HEART** and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

2 Timothy 2:22

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue after righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure **HEART**.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the **HEART**.

Hebrews 10:22

let us draw near with a sincere **HEART** in full assurance of faith, having our **HEARTS** sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water.

In my commentary I pretty much summarize these verses:

In short, Solomon undertakes eight major projects: building a huge new home, planting lush vineyards, creating beautiful parks, engineering dams and lakes, increasing his number of slaves, entering the ranching business, engaging in the silver and gold market, and becoming the patron of both musicians and desirable women. But as the old saying goes, "The opera ain't over till the fat lady sings." And she's still a long way from warbling in Ecclesiastes 2, because Solomon is still a long way from happiness, despite each massive accomplishment.

p. 62

THE CROSS OR THE CROWN?

"We see professing Christians who seem to be bidding on what the devil offered but Jesus refused—the kingdoms of this world. They want to live in the luxuries as King's kids before He is crowned King of kings. They want a crown without a cross. They want the Christian homefronts but not Christ's battlefield. They want the lilting, hand-clapping choruses, but not 'Onward, Christian Soldiers.' The world has encouraged us to take off the armor of God and to sit down at the tables of détente. So, instead of fighting the good fight, we have negotiated for arms control."

—Kay Arthur
(in *My Savior, My Friend*,
Harvest House, 1995)

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(Cactus Tracks & Cowboy Philosophy by Baxter Black)

I've always liked Stephen Wright's observation that goes, *"Ya know when you lean back in a chair till it's just about to tip over and you teeter on the brink? I feel like that all the time."*

p. 1

(Savvy Sayin's: Lean & Meaty One-Liners by Ken Alstad)

A self-made man worships his creator.
p. 124

(Fénelon: Talking with God by François Fénelon)

God is a jealous God. If in the recesses of your soul, you are attached to any creature, your heart is not worthy of him. He must reject it as a bridegroom would reject a spouse who divided her affections between him and a stranger.
p. 44

There are many things in our circumstances which must be met with courage, and things pleasant that must not be allowed to capture our affections. We resist the temptations of the disagreeable by accepting them at once, and the temptations of the pleasant by refusing to admit them into our hearts.
p. 51

Let us pray God that he will root out of our hearts everything of *our* planting, and set there, with his own hands, the Tree of Life, bearing all manner of fruits.
p. 52

You are in God's hands. You must live as if you were to die each day. Then you will be quite ready, for our preparation for death simply consists in detaching ourselves from the world to attach ourselves to God.
p. 53

v. 11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

After Solomon got through with all of these great projects and undertakings, he had denied his eyes nothing, or his heart any pleasure and he did receive a reward, strictly a fleeting one, from all of his labor.

"YET WHEN [he] SURVEYED ALL THAT [his] HANDS HAD DONE AND WHAT [he] HAD TOILED TO ACHIEVE" he uses THREE of the KEY PHRASES that occur in the book:

1. "[It] WAS MEANINGLESS,"
2. "[It is] A CHASING AFTER THE WIND," and
3. "NOTHING WAS GAINED UNDER THE SUN."

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

There is really no meaning or purpose in possessions and pleasure, it just leaves you thirsty for more.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

However, though he could gain some satisfaction from the joy of accomplishment and had indeed experienced pleasure from it all . . . when he reflected on the real value of what he had accomplished, he concluded that it **was meaningless** and **a chasing after the wind** . . . There was no real or ultimate gain (cf. 1:3) from all his accomplishments . . .

p. 982

"YET WHEN I SURVEYED ALL THAT MY HANDS HAD DONE AND WHAT I HAD TOILED TO ACHIEVED, EVERYTHING [without exception] WAS MEANINGLESS, A CHASING AFTER THE WIND; NOTHING [no benefit whatsoever] WAS GAINED UNDER THE SUN."

The discipline of desire is the background of character. Solomon has run contrary to this in his pursuit.

