

The End is the Beginning is the End

Daniel Abbey
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I. The Building of Wisdom

This is Solomon's epilogue, his final thoughts. And he begins his conclusion by describing how he built wisdom. He refers to himself in the third person, giving a birds eye view of himself for the reader, to underscore the importance of who he was and why he did what he did.

Note that he describes himself as very active when it came to wisdom. Solomon wasn't passive, like some isolated guru in a cave. He taught the people knowledge and the best teachers are the ones who find joy in sharing what they have learned. Whether it was his court officials, blacksmiths, physicians, scientists, priests, or the common people, Solomon wanted others to know what he had learned.

Notice his approach to wisdom: He pondered, searched out, and arranged many proverbs. In the original Hebrew, pondered means "to weigh" and it's the only time this verb is used in the Old Testament. The word for searched out means "to examine". And when we put these words together, weighed and examined, we see that Solomon poured over and carefully evaluated the weight, meaning and worth of every proverb he wrote and read. He then catalogued and arranged these proverbs in an orderly way, perhaps according to their strength and meaning, for the benefit of all who would read. Solomon was not only committed to finding wisdom, he wanted to finalize the best, practical, and most life-enhancing words for his people to grasp, benefit, and enjoy.

He also sought to find delightful words. Solomon understood that there is beauty in words; it's not good enough to just say something that's true — if you choose your words wisely, you can convey truth in an elegant and compelling way. The book of Proverbs is packed with these wonderfully expressed nuggets of wisdom.

Lastly, he sought to write words of truth correctly. Not to play loose with the truth, or scribble things quickly without editing. Because to write truth and get it wrong could be disastrous. It is important to write truth accurately, to communicate and preserve God's word with a faithful pen (Isaiah 40:8). Do we value and cherish the truth like Solomon? Are we willing to be critical of what we read, or do we just accept whatever is published because it's sold in a Christian bookstore? Or appears on a Christian website?

We must be careful with the truth (2Timothy 2:15). How do we do that? By actively growing in wisdom and truth. There's so much knowledge out there — information, misinformation, disinformation. We cannot afford to be passive consumers of the truth. We need to actively build our wisdom, teach others what we learn, and pursue, cherish, verify, and preserve God's truth with passion.

II. The Balance of Wisdom



We may not be kings like Solomon, but our lives are marked by the same kinds of challenges he faced. We are constantly in motion – working, raising kids, building relationships, growing businesses, leading companies and communities. There is not a day when we aren't making decisions. Big and small, minor and consequential. And as Christians, we are burdened with the challenge of living righteously in a fallen world. Which means, our decisions will always carry a spiritual weight. Everything we do, big and small, is an opportunity to worship and represent Christ well. We need all the godly wisdom we can get.

Godly words are like goads, says Solomon. A goad is a farming instrument, with a sharp end designed not to wound but to prick and push animals into moving. It jolts us into action. Scripture and godly counsel are powerful agents to get us moving in the right direction. Likewise, wise godly words are like well-driven nails, nails that have been pounded deep into wood, making structures sturdy and reliable. And this wisdom is given by one Shepherd. And that Shepherd is God. Perhaps Solomon had Psalm 23 in mind when he wrote this.

God's word, the Bible, is 66 books written over 1500 years by people from all walks of life – kings, prophets, fishermen, priests, scholars, professionals, and government officials. It includes law, history, prophecy, gospel narratives, letters, and of course, wisdom and poetic literature. And all of it has been revealed by God for our feeding, salvation, growth, guidance and protection (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible is supreme. But there is also a vast body of worldly wisdom out there, vying for our attention. Some of it is good and beneficial. A lot of it is questionable and even dangerous. There is no end to these books says Solomon. The key is to not be overly devoted to books or study. Don't be the person who has too much crammed into their heads, and nothing to show for it. The person who is long on learning and short on doing. The person who knows much philosophy and theology, who can quote Augustine, Calvin, Descarte, and Nietzsche, but doesn't know how to shepherd his own soul – or even know the great Shepherd himself. We must learn to balance our wisdom. We must read broadly, especially what God has revealed, but we must not obsess over knowledge to the point of physical and mental weariness. The perfect balance is learning what God has to say, using that to filter all other knowledge, and then putting our wisdom to good use.

