
THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS
POETRY & WISDOM
Job • Psalms • Proverbs • Ecclesiastes • Song of Solomon
BILL McLEOD

THE BOOK OF JOB

The King Who Is Our Redeemer

Job, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

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Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Is Our Redeemer: The Book of Job, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Job is a book for anyone who has ever asked, why is this happening to me? It’s about a good man who loses almost everything in a single day, and then spends most of the book arguing with his friends, and with God, about why.

Job doesn’t give easy answers. It gives you permission to ask hard questions. Job cries, complains, curses the day he was born, and demands a hearing with God. His friends give him neat explanations that turn out to be wrong. And when God finally speaks, He doesn’t say what anyone expects.

So why read it? Because sooner or later, everyone suffers. Maybe you already have: a loss, a diagnosis, a divorce, a betrayal, a season of darkness that won’t lift. Job won’t tell you everything happens for a reason you’ll understand by Friday. But it will show you that you can bring your pain honestly to God, and that God doesn’t leave suffering people alone.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Job in eight chapters: the worst day ever (Job 1–2), the darkest prayer (3), the friends’ formula (4–14), my Redeemer lives (15–21), where wisdom is found (22–28), the young man speaks (29–37), the voice from the whirlwind (38–41), and the ending (42).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book Job is, how it's put together, and when it may have been written. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as what Behemoth and Leviathan were or why God allowed Job's test, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. Job is long, so this book quotes it in places and explains it mostly in my own words. Keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the eighteenth book in The Old Testament for Teens, and the first of the poetry and wisdom books, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor where it fits, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Job deals with suffering, grief, death, depression, and anger at God. Many teenagers have already faced some of these. This book treats Job's lament in chapter 3, where he wishes he had never been born, with compassion. A Real Talk box encourages any reader who feels hopeless to talk to a trusted adult or counselor and lists 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Other boxes address grief, how to comfort a hurting friend, honest prayer, and the unhelpful idea that suffering is always a punishment.

The book also addresses honestly the two questions teenagers almost always ask about Job: why God allowed Satan's test at all, and how ten new children could ever make up for the ten Job lost. It doesn't pretend to fully answer either, but lays out how Christians have thought about them. A short box presents fairly the main views on Behemoth and Leviathan.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Job's longing for a mediator and his confidence that his Redeemer lives point to Jesus, the innocent Sufferer who stepped into our pain on the cross, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure Job in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Job's friends did that, and it didn't go well. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader who is hurting will find in Job permission to be honest with God, and will meet the Redeemer who lives.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

Job is wisdom literature, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom books ask big questions about how life works. Proverbs teaches that wise living usually leads to good results. Job asks the hard follow-up question: what about when it doesn't? What about when a good person suffers terribly for no reason they can see?

A Story Wrapped Around a Poem

Job is built like a sandwich. It begins (chapters 1–2) and ends (42:7–17) with a short story written in prose, ordinary storytelling. In between, chapters 3 through 42:6 are poetry: long, intense speeches by Job, his three friends, a young man named Elihu, and finally God. Most of the book is poetry, so expect images, repetition, and big emotions rather than step-by-step arguments. It's some of the most beautiful and difficult Hebrew in the whole Bible.

When and Where

The story is set in the land of Uz, probably east of Israel, in Edom or northern Arabia. Job doesn't seem to be an Israelite. There's no mention of Moses, the law, the temple, or Israel's history. Job offers sacrifices himself, like the patriarchs did, and his wealth is counted in livestock, so many readers think the story is set around the time of Abraham. No one knows when the book was written or by whom. Suggestions range from the time of Moses to after the exile. Ezekiel

mentions Job alongside Noah and Daniel as a famously righteous man, and James calls him an example of perseverance.

Real Person or Parable?

Christians have read Job in different ways. Many believe Job was a real historical person whose story was later told in beautiful poetry. Others think the book is more like an inspired parable, a story told to wrestle with a real question. Either way, the book teaches true things about God and suffering, and the New Testament treats Job as a real example to follow.

The Satan

In Hebrew, the figure in chapters 1–2 is called ha-satan, the satan, which means the accuser or adversary. He appears among the heavenly beings who come before God. Some readers see him simply as a heavenly prosecutor. Most Christians identify him with Satan, the devil, the enemy of God and His people described later in the Bible. Either way, notice that he can only do what God allows. He is not God's equal.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Job 1–2): The worst day ever.

Chapter 2 (Job 3): The darkest prayer.

Chapter 3 (Job 4–14): The friends' formula.

Chapter 4 (Job 15–21): My Redeemer lives.

Chapter 5 (Job 22–28): Where wisdom is found.

Chapter 6 (Job 29–37): The young man speaks.

Chapter 7 (Job 38–41): The voice from the whirlwind.

Chapter 8 (Job 42): The ending.

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CHAPTER 1

The Worst Day Ever

Job 1–2

The book of Job begins like a fairy tale. “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God, and turned away from evil.”

Job has it all. “There were born to him seven sons and three daughters.” He owns seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and a huge household of servants. He’s “the greatest of all the children of the east,” the richest man around.

And he’s genuinely good. His grown children take turns throwing feasts at each other’s houses, and afterward Job gets up early and offers a sacrifice for each one, just in case. “It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced God in their hearts.” He does this continually. Job isn’t just rich. He’s a devoted father who prays for his kids.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Blameless Doesn’t Mean Perfect**
>
> When the Bible calls Job “blameless and upright,” it doesn’t mean he never sinned. It means he was a person of integrity, someone whose life was whole and consistent, who honestly loved God and did what was right. That detail matters for the whole book. Job’s friends will insist that he must have done something terrible to deserve his suffering. The very first verse tells us they’re wrong.

Then the scene shifts from earth to heaven. The heavenly beings, called the sons of God, come to present themselves before the LORD, and the satan, the accuser, comes with them. God asks where he's been. Roaming the earth, he says.

Then God says something surprising. "Have you considered my servant, Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil."

God is proud of Job. And the accuser has a cynical reply. "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Of course Job is good, he says. You've put a hedge of protection around him. You've blessed everything he does. "But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce you to your face."

That's the real question of the book. Does anyone love God just for who He is? Or do people only love God for what they get out of Him?

God gives the accuser permission to take everything Job has, but not to touch Job himself. "So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Heavenly Court**

The opening scenes of Job picture God like a king holding court, with heavenly beings reporting to Him. That's the way ancient people often described the spiritual world, and the Bible uses similar pictures in other places. The point isn't to give a detailed map of heaven. It's to let readers know something Job never learns: his suffering is not a punishment. Notice, too, who is in charge. The accuser can't do anything without God's permission, and he can't go one inch past the limit God sets. That's important to remember when we get to the hard questions at the end of the book.

What happens next is almost too much to read. On a day when Job's children are feasting at their oldest brother's house, a messenger runs up to Job. Raiders called the Sabeans have attacked, stolen the

oxen and donkeys, and killed the servants. “I alone have escaped to tell you.”

While he is still speaking, another messenger arrives. Fire has fallen from the sky and burned up the sheep and the shepherds. While he is still speaking, a third arrives. The Chaldeans have stolen the camels and killed the servants.

And while he is still speaking, a fourth messenger arrives with the worst news a parent could ever hear. “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young men, and they are dead. I alone have escaped to tell you.”

In a single afternoon, Job loses his wealth, his servants, and all ten of his children.

“Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down on the ground, and worshiped.” These were ancient signs of deep grief. And then he says some of the most famous words in the Bible. “Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked will I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the LORD’s name.”

“In all this, Job didn’t sin, nor charge God with wrongdoing.”

> **REAL TALK** **Grief Is Not a Lack of Faith**
>
> Notice that Job worships and grieves at the same time. He tears his robe, shaves his head, and falls to the ground. He doesn’t pretend everything is fine. Some people think strong faith means you shouldn’t cry or feel sad when something terrible happens. The Bible disagrees. Job grieved. Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. If you’ve lost someone or something you love, it’s okay to hurt. Grief is the price of love. You can trust God and cry at the same time.

Then the heavenly court meets again. God points out that Job has held on to his integrity, "although you incited me against him, to ruin him without cause." The accuser doesn't give up. "Skin for skin," he says. People will give up anything to save their own lives. "But stretch out your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce you to your face."

Again God allows it, with a limit. "Behold, he is in your hand. Only spare his life."

So Job is struck "with painful sores from the sole of his foot to his head." He sits in the ashes, probably the town garbage dump where ashes were thrown, scraping his skin with a broken piece of pottery.

And then his wife speaks. "Do you still maintain your integrity? Renounce God, and die."

> **REAL TALK** **Job's Wife**
>
> Job's wife often gets a bad reputation. Some old preachers even called her the devil's helper. But think about what she has just been through. She lost everything Job lost. Those ten children were her children too. She watched her husband become sick and disfigured. She was grieving, exhausted, and probably terrified. Her words were wrong, and Job tells her so. But they came out of unbearable pain. Some readers even hear them as a kind of desperate mercy: she can't stand to watch him suffer anymore. Before you judge her, remember that grief makes people say things they wouldn't normally say. When someone you love says something harsh in a time of pain, try to hear the hurt underneath it.

Job answers her firmly but not cruelly. "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Notice he doesn't call her foolish. He says she's talking like one. "In all this Job didn't sin with his lips."

Then three friends hear what has happened: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They come from their homes "to sympathize with him and to comfort him." When they see Job from a distance, they don't even recognize him. They weep out loud, tear their robes, and throw dust in the air.