Devoting a little of yourself to everything means committing a great deal of yourself to nothing.

Hard work is the soundest investment. It provides a neat security for your widow's next husband.
<Unknown>

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

The author Oscar Wilde was one who paid scant attention to his spiritual life. William Barclay quotes Wilde's confession:

The gods have given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. . . . Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

MacDonald says:

Ralph Barton, a top cartoonist, was bored too. He wrote: "I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes. I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, and have visited great countries of the world. But I am fed up with devices to fill up twenty four hours of the day."⁵

The failure of pleasure and possessions to fill the heart of man was further illustrated by a fictional character who only had to wish for something and he got it instantly. "He wanted a house and there it was with servants at the door; he wanted a Cadillac, and there it was with chauffeur. He was elated at the beginning, but it soon began to pall on him. He said to an attendant, 'I want to get out of this. I want to create something, to suffer something. I would rather be in hell than here.' And the attendant answered, 'Where do you think you are?'"⁶

That is where our contemporary society is—in a hell of materialism, trying to satisfy the human heart with things that cannot bring lasting enjoyment.
pp. 26-27

Delitzsch says:

Of all this enjoyment, there remained nothing but the feeling of emptiness. What he strove after appeared to him as the wind; the satisfaction he sought to obtain at such an expense was nothing else than a momentary delusion. And since in this search after the true happiness of life he was in a position more favourable for such a purpose than almost any other man, he is constrained to draw the conclusion that there is . . . no real enduring and true happiness, from all labour under the sun.
p. 243

Baxter says:

Oh, what a different view of life we get when we see it through the eyes of the Lord Jesus! With Him there is no viewing of life selfishly rather than socially. None was ever so social-minded as the Son of Man. There was pure "otherism" and absolutely no egoism. He "went about doing good." He was the best of all mixers. He was at home in every circle, for wherever He was, He was there to forget Himself in the good of others. And with Him there was no viewing of human life as apart from God. He saw the Father's hand everywhere. Everything was significant of good purpose and of faithful Divine supervision. And with Him there was no viewing of life as bounded by the grave. The very opposite! It is there, beyond the mortal present, that the vast issues of our life are. There is no "vanity of vanities" with Jesus! He comes to declare *the reality of realities*, that there is a Divine meaning and purpose running all through our human life. Even the Cross, if it be the Father's will, is the pathway to a throne. There is benevolent purpose everywhere in the universe. We may trust God. We may know His love and presence in our lives. Life is not a mockery. God is *LOVE*. Behind every frowning providence there is a smiling face. God is not only Creator, King, and Judge: He is the *FATHER*!

p. 167

Philippians 1:21

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Kaiser says:

But the worth of all this acquiring and building had to be evaluated. What was the advantage and profit (1:3) of this labor? The answer remained—there was not advantage! Something was sadly missing. Not one of all those good things had brought satisfaction or joy.

p. 57

Patrick & Lowth say:

But then, after I had considered seriously how small a thing this pleasure was, how short, and how often interrupted, and laid in the balance against it all the time I had spent, and the pains I had taken, in contriving these magnificent buildings, gardens, paradises, and all the rest, it seemed to me as nothing; and I cannot but leave this observation behind me, that all this is empty and unsatisfying to the spirit of man; and there is also much vexation and torment in it, to see how cross things go many times to our desires, how negligent they are who should look after such great works as mine were; but especially in this, that a man can reap so little benefit and so transient, from such vast and long labours.
p. 122

Matthew Henry says:

We have, at length, the judgment he deliberately gave of all this, v. 11. When Solomon reviewed *all his works that his hands had wrought* with the utmost cost and care, *and the labour that he had laboured to do* in order to make himself easy and happy, nothing answered his expectation; *behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit; there was no profit under the sun*, neither by the employments nor by the enjoyments of this world.
p. 794

Wiersbe says:

The journey was a pleasure, but the destination brought pain. "Success is full of promise until men get it," said the American preacher Henry Ward Beecher, "and then it is a last-year's nest from which the birds have flown."
p. 36

Wiersbe says further:

This helps us to understand why many achievers are unhappy people. Ambrose Bierce called achievement "the death of endeavor and the birth of disgust." This is often the case. The overachiever is often a person who is trying to escape himself or herself by becoming a workaholic, and this only results in disappointment. When workaholics retire, they often feel useful and sometimes die from lack of meaningful activity.