III. The Beginning of Wisdom

The conclusion of this passage and indeed the entire book of Ecclesiastes is simple: fear God and obey his commandments. When all is said and done, the single most important thing we can do is fear God (Proverbs 9:10) and obey him. The end of Ecclesiastes is the beginning of wisdom.

It's telling that few today fear God. You see it in how they live, the choices they make, the words they use. They choose NOT to fear God. But the thing is, God is a fearsome God (Nahum 1:2). God is master of His wrath. He's not emotional; He's not driven by impulse



and feelings. God is master of His anger, a righteous anger that burns at sin and sinners. As a holy and just God, He is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11).

And everything ever done by men will be judged by God. All will be accounted for. And Jesus Christ himself will be the judge (Matthew 25:31-46). On judgement day we will truly realize that everything has eternal consequence. Now, this is quite the opposite of what Solomon has been saying throughout his book. And yet, if everything has no meaning, why is everything going to be judged by God? If the Lord Jesus Christ is going to judge every act and thought by every person who ever lived – certainly, everything has meaning!

Solomon is not contradicting himself. In fact, he is simply underlining his final point. The entire book has been written from an earthbound perspective. We live a fleeting life, we appear and then vanish like vapor. In this context, our endless work and striving ultimately mean nothing – we're all going to die, no one will remember us in a hundred years, and the earth will keep revolving. From dust we come, to dust we shall return, and none of what we attain in this life will be of any use in the next. In that light, everything is meaningless. The only thing that matters is that we remember God. Because God will certainly remember us. And He will judge all that we have done: the words we speak, the emotions we express, the secret lusts we harbor in the dark. He sees it all.

And if we are going to be judged by a holy God for everything we've ever done, we won't survive. All our efforts, sacrifice, penance and prayers can do nothing to move the needle in our quest to be at peace with God. None of us can withstand the righteous gaze and judgment that is to come. As sinners, we are truly hopeless (Isaiah 53:6). This is the story of our lives.

BUT the good news is the rest of that verse: "and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." We have all strayed from God and we will all be judged for our sin. But... Someone has already paid the price. The righteous judge Himself, Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the law. He lived a perfect life, the life we could never live, and took our place by receiving the Father's wrath on our behalf, on the cross, giving His life as a sacrifice for sinners.

All He asks is that we repent and believe in Him. That we confess our sins and bow the knee to His Lordship. In that moment of true belief, God clothes us with His own righteousness, like a robe. And in the final day, when God judges everything we have ever done, we can stand before the Lord, clothed with HIS righteousness, not our own. All our sinful deeds will have been paid for, washed away by the blood of the Son. When God looks upon us, all He will see is the righteousness of Christ. To fear God is to truly know and be in relationship with Him and His Son Jesus Christ.

Do you truly fear God? Are you trusting in Christ as Savior? Or are you brushing off the future in favor of temporary pleasures and pursuits? The beginning of wisdom is the end of all meaningless pursuits.



King Solomon was a deeply flawed man. He started so well, beloved by God, and then entered a phase of life defined by both righteous and worldly excess. It's really hard to understand. How could someone so wise, a mouthpiece for the wisdom of God, fall so far and so hard into sexual sin and idolatry? I believe God allowed this to demonstrate the true futility of life apart from God. Who else is qualified to say that wealth, wisdom and women have no power to satisfy and deliver the soul? Only Solomon, overflowing with knowledge, crowned with achievements, drowning in wealth, and buried in the bosoms of a thousand women. Only he was qualified to say, none of this will ever satisfy, and none of this will ever save you from the coming judgement!

And so, as we leave behind Ecclesiastes, let us remember to cherish wisdom – to heed, obey, love, uphold, preach, and guard the words of God. They are life to the body and bones. Let us balance our pursuit of knowledge, to guard ourselves from eternal study but no application.

And most of all, let us fear God and obey his commandments. A proper fear of God will lead to faith in Christ, and faith in Christ will deliver us from death to the joy of eternal reward.