And then they do the best thing they will do in the entire book. "So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

> **REAL TALK** **The Ministry of Showing Up**
>
> For seven days, Job's friends just sat with him. They didn't explain. They didn't give advice. They didn't quote Bible verses or tell him everything happens for a reason. They were simply there. It was the best thing they did. The moment they started talking, things went downhill. If a friend is going through something terrible, like a death in the family, a breakup, a diagnosis, or their parents' divorce, you don't need perfect words. Show up. Sit with them. Listen. Bring food. Text them that you're thinking about them. Paul wrote, "Weep with those who weep." Sometimes your presence says more than anything you could say.

Before moving on, notice what Job never knows. He never hears the conversation in the heavenly court. He never learns about the accuser's challenge. From his point of view, his life simply fell apart for no reason at all. We, the readers, know more than Job does. That's important, because it reminds us that there may be things going on in our own lives that we can't see. That doesn't make the pain less real. But it means that our limited view isn't the whole story.

It also means we should be careful about judging other people's suffering. When something terrible happens to someone, we often

want to figure out why. Did they make a bad choice? Did they do something wrong? Job's story warns us not to jump to conclusions. Sometimes there's no explanation we can see. Our job isn't to solve the mystery. It's to love the person in front of us.

KEY VERSE

He said, "Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked will I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the LORD's name."

Job 1:21 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What is the accuser's question about Job? Why is it such an important question?
2. How did Job respond to his losses in chapter 1? What do you think made that possible?
3. How do you think Job's wife felt? Why do you think she said what she did?
4. Why do you think the friends' silence was the best thing they did?

TRY THIS *Think of someone you know who is going through something hard. This week, find a simple way to be present for them: sit with them, send a message, or bring them something, without trying to fix it.*

CHAPTER 2

The Darkest Prayer

Job 3

After seven days of silence, Job speaks. And it isn't the calm, faithful worship of chapter 1. "After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed the day of his birth."

This is where the book changes from prose to poetry, and everything gets more intense. "Let the day perish in which I was born, the night which said, 'There is a boy conceived.'" Job wishes the day had been erased from the calendar. He wishes the night had been dark and joyless, with no stars and no dawn. He wants it wiped out of history.

Then he asks why. "Why didn't I die from the womb? Why didn't I give up the spirit when my mother bore me?" Why was he ever held and fed as a baby? If he had died then, he says, he would be at rest now, lying quietly with kings and rulers, in a place where the troubled stop troubling and the weary are at rest. In death, prisoners don't hear their guards shouting. The small and the great lie together, and slaves are free from their masters.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Poetry of Lament**
>
> Job 3 is a lament, a cry of grief and complaint. The Bible is full of them. About a third of the Psalms are laments. There's a whole book called Lamentations. Jeremiah even cursed the day he was born, in words very similar to Job's. Laments are honest prayers that tell God exactly how bad things feel. They

often use exaggerated, poetic language, because pain doesn't come out in neat sentences. The fact that these prayers are in the Bible means God doesn't just tolerate honesty. He invites it.

Then Job asks one of the most painful questions anyone can ask. "Why is light given to him who is in misery, life to the bitter in soul." Why do people who long for death keep living? They search for it more than for hidden treasure, he says, and they would be glad to find the grave.

He ends with a confession of what's been happening inside him. "For the thing which I fear comes on me, that which I am afraid of comes to me. I am not at ease, neither am I quiet, neither do I have rest; but trouble comes."

Notice what Job doesn't do. He doesn't curse God. He curses the day of his birth. He's in agony, but he's still talking, and the rest of the book shows that he's still talking to God. Even his darkest words are a kind of prayer.

REAL TALK **When You Don't Want to Be Here**

Job 3 is in the Bible for a reason. Maybe you've felt something like what Job felt: so much pain that you wish you'd never been born, or that you could just stop existing. If you've ever felt that way, you're not a bad person, and you're not a bad Christian. Job was called blameless, and he felt it too. But please don't carry those feelings alone. Talk to a trusted adult today, like a parent, a school counselor, a pastor, or a doctor. A counselor or therapist can help you work through grief, depression, or trauma, and getting that help is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you are thinking about suicide or hurting yourself, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Your life matters, even when you can't feel it. Job's story didn't end in chapter 3, and yours doesn't have to either.

It's worth noticing something about how the Bible handles Job's words. God never scolds him for this chapter. Later, when God finally speaks, He does correct Job for some of what he said. But at the very end of the book, God says that Job spoke rightly about Him, and that his friends didn't. Somehow, Job's raw, angry, honest prayers were closer to the truth than his friends' tidy speeches about God.

That doesn't mean everything Job says is correct. It means God would rather have your honesty than your pretending. You can bring Him your worst days, your angriest questions, and your darkest feelings. He can handle it.

REAL TALK **How to Pray When You're Hurting**

If you don't know how to pray when you're hurting, try praying like Job and the psalmists. Tell God exactly how you feel, without cleaning it up. Ask Him your questions, even the angry ones. David prayed, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Then, if you can, remind yourself of something true about Him, even if you don't feel it yet. You might write your prayer down, like a journal. You might pray out loud in your car or your room. You might just sit in silence and say, God, I'm here. That's enough. Psalm 34 says, "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit."

REAL TALK **Grief Has Many Faces**

Grief doesn't only come from death. You can grieve a friendship that ended, a parent who moved out, a pet that died, a dream that didn't work out, a body that got sick or injured, or a home you had to leave. You might feel sad, but you might also feel angry, numb, tired, anxious, guilty, or even relieved, and sometimes all of those in the same day. That's normal. Job's feelings swung wildly too. If your feelings don't make sense, you're not doing grief wrong. Be gentle with yourself, and let people who love you help carry the weight.

Chapter 3 ends without an answer. Job's pain just hangs in the air. And that's where his friends decide it's finally time to speak.

It's also worth noticing what Job doesn't get in chapter 3. He doesn't get a quick fix. He doesn't get a verse that makes the pain go away. He doesn't get an explanation. That can be frustrating, especially if you like stories where everything gets resolved quickly. But real grief usually doesn't work like a thirty-minute TV show. It takes time. Some days are better and some are worse. Sometimes the pain comes back when you least expect it, on a birthday, at a holiday, or when a certain song comes on.

If you're grieving, be patient with yourself. There's no right timeline. And if you're walking alongside someone who's grieving, be patient with them too. Don't expect them to be over it in a week, or a month, or even a year. Keep showing up. Job's friends were great for seven days. The hard part is staying faithful after that.

KEY VERSE

I am not at ease, neither am I quiet, neither do I have rest; but trouble comes."

Job 3:26 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Job's words in chapter 3 sound so different from his words in chapters 1 and 2?
2. Why do you think God included prayers like this one in the Bible?
3. Have you ever felt like you couldn't be honest with God? What would change if you were?
4. If a friend told you they felt the way Job felt in chapter 3, what would you do?

TRY THIS *Write an honest prayer to God about something that hurts or confuses you, without cleaning it up. If any of what you write scares you, show it to a trusted adult.*

CHAPTER 3

The Friends' Formula

Job 4–14

Eliphaz speaks first. He's probably the oldest of the three friends, and he starts gently. You've helped so many people, Job. "Your words have supported him who was falling, you have made the feeble knees firm. But now it has come to you, and you faint."

Then he makes his main point. "Remember, now, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the upright cut off? According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble, reap the same."

That's the friends' formula, and they'll repeat it in many different ways for the next thirty chapters. Good people get blessed. Bad people get punished. So if you're suffering, you must have done something wrong. It's a kind of spiritual karma.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Karma Formula**

The friends' idea wasn't crazy. In fact, it sounds a lot like parts of the Bible. Proverbs often says that wise and righteous people are blessed, and foolish and wicked people suffer. As a general rule, that's true. Choices have consequences. But the friends turned a general rule into an unbreakable law that works the same way every time. And they ran it backward: if you're suffering, you must have sinned. Job's whole story shows that this is wrong. Jesus rejected it too. When His disciples asked whether a man was born blind

> because of his own sin or his parents', Jesus answered, "This man didn't sin, nor did his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him."

Eliphaz even claims to have had a spooky vision in the night, a spirit whispering that no human is righteous before God. Then he offers advice. If I were you, I would seek God. "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects. Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For he wounds and binds up. He injures and his hands make whole." Those words sound comforting. But Eliphaz is assuming that Job's suffering is God's punishment, and that if Job just repents, everything will be fine.

Job's reply is heartbreaking. "Oh that my anguish were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the seas, therefore my words have been rash." He admits his words have been wild. But he wants his friends to understand how much pain he's in.

Then he tells them what he really needs from them. "To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown from his friend." Instead, he says, they've been like a desert stream that's full in the spring but dries up in the summer heat, just when thirsty travelers need it most. "Teach me, and I will hold my peace. Cause me to understand my error." If I did something wrong, Job says, show me. Don't just assume.

Then Job turns from his friends to God. "Therefore I will not keep silent. I will speak in the anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." He feels like God is watching him every second, not to protect him, but to attack him. "How long will you not look away from me, nor leave me alone until I swallow down my spittle?"