Solomon tested life, and his heart said, "Vanity!"
p. 36

Parker says:

But nothing would have convinced him of this beforehand. Every man must do his own wickedness. Every man must break his own head. Every man must burn his own fingers. We cannot believe one another. We are told that the way of transgressors is hard, but this does not deter a solitary soul from transgression; every man thinks that it will not be hard in his particular case, just as "all men think all men mortal but themselves." What is it, then, that Coheleth contributes to human experience in this history? He shows that it is not in the power of houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards, trees, and pools of water to satisfy the heart of man. In one word, the material can never satisfy the spiritual. Build your fine houses, put on gold where you have now laid on gilt, put musical instruments in every room, make your beds of down and carpets of embroidered silk, and sit down in the midst of it on a chair of ivory, and one pang of heart-hunger will turn the whole glittering scene into ghastly mockery. You sigh for something better; for the child dead years ago; for the heart that always knew you best; for the footfall which means companionship and sympathy.

"O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!"
p. 14

Robert Foster says:

Solomon built a nation for God but failed in building his personal life in God. Success in doing . . . failure in being. This wisest of all men who spent his life majoring on the minors should have listened to his dad: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after . . . to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." Psalm 27:4
p. 3b

Kidner says:

Here we are brought very near to our own times with their cult of the irrational in its various forms, from romanticism down to the addict's craving for strange states of consciousness; and down still further into the nihilism which cultivates the ugly, the obscene and the absurd, not as a frolic but as an attack on reasonable values.
p. 31

Alexander Whyte says:

No; there is no real repentance, real or assumed, anywhere in Solomon. There is remorse in plenty, and weariness of life, and discontent, and disgust, and self-contempt, bitterer to drink than blood. There is plenty of the sorrow that worketh death; but there is not one syllable of the repentance to salvation not to be repented of.
p. 284

Swindoll says:

A Penetrating Analysis

See, the dream of the great society is that we work, work, work; fight, fight, fight; earn, earn, earn; sell, sell, sell; labor, labor, labor to get more, more, more! So it is at the top. It's crazy, but there's something so ego-satisfying about being at the top. It offers all of those perks that we didn't have down below. And by climbing in that cage at the top we think we'll then occupy our long-awaited dream: "I'm now in laid-back city . . . relax . . . rejoice. I have finally arrived!"

Stop and think about some of those super-duper perks. Your own parking spot. Your own bathroom attached to your office. A little thicker pad underneath your carpet. A chair you can lean *way* back in. Maybe a sofa! I mean, just think of a sofa in light of eternity! Drapes—big window. A company car. Tax write-offs. A boat to get in and pilot around a harbor twice a year. People calling you "president" or "doctor."
p. 15

(Fénelon: Meditations on the Heart of God by François Fénelon)

It is easier to keep our heart in a state of repentance and burning desire for God than to bring it back to him once it has gone down the slope of pleasure and laxity.