REAL TALK **Bad Comfort**

Job's friends meant well, but they were terrible comforters. Most people who say hurtful things to grieving people mean well too. Here are some things people often say that don't help: Everything happens for a reason. God needed another angel. At least it wasn't worse. You just need more faith. I know exactly how you feel. Even when these sayings have a grain of truth in them, they can make a hurting person feel judged, rushed, or alone. Better things to say are often simpler: I'm so sorry. I love you. I'm here. I don't know what to say, but I'm not going anywhere. And sometimes the best thing is to say nothing at all.

Bildad speaks next, and he's blunter. How long will you keep talking like this, Job? Your words are like a strong wind. Does God twist justice? Then he says something cruel. "If your children have sinned against him, he has delivered them into the hand of their disobedience." In other words, maybe your kids deserved to die. And if you were really pure and upright, God would restore you right now.

Job replies with a question that sets up the rest of the book. "Truly I know that it is so, but how can man be just with God?" Job agrees that God is just. But how can a human being even argue his case with God? God is so powerful. He moves mountains, shakes the earth, commands the sun, and stretches out the heavens. Who could ever stand before Him in court?

And then Job expresses one of the deepest longings in the Old Testament. "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, that we should come together in judgment. There is no umpire between us, that might lay his hand on us both."

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Umpire Between Us**

The Hebrew word here can mean umpire, arbitrator, or mediator, someone who stands between two sides in an argument and can make things right. Job pictures a person who could put one hand on God's shoulder and one hand on Job's, someone who understands both and can bring them together. He doesn't think such a person exists. "There is no umpire between us." But hold on to that longing. It's going to grow stronger as the book goes on, and the New Testament will say that the Mediator Job wished for has come.

Zophar, the third friend, is the harshest. He thinks Job is all talk and needs to be put in his place. He says he wishes God would speak and show Job the secrets of wisdom. "Know therefore that God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves." In other words, whatever you're suffering, you actually deserve worse. If you'd just get your heart right and get rid of your sin, Zophar says, everything would turn around.

By now Job is fed up. "No doubt, but you are the people, and wisdom will die with you." It's pure sarcasm. Then he gets direct. "But you are forgers of lies. You are all physicians of no value. Oh that you would be completely silent! Then you would be wise."

REAL TALK **When People Assume the Worst**

Job's friends decided he was guilty without any evidence. Maybe you've had people assume the worst about you, that you must have done something to cause a breakup, a family problem, or a bad situation at school. It hurts. Job didn't let their accusations define him. He kept telling the truth, and he kept taking his case to God. If people are judging you unfairly, you don't have to accept their verdict. Talk to God about it, and talk to someone you trust who knows you well.

Job turns again to God, desperate for a hearing. "Surely I would speak to the Almighty. I desire to reason with God." He's willing to risk everything to stand before God and argue his case. "Behold, he

will kill me. I have no hope. Nevertheless, I will maintain my ways before him."

Chapter 14 ends this first round of speeches with a poem about how short and painful human life is. "Man, who is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble." A tree that's cut down can sprout again, Job says. But what about a person? And then he asks a question that's almost a hope. "If a man dies, will he live again?" He doesn't answer it yet. But a few chapters later, he will.

Something else is happening in this first round that's easy to miss. Job's friends talk about God. Job talks to God. Over and over in his speeches, Job turns away from his friends and starts speaking directly to God, with questions, complaints, and pleas. The friends never do that. They have plenty of opinions about God, but they never pray for Job or with him.

That's a big difference. It's possible to spend a lot of time talking about God, arguing about theology, debating hard questions, and having strong opinions, without ever actually talking to Him. Job, even in his anger, kept the conversation with God going. If you have hard questions about God, that's great. Ask them. Study them. Talk about them with others. But don't forget to bring them to God Himself.

KEY VERSE

There is no umpire between us, that might lay his hand on us both.

Job 9:33 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What is the friends' formula? What's true about it, and what's wrong with it?
2. What hurtful things have people said to you, or what have you said to others, when someone was suffering?
3. Why do you think Job wanted an umpire between himself and God?
4. Job kept talking to God even when he felt attacked by Him. What does that tell you about his faith?

TRY THIS *The next time someone you know is hurting, practice saying something simple and honest, like I'm so sorry and I'm here, instead of trying to explain why it happened.*

CHAPTER 4

My Redeemer Lives

Job 15–21

The second round of speeches begins, and the friends get meaner. Eliphaz accuses Job of destroying reverence for God by talking the way he does. "Yes, you do away with fear, and hinder devotion before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the language of the crafty." Your own mouth proves you're guilty, Eliphaz says.

Then he describes, at length, how wicked people always end up living in terror and losing everything. He doesn't say Job's name, but everyone knows who he's talking about.

Job is exhausted. "I have heard many such things. You are all miserable comforters!" If our places were switched, Job says, I could make speeches too, and shake my head at you. But I wouldn't. "But I would strengthen you with my mouth. The solace of my lips would relieve you."

> REAL TALK **Miserable Comforters**
>
> Job's friends had a lot of knowledge about God, and a lot of it was even true. But they used it as a weapon. They cared more about being right than about loving their friend. That's always a danger for religious people. It's possible to know a lot of Bible verses and still be a miserable comforter. Before you give someone advice, especially someone who is hurting, ask yourself: Am I trying

> to help, or am I trying to win? Do I understand what they're going through? Have I listened first?

Then, in the middle of his pain, something new begins to rise in Job. He feels that God has attacked him, and his friends have turned against him. But somehow, he believes he has someone on his side. "Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven. He who vouches for me is on high. My friends scoff at me. My eyes pour out tears to God, that he would maintain the right of a man with God, of a son of man with his neighbor!"

In chapter 9, Job said there was no umpire between him and God. Now he dares to hope there's a witness in heaven who will speak up for him. Who could it be? Job doesn't say. But his hope keeps growing.

Bildad speaks again, with another long description of what happens to the wicked. Their light is put out. Their own plans trap them. Disease eats their skin. They have no children left to carry on their name. Every line is aimed at Job, who has lost his children and whose skin is covered with sores.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Speech Cycles**
>
> The middle of Job is organized in rounds, like a debate. In each round, each friend speaks, and Job answers each one. There are three rounds: chapters 4 through 14, 15 through 21, and 22 through 27. As the rounds go on, the friends' speeches get shorter and harsher, and they start repeating themselves. In the third round, Bildad's speech is only six verses long, and Zophar doesn't speak at all. It's as if they've run out of arguments. Meanwhile, Job's speeches keep getting deeper.

Job answers Bildad in chapter 19, and it's the emotional peak of the book. "How long will you torment me, and crush me with words?" He describes how God seems to have walled him in, stripped away

his honor, and torn him down. And he describes how lonely he is. "He has put my brothers far from me. My acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My relatives have gone away. My familiar friends have forgotten me." His servants won't answer him. His breath is offensive to his wife. Even little children make fun of him. "All my familiar friends abhor me. They whom I loved have turned against me."

Then he begs. "Have pity on me. Have pity on me, you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me."

And then he wishes his words could be preserved forever. "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! That with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!" Job wants a permanent record, carved into stone, so that someday he'll be proven innocent.

Ironically, his wish came true. His words were written in a book, and we're reading them now.

And then, at his lowest point, Job says this: "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth. After my skin is destroyed, then I will see God in my flesh, whom I, even I, will see on my side. My eyes will see, and not as a stranger."

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Is a Redeemer?**

The Hebrew word is go'el. In Israel, a go'el was a close relative who stepped in to rescue a family member in trouble. He might buy back land a relative had lost, pay to free a relative who'd been sold into slavery, or make sure justice was done when a family member was wronged. Boaz was a go'el for Ruth. Job is saying that even though his family and friends have abandoned him, he has a Redeemer, a relative who will stand up for him and make things right. Some scholars think Job means God Himself. Others think he means a heavenly advocate, like the witness in chapter 16. Christians have long heard in these

words a prophecy of Jesus, who is both God and our Redeemer. The details of the Hebrew are hard to translate, but the hope is unmistakable.

Think about where Job is when he says this. He has lost his children, his wealth, his health, his reputation, and his friends. He feels like God has turned against him. And yet somewhere deep inside, he knows his Redeemer lives. He believes that even if his body is destroyed, he will see God, and God will be on his side.

That's not the kind of faith that comes from things going well. It's the kind of faith that survives when everything goes wrong.

REAL TALK **Faith in the Dark**

Job's hope didn't come from his circumstances. Nothing had gotten better. It came from what he believed about God, even when he couldn't see Him. Sometimes faith looks like confidence and joy. Sometimes it looks like Job: sitting in ashes, angry and confused, and still saying, I know that my Redeemer lives. If you're in a dark place right now, you don't have to feel strong. You can hold on to just one true thing. Paul wrote that nothing, "neither death, nor life," nor anything else in all creation, "will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Zophar answers with another speech about how the wicked always lose everything in the end. But Job points out the obvious problem with the friends' formula. "Why do the wicked live, become old, yes, and grow mighty in power?" Look around, Job says. Wicked people often live long, comfortable lives. Their kids are safe. Their businesses do well. They die peacefully in their sleep. Your formula doesn't match reality. Your comfort is empty, and your answers are lies.

Step back for a moment and notice how far Job has come in these chapters. In chapter 9, he said there was no umpire between him and God. In chapter 16, he hoped for a witness in heaven. Now, in

chapter 19, he says he knows his Redeemer lives. Nothing in his circumstances has changed. His children are still gone. His body is still sick. His friends are still accusing him. But his hope has grown, little by little, in the dark.

That's often how faith grows in hard times. Not all at once, and not because everything gets better, but slowly, as you keep bringing your pain to God. If you're in a hard place right now, your faith might feel small and shaky. That's okay. Job's faith started small too. Keep talking to God. Keep holding on to whatever truth you can. You may be surprised, someday, by how much stronger it has grown.

KEY VERSE

But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth.

Job 19:25 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between being right and being a good comforter?
2. Why do you think Job's hope grew stronger even as his circumstances stayed the same?
3. What does the word Redeemer mean? Why is that such a powerful word for Job to use?
4. Job pointed out that wicked people sometimes prosper. How does that challenge the friends' formula?

TRY THIS *Write Job 19:25 on a card and put it where you'll see it every day this week. Whenever you see it, remind yourself of one true thing about God.*

CHAPTER 5

Where Wisdom Is Found

Job 22–28

In the third round of speeches, Eliphaz finally says out loud what the friends have been hinting all along. “Isn’t your wickedness great? Neither is there any end to your iniquities.” Then he makes up specific sins to accuse Job of. You must have taken advantage of the poor, he says. You must have refused water to the thirsty and bread to the hungry. You must have sent widows away empty-handed and crushed orphans.

None of it is true. Eliphaz has no evidence. He’s just decided that because Job is suffering, Job must have done terrible things, and now he’s filling in the details. It’s a vivid example of how a bad theology can make good people say cruel things.

Then Eliphaz offers his solution, which sounds lovely on its own. “Acquaint yourself with him now, and be at peace. By it, good will come to you.” Get right with God, and everything will be restored. The problem isn’t that the advice is wrong in general. It’s that Eliphaz is using it to accuse a man who has done nothing to deserve what happened.

> REAL TALK **Right Words, Wrong Time**
>
> Many of the things Job’s friends said were true statements about God. God is just. God is powerful. God blesses those who seek Him. But they used true

words in the wrong way, at the wrong time, to the wrong person. That's a warning for anyone who loves the Bible. You can quote a verse accurately and still use it to hurt someone. Before you share a verse with someone who's hurting, ask yourself whether it's what they need right now, or whether you're using it to win an argument or make yourself feel better.

Job's answer in chapters 23 and 24 is one of the most honest descriptions of spiritual dryness in the Bible. He doesn't want to argue with Eliphaz anymore. He wants to find God. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat!" If he could just get into God's presence, he thinks, he could lay out his case and God would listen.

But he can't find Him. "If I go east, he is not there. If I go west, I can't find him. He works to the north, but I can't see him. He turns south, but I can't catch a glimpse of him."

And then, right in the middle of that feeling of abandonment, Job says something remarkable. "But he knows the way that I take. When he has tried me, I will come out like gold."

Job can't see God. But he believes God can see him. He doesn't know why he's suffering, but he trusts that somehow, like gold in a fire, he'll come out of it purified rather than destroyed.

REAL TALK **When God Feels Far Away**

Maybe you've felt like Job in chapter 23. You pray and nothing happens. You go to church and feel nothing. You read the Bible and the words seem flat. Christians through the centuries have experienced seasons like this. Some have called it the dark night of the soul. It doesn't necessarily mean you've done something wrong or that God has left you. Job was blameless, and he felt it too. In those seasons, keep showing up. Keep praying, even if your prayers are short. Stay connected to other believers. Hold on to what you know is true, even when you can't feel it. And if the feeling of emptiness

comes with deep sadness, hopelessness, or thoughts of hurting yourself, please talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988.

In chapter 24, Job widens his complaint beyond himself. Look at the world, he says. Powerful people move boundary stones to steal land. They drive away the donkeys of orphans and take the widow's ox. The poor are forced to hide. They go barefoot and hungry, harvesting crops for others while they themselves starve. They have no clothes for the cold, and they huddle against the rocks in the rain. In the cities, the dying groan, and the wounded cry for help, "yet God doesn't regard the folly." Why doesn't God do something?

It's a question people still ask. Job isn't just asking why he suffers. He's asking why the whole world is so unfair.

Bildad's last speech is only six verses long. All he can say is that God is great and humans are tiny. "How then can man be just with God? Or how can he who is born of a woman be clean?" It's true, but it doesn't help. Zophar doesn't speak at all. The friends have run out of things to say.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Said What?**

Bible scholars have noticed something strange about chapters 24 through 27. Some of the things Job says in these chapters sound a lot like what his friends have been saying, especially descriptions of how the wicked will be punished. And Zophar, who spoke in both earlier rounds, has no third speech. Some scholars think parts of the text may have gotten out of order as it was copied, and that some of these lines originally belonged to Bildad or Zophar. Others think Job is agreeing that God will eventually judge the wicked, while still insisting that he himself is not one of them. Either way, the main point is clear. The debate has broken down.

Job closes the debate by refusing to give in. "Far be it from me that I should justify you. Until I die I will not put away my integrity from

me. I hold fast to my righteousness, and will not let it go. My heart will not reproach me so long as I live." He won't confess to sins he didn't commit just to make his friends happy.

Then comes chapter 28, and the tone of the book changes completely. Suddenly, the arguing stops. It's quiet. And we get a beautiful poem about wisdom.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Wisdom Poem**
>
> Chapter 28 is so different from what comes before and after that many readers think it works like an interlude, a pause in the drama, like the narrator stepping onto the stage between acts. It isn't clear whether Job is speaking or whether it's the narrator's voice. Either way, it's one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament, and it asks the question the whole book has been circling: where can wisdom be found?

The poem begins underground, in a mine. "Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold which they refine." It describes ancient miners digging deep tunnels far from where people live, hanging from ropes in the darkness, cutting through rock, and finding sapphires and gold. "Man sets an end to darkness, and searches out, to the furthest bound, the stones of obscurity and of thick darkness." Humans are amazing. We can find treasures hidden deep in the earth, in places no bird has ever seen and no lion has ever walked.

But then the poem asks its big question. "But where will wisdom be found? Where is the place of understanding?"

You can't dig it up. You can't buy it. "It can't be gotten for gold, neither will silver be weighed for its price." Wisdom is worth more than gold, rubies, coral, crystal, or any treasure people can find. The deepest oceans say, it's not in me. Even death and destruction say they've only heard rumors of it.

Then the poem gives its answer. "God understands its way, and he knows its place." God sees everything under heaven. When He set the weight of the wind, measured out the waters, and made a path for the lightning and the thunder, He saw wisdom and set it in place.

And the poem ends with this: "To man he said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. To depart from evil is understanding.'"

> **REAL TALK** **What Is the Fear of the Lord?**
>
> The fear of the Lord doesn't mean being terrified of God, as if He's waiting to hurt you. It means a deep respect and awe for who He is, the kind of reverence that shapes how you live. It's like the feeling of standing at the edge of the ocean or under a sky full of stars, and realizing how small you are and how great God is. The fear of the Lord says, God is God, and I'm not. Notice that it's tied to action: turning away from evil. Real wisdom isn't just knowing a lot. It's trusting God and living His way, even when you don't understand everything. That's exactly what Job has been doing all along. He doesn't understand his suffering, but he still fears God and refuses to do evil.

Chapter 28 doesn't answer Job's question about why he's suffering. But it changes the question. Maybe the deepest wisdom isn't having all the answers. Maybe it's trusting the One who does.

The wisdom poem also connects Job to the rest of the wisdom books. Proverbs begins with almost the same idea, saying that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Ecclesiastes ends with a similar conclusion. Across all these books, the message is consistent. Wisdom doesn't start with being smart, educated, or experienced. It starts with knowing who God is and living in awe of Him.

That's good news for teenagers. You don't have to wait until you're older to be wise. You don't need a degree or a lot of life experience.

You can begin today, by respecting God, trusting Him with what you don't understand, and choosing to turn away from what's wrong. That kind of wisdom will serve you better than any amount of information.

Chapter 28 is also a reminder that information and wisdom aren't the same thing. Ancient miners could find gold in the dark, and today we can find almost any fact in seconds on a phone. But all the information in the world can't tell you how to live, how to handle suffering, or how to know God. That kind of wisdom has to come from Him.

KEY VERSE

To man he said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. To depart from evil is understanding.'

Job 28:28 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why did Eliphaz make up sins to accuse Job of? What does that show about the friends' formula?
2. Have you ever felt like Job in chapter 23, unable to find God? What helped?
3. According to chapter 28, why can't wisdom be found the way people find gold?
4. What do you think the fear of the Lord looks like in a teenager's everyday life?

TRY THIS *Go outside at night and look up at the stars, or find a place where you can see something huge in nature. Spend five minutes thinking about how great God is, and tell Him what you're feeling.*

CHAPTER 6

The Young Man Speaks

Job 29–37

Before the debate is completely over, Job gives one final, long speech. It has three parts.

In chapter 29, he remembers the good old days. He remembers when God watched over him, when his children were all around him, and when he was honored in his town. When he walked into the city gate, young men stepped aside, old men stood up, and leaders stopped talking to listen to him. And it wasn't just because he was rich. "I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy. I researched the cause of him whom I didn't know." Job used his position to protect widows, rescue orphans, and fight for justice.

In chapter 30, he contrasts that with now. Young men he once wouldn't have hired to watch his dogs now mock him and spit in his face. His body is wracked with pain at night. "I cry to you, and you do not answer me. I stand up, and you gaze at me." He sums it up in a line that anyone who has lived through a hard season will recognize. "When I looked for good, then evil came. When I waited for light, darkness came."