So let us keep watch over ourselves. Let us stay away from drinking water that only increases our thirst. Let us keep careful watch over our hearts, for fear that the world and its vain comforts will come in and trouble our peace.
pp. 55-56

In my commentary I give the illustration of Ernest Hemingway:

Consider author Ernest Hemingway—few Americans have led as fascinating a life as he. He was an infantryman and ambulance driver in World War I, a war correspondent in the Spanish Civil War and World War II. In peacetime, he was an avid sportsman, hunting big game in Africa and fishing off the coasts of Key West and Cuba. He traveled extensively. His novels hit the bestseller lists time after time. In winning the Pulitzer in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, he established a place for himself as one of the greatest American authors of all time. By most standards, he had it all, but it must not have been enough. Discouraged and despondent, he blew his brains out in a cabin in Idaho in 1961.
p. 64

(To Follow Him: The Seven Marks of a Disciple by Mark Bailey)

When Jesus looks at what you do, at the way you spend your time, does He feel He's loved by you? That becomes the convicting question.
p. 149

(More Holy Humor by Carl and Rose Samra)

In the early part of this century, the London Times asked several eminent authors to write articles on the theme, "What's Wrong with the World?" Christian humorist G. K. Chesterton wrote this brief reply:

Dear Sirs:
I am.
Sincerely yours,
G. K. Chesterton

p. 58

(Never Walk Away: Lessons on Integrity from a Father Who Lived It by
Crawford W. Loritts, Jr.)

I love what Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great British preacher, said: "It was by perseverance that the snail made it into the ark." That sentence triggers a scene in my mind of other animals passing the snail by. Most of them looked more elegant and prettier than the snail. Virtually all of them were more swift. But the snail eventually made it inside the ark anyway. Perseverance is really the foundation of anything that takes place in life. That's why I want to encourage those of you who are reading these words to never quit. Hang in there. Don't give up. Your perseverance, your model of tenacity even in the midst of opposition and painful choices in life, is providing the fuel for the next generation.

p. 86

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: "Above all else, guard your heart for it affects everything you do" (Proverbs 4:23 NLB).

LESSON #2: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21 NASB).

LESSON #3: The pursuit of pleasure will only leave you thirsty for more and more.

LESSON #4: Cheering oneself with wine and folly will end in futility.

LESSON #5: There is no real purpose in becoming a workaholic.

LESSON #6: There is no lasting satisfaction in possessions and pleasures.

LESSON #7: Make it your mission to delight the heart of God not the heart of man.

LESSON #8: Recognize the fact that our lives, in view of eternity, are really just "a vapor that appears for a few days and then passes away" (James 4:14 paraphrased).

LESSON #9: Solomon's summary of his experience is three-fold: (1) "it was meaningless"; (2) "it was a chasing after the wind"; and (3) "there was nothing gained under the sun."

LESSON #10: Make it your motto that you are going to "live for Christ and then to die would be to gain" (Philippians 1:21 paraphrased).

(Charity: A Collection of Poems by Gail T. Burton by Gail T. Burton)

RESERVED

I quietly sat in Church today
 at the funeral of a friend,
 His age was just the same as mine,
 but his life is at an end.
 I sat there as the organ played,
 and in thought I chanced to see
 A small "reserved" sign on a pew
 where his family soon would be.

And then the thought came rushing
 that the word was most profound,
 It told me where my friend had gone
 and told where I was bound.
 My name is written in His book
 with a place reserved for me.
 And tho' the journey still is dim
 the end I plainly see.

p. 29

(Future Grace by John Piper)

Faith in future grace produces love by pushing *guilt* and fear and greed out of the heart. It pushes out guilt because it holds fast to the hope that the death of Christ is sufficient to secure acquittal and righteousness now and forever (Hebrews 10:14). It pushes out *fear* because it banks on the promise, "Do not fear, for I am with you . . . I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). And it pushes out greed because it is confident that Christ is greater wealth than all the world can offer (Matthew 13:44; Philippians 3:8; Hebrews 11:26). In every case the glory of Christ is magnified when we are more satisfied with his future grace than we are with the promises of sin.

p. 283

(When God Interrupts: Finding New Life Through Unwanted Change by M. Craig Barnes)

Either we believe life is something that must be achieved, or we believe life is something that can only be received. Once we start seeing this choice in the Bible, we find it on almost every page. Is God the Creator, or are we? Is Jesus the Savior, or are we? Does the Holy Spirit gives wisdom, or are we smart enough on our own? We've got to choose. The Bible cautions us to choose carefully.
p. 145