REAL TALK **Missing the Way Things Were**

Chapter 29 is full of nostalgia. Job misses the way his life used to be. Maybe you understand. Maybe your family used to be together, and now it isn't. Maybe you used to have a close group of friends, or you used to be healthy, or you used to live somewhere you loved. It's normal to grieve what you've lost. Ecclesiastes says there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Don't rush yourself through grief. Talk to God about what you miss. Talk to people who love you. Over time, God can help you find hope again, without asking you to pretend the loss didn't matter.

In chapter 31, Job makes his final defense, almost like a legal oath. He lists sins he could have committed and swears he didn't commit them, calling down curses on himself if he's lying. He didn't lie or cheat. He didn't commit adultery. He didn't mistreat his servants, ignore the poor, trust in his wealth, or rejoice when his enemies suffered. He even says, "I made a covenant with my eyes; how then should I look lustfully at a young woman?" Job's integrity went all the way down to what he let himself look at.

REAL TALK **A Covenant With Your Eyes**

Job's line about making a covenant with his eyes is surprisingly relevant today. Job didn't have the internet, but he understood that what you look at shapes your heart. In a world where explicit images are everywhere, a decision like Job's takes real commitment. If you're struggling with pornography or with what you look at online, you're not alone, and you're not beyond help. Talk to a parent, pastor, youth leader, or trusted adult. Set up filters and accountability. Make a decision ahead of time about what you will and won't look at. And remember that God's grace is bigger than your failures.

He ends with a dramatic challenge. "Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!" It's as if

Job signs his name to his defense and throws it at the feet of heaven. Then the narrator says simply, the words of Job are ended.

But just when you expect God to answer, someone else speaks.

His name is Elihu. He hasn't been mentioned before. He's young, and he's angry. "Then the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was kindled against Job. His wrath was kindled because he justified himself rather than God. Also his wrath was kindled against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job."

Elihu has been waiting politely while the older men talked. "I am young, and you are very old. Therefore I held back, and didn't dare show you my opinion. I said, 'Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives them understanding. It is not the great who are wise, nor the aged who understand justice."

> **REAL TALK** **Young and Wise?**
>
> Elihu makes a point that every teenager will appreciate: being old doesn't automatically make you wise, and being young doesn't automatically make you foolish. Wisdom comes from God, and He can give it to anyone. That's true. At the same time, Elihu goes on talking for six chapters, and he tells everyone several times how full of words he is and how he's about to burst. He's a little full of himself. The balance is something like this: your age doesn't disqualify you from having something important to say. But humility, listening, and a willingness to learn from others are part of wisdom at any age.

What does Elihu actually say? He agrees with the three friends that Job has spoken wrongly. He's especially upset that Job seems to be accusing God of being unfair. "Far be it from God, that he should do

wickedness, from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity." But Elihu also adds something new.

The friends said suffering was always punishment. Elihu suggests that suffering can also be a way God teaches and warns people. "For God speaks once, yes twice, though man pays no attention." God can speak through dreams, through pain, and through hardship, to turn people away from pride and keep them from destruction. "He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear in oppression." In other words, sometimes God uses suffering not to punish us, but to get our attention and draw us closer to Him.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **How Should We Read Elihu?**
>
> Readers have strongly disagreed about Elihu. Some see him as a hero, a young man who corrects both Job and the friends and prepares the way for God's speech. They point out that God criticizes the three friends at the end of the book but never criticizes Elihu. Others see him as one more know-it-all who repeats the friends' ideas with more words and more confidence. They point out that God ignores him completely and answers Job directly. Many readers land somewhere in between: Elihu gets some important things right, especially that suffering can be used by God for good, but he still doesn't know why Job is suffering. Like the friends, he doesn't know about the heavenly court in chapters 1 and 2.

Elihu ends his speech by describing a storm. Lightning flashes. Thunder roars. God's voice rumbles in the sky. Snow and rain fall at His command, and the animals take shelter. "Out of the north comes golden splendor. With God is awesome majesty. We can't reach the Almighty. He is exalted in power."

It's a fitting place for Elihu to stop. Because a storm is coming. And God is about to speak out of it.

It's worth pausing on Job's final speech before Elihu interrupts. Job doesn't just argue that he's innocent. He shows us what a righteous life actually looks like. It isn't mainly about religious rituals. It's about how you treat people, especially people who can't do anything for you: the poor, the blind, the disabled, widows, orphans, strangers, and even your own servants. Job said he couldn't mistreat his servants because the same God who made him made them too. That's a remarkable thing to say in a world where servants were often treated like property.

It's a good checklist for anyone who wants to follow God. How do you treat the kid nobody likes? The new student? The person who can't help your reputation? The custodian at your school? The way you treat people with no power says a lot about what you really believe about God.

Elihu also reminds us that there's a difference between having something to say and needing to say all of it. He had waited a long time, and when he finally spoke, he couldn't stop. Most of us have done the same thing in an argument: we finally get our turn, and we unload everything. Sometimes that's necessary. But often, the most helpful words are short, kind, and true. As James later wrote, everyone should be quick to hear and slow to speak.

KEY VERSE

But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives them understanding.

Job 32:8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does chapter 29 tell you about the kind of man Job was before his suffering?
2. What do you think it would look like for you to make a covenant with your eyes?
3. Do you agree with Elihu that age doesn't automatically make someone wise? What does make someone wise?
4. What new idea does Elihu add about suffering? Do you think he's right?

TRY THIS *Pick one area where you want to have integrity all the way down, like what you look at, what you say about others, or how you treat people who can't do anything for you. Make a specific commitment, and tell someone you trust.*

CHAPTER 7

The Voice from the Whirlwind

Job 38–41

For thirty-five chapters, Job has demanded that God answer him. Now He does.

"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind."

Notice the name. For most of the poetry section, the characters have used general names for God. Now, for the first time since chapter 2, the narrator uses the LORD, the personal covenant name of God. The God who speaks to Job isn't a distant force. He's the LORD.

And He doesn't come with explanations. He comes with questions. "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man, for I will question you, then you answer me!"

Then comes the first question, and it sets the tone for everything that follows. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding."

God takes Job on a tour of the universe. Who measured the earth? Who laid its cornerstone, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Who shut the sea behind doors when it burst out of the womb, wrapping it in clouds like a baby blanket, and telling it, "You may come here, but no further. Your proud waves shall be stopped here"?

Have you ever commanded the morning to come? Have you walked in the depths of the ocean? Have you seen the gates of death? Do you know where light lives, or where darkness has its home? Have you visited the storehouses of the snow and hail? "Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loosen the cords of Orion?" Can you send out lightning bolts and have them report back to you, "Here we are"?

BACKGROUND CHECK **God's Questions**

God asks Job more than seventy questions in chapters 38 through 41, and He never directly answers Job's question about why he suffered. He never mentions the heavenly court or the accuser. That frustrates some readers. But many see a deep wisdom in it. If God had explained the test, it would have been like reading the end of a mystery novel first. Job's faith wouldn't have been tested at all. And the explanation might not have satisfied him anyway. Instead, God gives Job something better than an explanation. He gives Job Himself. He shows Job that the universe is far bigger, stranger, and more wonderful than Job ever imagined, and that God is in charge of all of it.

Then God turns to the animals. And here's something surprising: most of them are wild animals that humans can't control and have no use for. Can you hunt food for the lions? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Who set the wild donkey free to roam the wilderness, laughing at the noise of the city? Will the wild ox agree to serve you and sleep in your barn?

God describes the ostrich, which flaps its wings with joy, lays its eggs on the ground, forgets that they might be crushed, and yet can outrun a horse. He describes the war horse, charging into battle with a quivering mane, laughing at fear. "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and stretches her wings toward the south?" Does the eagle build its nest on the high cliffs at your command?

REAL TALK **A Universe Not About Us**

God's speech shows Job a world full of creatures that have nothing to do with him. Lions, goats, donkeys, ostriches, and hawks live their lives in places no human sees, and God cares for every one of them. That's humbling, and in a strange way, comforting. Your life matters deeply to God. But the universe isn't centered on you, and that's good news. It means you don't have to understand or control everything. The God who feeds the lions and guides the hawks is big enough to handle what you can't. When you're overwhelmed, try going outside and paying attention to the world God made. It can put your worries in perspective, and remind you how much He cares.

God pauses and asks Job if he wants to keep arguing. "Shall he who argues contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it."

Job's answer is brief. "Behold, I am of small account. What will I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

The man who demanded a hearing is suddenly speechless.

But God isn't finished. He speaks again from the whirlwind, and this time He gets more personal. "Will you even annul my judgment? Will you condemn me, that you may be justified?" In his pain, Job had come close to saying God was unjust in order to prove that he himself was innocent. God gently but firmly pushes back. If you think you could run the universe better, God says, go ahead. Dress yourself in majesty and glory. Look at every proud person and bring him low. Crush the wicked. If you can do that, then I'll admit you can save yourself.

Then God describes two enormous creatures. The first is Behemoth. "See now behemoth, which I made as well as you. He eats grass as an ox." His strength is in his hips and stomach. His tail sways like a

cedar. His bones are like bronze tubes. When the river rages, he isn't alarmed. "He is the chief of the ways of God."