(To Follow Him: The Seven Marks of a Disciple by Mark Bailey)

I saw a bumper sticker once that said, "If God is your co-pilot, you're sitting in the wrong seat!" Are you sitting in the wrong seat? Isn't it time you moved over and let Jesus drive? What do you have to do to live that way? You die to self and allow God to live His life in and through yours.
p. 92

(The Seeking Heart: Volume 4: The Library of Spiritual Classics by Fenelon)

Don't be so concerned about the future. The future belongs to God. He is in charge of all things and will take care of you completely. If you try to guess what is going to happen you will only worry yourself and anticipate trouble. Live each day as it comes. Each day brings its own good and evil, but what seems evil becomes good if you leave it in God's hands. Do not hold up His purpose by being impatient.
p. 115

The old cowboy song says it well:

I've closed my eyes to the cold, hard truth I'm seeing."

Oh, may I urge you to hear the warning of:

Hebrews 3:15

while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

(A Heart Like His: The Shaping of Character in the Choices of Life by Rebecca Manley Pippert)

Throughout history God's people have been willing to pay the price for truth and loyalty. A gray-haired woman of sixty with a heavy German accent spoke to a congregation in Tennessee. She was a Jew who had been captured as a teenager and sent to prison camp during the second world war. Her story was not unlike other stories of the tragic suffering of prisoners inside German concentration camps.

After months of abuse and malnutrition that led to starvation, she realized that if she had any hope of escaping she had to do it while she still had some strength. Having just graduated from high school, she saw women just a few years older than her who already looked elderly. They plotted an escape carefully, and tried to leave no detail to chance.

On the night of her escape she had maneuvered every challenge successfully. There was only one hurdle left—a literal one. She had to scale a barbed wire fence to get outside the compound. She was halfway up the fence when the S.S. guard on duty spotted her. He screamed for her to stop, and at gunpoint demanded that she drop down. She did, her knees and legs badly bleeding. She began sobbing, realizing that her only hope of escape had just vanished.

But to her astonishment she heard the guard say, "Ellie? Is that you? It can't be possible!" She looked into his face and realized it was Rolf, a fellow classmate who had been her best friend in middle school. They had shared so many secret dreams and aspirations then. But now it was wartime, and they were on opposite sides. "Oh, Rolf, go ahead and kill me. Please! I have no reason to live. I have lost all hope. Get it over with and let me die now. There's nothing to live for anyway."

"Ellie, you are so wrong. There is everything to live for so long as you know *who* to live for. I'm going to let you go. I'll guard you until you climb the wall and get on the other side. But would you promise me one thing?"

Ellie looked at him incredulously, thinking he must be joking, but she could see his intensity and knew he meant every word. "What is it, Rolf?" she asked.

"Promise me when you get on the other side and become free, that you will ask one question continuously until someone answers it for you. Ask,

'Why does Jesus Christ make life worth living?' Promise me, Ellie! He's the only reason to live. Promise me you'll ask until you get the answer."

"Yes, I promise, I promise!" she shouted. As she furiously climbed the fence she felt guilty. *I would have said anything*, she thought to herself, *to get out of this hellhole*.

As she dropped to the other side into freedom, she heard several deafening shots. She turned to look as she ran, convinced that Rolf had changed his mind and amazed that his bullets had missed. To her horror, she saw that other S.S. guards, having realized that Rolf allowed and aided her escape, had killed him on the spot. It was as she ran to her freedom that it dawned on her that Rolf died for her that she might know this Jesus. She wondered who this Jesus Christ was, that someone would lay down his own life so that she could know him.

"And so, I did exactly as Rolf told me to do. I kept asking and asking, until one day I met someone who answered his question. I am a Christian today because Rolf sacrificed his life for me."

What God requires of his followers has not changed. Rolf and Jonathan paid a great price for their loyalty. The cost of love has always been high.
pp. 125-6