The second is Leviathan, and God spends a whole chapter on him. "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fish hook, or press down his tongue with a cord?" Will he beg you for mercy? Will you keep him as a pet on a leash for your girls? Lay a hand on him once, and you'll never do it again. His scales are like a row of shields, so tightly packed that air can't get between them. "His sneezing flashes out light." Flames shoot from his mouth, and smoke pours from his nostrils. Swords and spears bounce off him. "On earth there is not his equal, that is made without fear." And the speech ends with this: "He is king over all the sons of pride."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Behemoth and Leviathan**

What are these creatures? Christians have held several views. Many readers think Behemoth is a hippopotamus or an elephant, and Leviathan is a crocodile, described with poetic exaggeration. Some think they may be dinosaurs or other large animals that no longer exist. Others note that in the ancient Near East, Leviathan was a well-known name for a sea monster representing chaos, and that the Bible uses the name that way too: Isaiah says the LORD will punish "leviathan, the twisted serpent." On this view, God is describing the most terrifying powers imaginable, and showing that even they are His creatures. Yet another psalm says God formed leviathan "to play" in the sea. The views can overlap, and Christians don't need to agree on the exact identity to get the point. If Job can't even handle these creatures, how could he handle the One who made them? And yet God made them, rules them, and even delights in them.

Notice what God doesn't do in these chapters. He doesn't scold Job for asking questions. He doesn't tell him he should have kept quiet. He doesn't accuse him of secret sin, the way the friends did. He

shows up. After all the silence, God comes close enough to talk with Job, personally, out of the storm.

That's the real answer Job needed. He had been longing for a hearing, for God to meet him. And God did, though not in the way Job expected. When you're suffering, you may long for explanations. Sometimes God gives understanding later. Often He doesn't. But what He always offers is Himself. The book of Job suggests that knowing God is better than knowing why.

It's also interesting to notice what God talks about. He doesn't talk about the temple, the law, or Israel's history. He talks about stars, oceans, weather, and animals. He points Job to creation. For thousands of years, people have found God's greatness reflected in the natural world. Scientists who study the vastness of space, the complexity of a single cell, or the behavior of animals often describe a sense of awe. Job's experience suggests that awe is a doorway to trust. The more you see how wise and powerful God is in creation, the easier it becomes to trust Him with what you can't understand in your own life.

That doesn't mean nature answers every question. Job still didn't know why he suffered. But he came away knowing that the God who runs the universe is not careless, not cruel, and not confused. He knows exactly what He's doing, even when we don't.

KEY VERSE

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Declare, if you have understanding.

Job 38:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God answered Job with questions instead of explanations?
2. What do you think God wanted Job to learn from the descriptions of wild animals?
3. What view of Behemoth and Leviathan makes the most sense to you? Why?
4. How can knowing that God is that big be comforting when you're going through something hard?

TRY THIS *Spend fifteen minutes outside this week observing one part of creation: birds, insects, clouds, trees, or stars. Then write a short prayer thanking God for something you noticed.*

CHAPTER 8

The Ending

Job 42

After God's second speech, Job answers one last time. "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be restrained." He admits that he spoke about things he didn't understand, "things too wonderful for me, which I didn't know."

And then he says the line that sums up the whole journey. "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."

Before his suffering, Job knew about God. He had heard the stories. He believed them. He lived by them. But now he has met God face to face. His questions haven't been answered, but they've been swallowed up in something bigger.

"Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Did Job Repent Of?**

Job's last words are hard to translate, and readers understand them differently. Many translations, like the WEB, have Job say that he despises himself and repents. That doesn't mean he admits the friends were right. He still hasn't confessed to any secret sin, and God is about to say Job was right and the friends were wrong. Instead, Job seems to be turning away from his demands and his accusations that God was unjust. Some scholars translate the verse differently, as Job saying he retracts his case or is comforted concerning dust and ashes, meaning he's at peace with being human and

mortal. Either way, Job is no longer demanding an answer. He has seen God, and that is enough.

Now the book switches back from poetry to prose, and God speaks to Eliphaz. "My wrath is kindled against you, and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has."

That's a stunning verdict. The friends defended God for thirty chapters. Job argued with God, complained to God, and accused God of being unfair. And God says Job is the one who spoke rightly about Him.

Why? The friends spoke about God as if He were a formula. They tried to explain everything, and they were wrong. They also never spoke to God. Not once in the whole book do the friends pray. Job, on the other hand, kept talking to God, honestly and relentlessly. He refused to lie, even to protect God's reputation. He never stopped believing that God was the only One who could make things right.

REAL TALK **God Prefers Honesty**

The ending of Job sends a powerful message. God would rather have an honest relationship with you than a list of correct answers. That doesn't mean everything Job said was right. God corrected him. But Job's honest wrestling was closer to the truth than his friends' tidy theology. You don't have to pretend with God. You can bring Him your doubts, your anger, your confusion, and your pain, and keep talking. James wrote, "You have heard of the perseverance of Job and have seen the Lord in the outcome, and how the Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

Then God tells the friends to bring sacrifices to Job, "and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept him." The men who accused Job now need him to pray for them. And Job does. He forgives the friends who hurt him so badly.

"The LORD restored Job's prosperity when he prayed for his friends. The LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before." His brothers and sisters and old friends come to eat with him and comfort him, and each one gives him a gift. He ends up with fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys, exactly double what he had before.

"He had also seven sons and three daughters." The book names the daughters, which was unusual in the ancient world: Jemimah, Keziah, and Keren-happuch. They're the most beautiful women in the land. And Job does something almost unheard of in his culture. "Their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers." Job lives one hundred forty more years and sees four generations of his family. "So Job died, being old and full of days."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard Passage: Two Questions Everyone Asks**

Readers of Job almost always ask two hard questions. The first is, why would God allow the accuser to test Job at all? The book never fully explains, and honest Christians admit they don't have a complete answer. A few things help. The test proved the accuser wrong: Job's faith wasn't just about what he got from God. That matters, because it shows that real love for God is possible. God also set strict limits on the accuser, and stayed in control the whole time. And Job's experience became a gift to millions of suffering people who have found comfort in his story. Still, the book doesn't make the pain small, and neither should we. Lamentations says, "For he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." God doesn't enjoy our suffering. The second question is, how could ten new children make up for the ten Job lost? The answer is, they couldn't, and the book doesn't say they did. Notice that God gave Job double the animals, but the same number of children, seven sons and three daughters. Many readers believe that's deliberate: Job's first ten children weren't replaced, because they weren't gone forever. Job had already said, "After my skin is destroyed, then I will see God." Some see a hint here that Job would see his first children again. And no parent who has

lost a child would say that new children erase the grief. Job's later blessings were real, but so was his loss. The Bible lets both be true. If you've lost someone you love, you don't have to pretend that good things later cancel out the pain. They don't. But God promises a day when "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more."

REAL TALK **Forgiving Those Who Hurt You**

Before Job's restoration began, he prayed for the friends who had wounded him. That's not a small thing. They had accused him, mocked him, and made his suffering worse. Forgiveness doesn't mean pretending what they did was okay. God Himself said they were wrong. And it doesn't mean you have to keep trusting people who keep hurting you. But it does mean releasing your desire for revenge and asking God to bless them. That's hard. It took Job a long journey through pain to get there. If someone has hurt you, start by being honest with God about it. Then ask Him to help you forgive. And if someone is hurting you in a way that isn't safe, tell a trusted adult right away.

Job's story ends happily, but the ending doesn't erase the middle. Job still lost his children. He still suffered terribly. He still never found out why. But he met God, and that changed everything. The book of Job doesn't give us a neat answer to the problem of suffering. It gives us something better: a God who shows up in the storm, who welcomes our honest questions, and who is big enough to be trusted even when we don't understand.

As we come to the end of Job, it's worth remembering where this book sits in the Bible. Job is the first of the poetry and wisdom books, which also include Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Proverbs will teach that wise living usually leads to good things. Ecclesiastes will wrestle with how confusing and unfair life can be. The Psalms will give us prayers for every emotion, from joy to despair. Job stands at the front of them all, reminding us that

faith isn't a formula. It's a relationship with a God who is bigger than our questions.

If you remember only one thing from Job, remember this: you can be honest with God. You don't have to clean up your prayers or pretend you understand. Like Job, you can bring your pain straight to Him, keep talking, and trust that your Redeemer lives.

One more thing is worth noticing about the ending. Job's restoration doesn't come because he finally figured everything out or said the right words. It comes after he meets God, humbles himself, and prays for his friends. The book doesn't teach that if you suffer well, you'll get everything back twice over. Many faithful people suffer and never see that kind of restoration in this life. Instead, the ending is a picture of God's goodness and justice breaking through, a preview of the final restoration the rest of the Bible promises.

For Christians, that final restoration is tied to Jesus. Because He rose from the dead, those who belong to Him will be raised too. Every loss will be made right. Every tear will be wiped away. The happy ending of Job is a small taste of a much bigger ending still to come.

KEY VERSE

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.

Job 42:5 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between hearing about God and seeing Him for yourself?
2. Why do you think God said Job spoke rightly about Him, even though Job had complained and argued?
3. Why do you think God gave Job double the animals, but the same number of children?
4. Is there someone you need to pray for or forgive, like Job did for his friends?

TRY THIS *Pray for someone who has hurt you this week. Ask God to bless them, even if it's hard. If you're not ready, start by honestly telling God how you feel about what they did.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Job suffered without knowing why. His friends accused him. He felt abandoned by God. And in the middle of his pain, he longed for someone who could stand between him and God. “There is no umpire between us, that might lay his hand on us both.” Then, in his darkest moment, he said something astonishing: “But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth.”

Jewish readers treasure Job as the great book about faith in suffering and about honest wrestling with God. Christians read it too, and believe Job’s longing found its answer in Jesus. Paul wrote, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Jesus is fully God and fully human, so He can lay His hand on both. And like Job, He was innocent and suffered anyway. Isaiah described Him as “a man of suffering and acquainted with disease.” On the cross, He even cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But unlike Job, Jesus suffered for others. “He was pierced for our transgressions.” Then He rose again. Job’s Redeemer really does live, and He really will stand upon the earth.

Here’s what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He sees your pain, and He doesn't look away.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Job was blameless, but he wasn't sinless, and neither are we. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the Redeemer Job longed for.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. Job cried out for someone to stand between him and God. Jesus is that Mediator, and He suffered in our place.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Job's friends thought blessing was earned by being good. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Trust your Redeemer.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. Job certainly didn't. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I don't understand everything that happens in my life, and sometimes it hurts. But I believe You are here. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus, the innocent One, suffered for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Be my Redeemer. Hold me when I'm hurting, and help me trust You even when I can't see why. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Job 1, 19, and 38, then Isaiah 53, the Sufferer who was pierced for us.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Sit with someone. Job's friends got one thing right: they showed up. Be that friend for someone who is hurting.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Job asked God hard questions for thirty-five chapters, and God still showed up. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Job is right, the God who spoke out of the whirlwind isn't afraid of your questions, and your Redeemer lives.

But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth.

Job 19:25 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The King Who Hears Our Songs

Psalms, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Hears Our Songs: The Book of Psalms, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” The Psalms are the Bible’s songbook and prayer book, one hundred fifty poems written over about a thousand years by shepherds, kings, musicians, and exiles. Some are shouts of joy. Some are screams of pain. Some are whispered confessions. Some are angry enough to make you uncomfortable.

Most of the Bible is God speaking to people. The Psalms are mostly people speaking to God, and God chose to make their words part of His word. That means the Psalms show you how to talk to Him when you’re happy, scared, lonely, guilty, angry, jealous, grateful, or so sad you can’t get out of bed. There’s a psalm for almost every feeling you’ll ever have.

So why read them? Because at some point you’ll run out of words. When you do, the Psalms will give you some. And you’ll discover that people have felt exactly what you feel for three thousand years, and brought it to God, and found that He was listening.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

There are 150 psalms, far too many to cover one by one. This book walks through about forty of them in nine chapters, grouped by theme: the doorway (Psalms 1–2), shepherd and shelter (23, 27, 46, 91), honest lament (13, 22, 42–43, 88), guilt and forgiveness (32, 51,

103), anger, envy, and hard psalms (73, 137), wonder and being known (8, 19, 139), God's word and the songs of ascent (119, 121, 126, 133), the King's psalms (22, 110, 118), and the hallelujah finale (100, 145, 146–150).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains how the Psalms are organized, who wrote them, and how Hebrew poetry works. It ends with a quick-finder called When You Feel, which points you to psalms for specific emotions. Bookmark it.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to pray the angry psalms, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes the Psalms often, but explains them mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Better yet, read each psalm out loud. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the nineteenth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Rather than cover all 150 psalms, this book curates about forty from all five books of the Psalter and all the major types: wisdom, royal, trust, lament, penitential, imprecatory, creation, Torah, pilgrimage, messianic, and praise psalms. A quick-finder maps common teen emotions, such as anxiety, anger, loneliness, guilt, doubt, and gratitude, to specific psalms.

The Psalms are emotionally honest, and this book is too. Psalm 88 ends in darkness, and a Real Talk box on depression encourages any reader who is struggling to talk to a trusted adult or counselor and lists 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. A hard-passage box addresses the imprecatory psalms, including Psalm 137:9, explaining how they hand rage over to God rather than taking personal vengeance, and setting them alongside Jesus' command to love our enemies. Psalm 139 includes a gentle note on identity and worth.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Jesus prayed the Psalms, even from the cross, and how the New Testament sees Him as their fulfillment, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure the Psalms as the heart of their own worship and prayer. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will learn to pray the Psalms, and will find in them a voice for every season of life, and the King who hears every song.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

Psalms is a collection of 150 songs and prayers. The Hebrew title is Tehillim, which means praises. The English word psalm comes from a Greek word for a song sung with a stringed instrument. Ancient Israel sang many of these at the temple, and Jews and Christians have prayed and sung them ever since. Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn together on the night before He died, probably from the psalms Jewish families sang at Passover, and the New Testament quotes the Psalms more than almost any other Old Testament book.

Five Books in One

Psalms is actually divided into five smaller books: Book One (Psalms 1–41), Book Two (42–72), Book Three (73–89), Book Four (90–106), and Book Five (107–150). Each book ends with a short burst of praise called a doxology. Many readers think the five-part shape was meant to echo the five books of Moses, as if to say: here is God's instruction, and here is His people's response. Books One and Two are mostly by David. Book Three is darker and wrestles with the fall of Jerusalem. Books Four and Five lift the eyes back up to God as King, and the whole collection ends in a flood of hallelujahs.

Who Wrote Them?

Many psalms have a short heading, called a superscription, telling who wrote them or when. About 73 are linked to David, the

shepherd who became king. Twelve are by Asaph, one of David's chief musicians. Eleven are by the sons of Korah, a family of temple singers. Psalm 90 is a prayer by Moses, probably the oldest psalm. Psalms 72 and 127 are linked to Solomon. Heman and Ethan, two more temple musicians, wrote Psalms 88 and 89. About fifty have no name at all. Scholars debate exactly what some headings mean, since the Hebrew phrase translated by David can also mean for David or in the style of David. Either way, the Psalms were written over roughly a thousand years, from Moses to the return from exile.

How Hebrew Poetry Works

English poems often rhyme. Hebrew poems mostly rhyme ideas instead of sounds. This is called parallelism. A line says something, and the next line echoes it, expands it, or contrasts it. Sometimes the second line repeats the first in different words: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin." Sometimes it gives the opposite: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish." Sometimes it builds on the first line and takes it further. When you read a psalm, slow down and notice how the lines talk to each other. Some psalms are also acrostics, where each line or section starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

What Does Selah Mean?

The word Selah appears 71 times in the Psalms, often at the end of a line or section. No one knows for sure what it means. It may have been a musical instruction, like a pause, an instrumental break, or a signal to lift the voice. Many readers treat it as an invitation to stop and think about what was just said. That's not a bad way to read the Psalms in general.

Many Kinds of Psalms

Scholars group the psalms into types. Praise psalms celebrate who God is. Thanksgiving psalms thank Him for something He's done. Laments, the most common type, cry out to God in pain. Penitential psalms confess sin. Trust psalms express confidence in God's care. Wisdom psalms teach how to live. Royal psalms are about the king, and many of them came to be read as pointing to the Messiah. Imprecatory psalms ask God to punish enemies. Many psalms mix several types together, often moving from pain to praise.

How to Read a Psalm

Psalms are poems, so read them like poems, not like a textbook. Read slowly, and out loud if you can. Notice the pictures: shepherds, rocks, rivers, storms, birds, and trees. Pay attention to how the psalm moves. Many start in one place and end somewhere very different, often moving from complaint to trust. Look for the turn, the moment where everything shifts. Ask who is speaking and who they're speaking to. Sometimes it's a person talking to God, sometimes God talking to people, sometimes a person talking to their own soul. And then try praying it. The Psalms were written to be prayed and sung, not just studied.

The Psalms Through History

For three thousand years, the Psalms have been at the center of worship. They were sung at the temple in Jerusalem, and later in synagogues all over the world. Jesus quoted them more than almost any other book. The early church sang them, and Paul encouraged believers to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Monks in the Middle Ages prayed through all 150 psalms every week. The Reformers set them to music so ordinary people

could sing them. Enslaved African Americans drew on them in spirituals that cried out for freedom. Today, many worship songs are based on the Psalms. When you pray them, you join a very long line of people who did the same.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Psalms 1–2): The doorway.

Chapter 2 (Psalms 23, 27, 46, 91): Shepherd and shelter.

Chapter 3 (Psalms 13, 22, 42–43, 88): Honest lament.

Chapter 4 (Psalms 32, 51, 103): Guilt and forgiveness.

Chapter 5 (Psalms 73, 137): Anger, envy, and hard psalms.

Chapter 6 (Psalms 8, 19, 139): Wonder and being known.

Chapter 7 (Psalms 119, 121, 126, 133): God's word and the road up.

Chapter 8 (Psalms 22, 110, 118): The King's psalms.

Chapter 9 (Psalms 100, 145–150): The hallelujah finale.

When You Feel...

Anxious or afraid: Psalms 4, 23, 27, 46, 56, 91, 121.

Angry: Psalms 4, 37, 73, 109, 137.

Lonely: Psalms 25, 68, 139, 142.

Guilty: Psalms 32, 51, 103, 130.

Doubting or far from God: Psalms 13, 42–43, 73, 88.

Sad or hopeless: Psalms 30, 34, 40, 42, 88.

Grateful or happy: Psalms 100, 103, 126, 136, 145–150.

Overwhelmed: Psalms 55, 61, 62.

Wondering who you are: Psalms 8, 139.

Tempted: Psalms 1, 119.

If you're feeling hopeless or thinking about hurting yourself, please don't just read a psalm. Talk to a trusted adult today, and call or text 988 any time.

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8 The King's Psalms *22, 110, 118* .....

9 The Hallelujah Finale *100, 145–150* .....

Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

The Doorway

Psalms 1–2

Every building has a front door, and the book of Psalms has one too. Many scholars believe Psalms 1 and 2 were placed at the beginning on purpose, like a doorway into the whole collection. Neither has a title or an author's name. Together, they introduce two big themes that run through all 150 psalms: the way of the righteous person, and the reign of God's chosen King.

Psalm 1 begins with a word that's almost a cheer. "Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand on the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers."

Blessed means deeply happy, flourishing, the way life is meant to be. And notice the progression in that verse: walk, stand, sit. First you walk alongside people who don't care about God and listen to their advice. Then you stop and stand with them. Finally you sit down and settle in, and you become a scoffer yourself, someone who mocks what's good. It rarely happens all at once. It happens a step at a time.

> REAL TALK **Walk, Stand, Sit**
>
> Psalm 1 describes how people drift away from God. It usually isn't one dramatic decision. It's a slow slide. You start hanging around people who make fun of faith. You laugh along. You start agreeing. Eventually you're the one doing the mocking. The friends you spend the most time with, the voices

you listen to online, and the content you consume will shape who you become. That doesn't mean you should only have Christian friends. Jesus spent time with all kinds of people. But it does mean you should pay attention to who is influencing whom. Are you walking with people who pull you toward God, or away from Him?

So what does the blessed person do instead? "But his delight is in the LORD's law. On his law he meditates day and night."

The word law here is torah, which means instruction or teaching. It isn't just a list of rules. It's everything God has revealed about how to live. And the blessed person doesn't just follow it. They delight in it. The word meditate pictures someone murmuring the words under their breath, chewing on them, thinking about them over and over.

Then comes one of the most beautiful pictures in the Psalms. "He will be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that produces its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever he does shall prosper."

In a dry land like Israel, a tree by a stream was a picture of life. Its roots go deep. It doesn't panic when the heat comes. It produces fruit at the right time. That's what a life rooted in God looks like.

The wicked, the psalm says, are the opposite. They're like chaff, the dry husks that blow away when farmers toss grain into the air. No roots. No weight. Nothing lasting.

The psalm ends with a promise. "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does Psalm 1 Promise Success?**

Psalm 1 says the righteous person will prosper in whatever they do. Does that mean if you follow God, you'll always get good grades, make the team, and never have problems? Not exactly. The rest of the Psalms are full of righteous

people who suffer, and the book of Job is all about it. Psalm 1 is describing the overall direction of a life. A tree by the water still goes through winter. But its roots hold, and in the right season, it bears fruit. The prosperity Psalm 1 describes is deeper than success. It's a life that lasts.

Psalm 2 shifts the camera from one person to the whole world. "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing?" Kings and rulers are gathering together "against the LORD, and against his Anointed." They want to throw off God's rule. "Let's break their bonds apart, and cast their cords from us."

And God's reaction? "He who sits in the heavens will laugh." It isn't a cruel laugh. It's the laugh of someone who knows how ridiculous it is for tiny human rulers to think they can overthrow the Creator of the universe.

Then God announces that He has installed His King on Zion, His holy hill in Jerusalem. And the King Himself speaks. "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your father.'"

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Anointed One**

In ancient Israel, kings were anointed with oil when they were crowned. The Hebrew word for anointed one is mashiach, which gives us the word Messiah. In Greek, it's christos, which gives us Christ. Psalm 2 was probably first sung at the coronation of kings in David's line, when the new king was declared to be God's son, meaning God's chosen representative. But over time, Jewish readers began to see that no ordinary king fully lived up to the psalm's huge promises, like ruling the whole earth. They began to hope for a greater King to come. The New Testament quotes Psalm 2 several times about Jesus, including at His baptism, when a voice from heaven called Him God's beloved Son.

God promises His King an inheritance that covers the whole world. "Ask of me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." Then the psalm turns to the rulers of the earth with a warning: be wise. Serve the LORD with fear. Honor the Son.

And then the last line of Psalm 2 echoes the first line of Psalm 1. "Blessed are all those who take refuge in him."

Psalm 1 began with blessed. Psalm 2 ends with blessed. Together they form a frame. The blessed life is a life rooted in God's word, and a life that takes refuge in God's King.

> **REAL TALK** **Who's in Charge?**
>
> Psalm 2 can be encouraging when the world feels out of control. Turn on the news, and it can seem like powerful people are doing whatever they want. Psalm 2 says they're not as powerful as they think. God isn't nervous. He isn't wringing His hands. He has a King, and that King will reign. That doesn't mean we should ignore injustice or stop caring about what happens in the world. But it does mean we don't have to be afraid. Our hope isn't in any human leader or political party. It's in God's King.

These two psalms are the doorway into everything else. In the pages ahead, you'll meet people who are scared, sad, angry, guilty, and overjoyed. You'll hear them pray, complain, confess, and sing. But all of it happens inside the frame of Psalms 1 and 2. There is a way that leads to life. And there is a King who reigns.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Two Psalms, One Person?**
>
> Christians have long noticed that Psalms 1 and 2 describe two figures: the perfectly righteous man who delights in God's law, and the King who is God's Son. Who fully fits both descriptions? Ordinary people fall short of Psalm 1, and ordinary kings fall short of Psalm 2. The New Testament's answer is

Jesus. He alone lived the life of Psalm 1 perfectly, and He alone is the King of Psalm 2. As you read the rest of the Psalms, watch for Him.

REAL TALK **Roots Before Fruit**

Trees don't produce fruit overnight. First they put down roots, and most of that growth happens underground where no one can see it. The same is true of faith. Reading a psalm before school, praying on the bus, memorizing a verse, or showing up at youth group when you don't feel like it might not seem to change much. But those small habits are roots. When a hard season comes, like a drought for a tree, the roots are what keep you standing. Start growing them now, before you need them.

It's also worth noticing that Psalm 1 doesn't say the blessed person never meets wicked people or never hears bad advice. They live in the same world as everyone else. The difference is where they go for direction and where they put down roots. You can't always choose what you hear. But you can choose what you dwell on, what you return to, and whose voice you trust most.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Start Here?**

Ancient editors put real thought into the order of the Psalms. Psalm 1 sets up the contrast between two ways of life that runs through the whole book. Psalm 2 introduces God's anointed King, whose story will rise and fall through the collection. Book Three ends with Psalm 89, a painful cry asking why God's promises to David seem to have failed after Jerusalem fell. Book Four then opens with Psalm 90, a prayer by Moses, reminding exiled readers that God was their home long before there was a king or a temple. The order tells a story of its own.

Here's one more way to think about Psalms 1 and 2. Psalm 1 is personal. It's about the choices you make every day: who you listen to, what you think about, where you put down roots. Psalm 2 is global. It's about nations, rulers, and the King who reigns over all of them. The Psalms hold both together. Your small, ordinary choices

matter, and they happen inside a huge story about God's kingdom. You're not just a random person trying to be good. You're invited to be part of what God is doing in the whole world.

KEY VERSE

He will be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that produces its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever he does shall prosper.

Psalm 1:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does the progression of walk, stand, and sit in Psalm 1:1 tell you about how people drift away from God?
2. What do you think it would look like to delight in God's word, not just read it?
3. Why do you think God laughs in Psalm 2? Is that comforting or uncomfortable to you?
4. Who are the biggest influences in your life right now? Are they planting you by the water or blowing you away like chaff?

TRY THIS *Pick one verse from Psalm 1 or 2 and write it on a card. Carry it with you this week and read it at least three times a day, letting the words sink in.*

CHAPTER 2

Shepherd and Shelter

Psalms 23, 27, 46, 91

If you know only one psalm, it's probably this one. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing."

Psalm 23 was written by David, who spent his teenage years as a shepherd. He knew what sheep needed. They needed food, water, rest, guidance, and protection. Sheep aren't very smart, and they can't defend themselves. Without a shepherd, they wander off, get lost, and get eaten. David knew he was just like them. And he knew who his Shepherd was.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." Sheep won't lie down unless they feel safe and full. The Shepherd provides both. He leads them to still water, because sheep are afraid of fast-moving streams. He knows what they need before they do.

"He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The Shepherd doesn't just keep the sheep alive. He leads them in the right direction.

Then the psalm takes a turn. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Valley of the Shadow**

The Hebrew phrase translated shadow of death can also mean deep darkness. In Israel, shepherds sometimes led their flocks through narrow, shadowy ravines to reach new pastures. Those valleys were dangerous, with steep drops and predators hiding in the rocks. But notice what David says. The Shepherd doesn't take the sheep around the valley. He leads them through it. And notice the shift in the psalm. Up to verse 4, David talks about God: He makes me, He leads me. In the valley, David starts talking to God: you are with me. In the darkest place, God gets closer. The rod was a club for fighting off wild animals. The staff was a long stick with a hook, for guiding and rescuing sheep. Both were signs that the shepherd was there.

Then the picture changes again, from a shepherd to a host. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over." In the ancient world, if someone invited you to their table, they were responsible for protecting you. Your enemies can watch, but they can't touch you.

The psalm ends with confidence. "Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the LORD's house forever." The word follow is really strong in Hebrew. It means pursue or chase. God's goodness and love aren't just behind you. They're chasing you down.

REAL TALK **When You're in the Valley**

Maybe you're walking through a dark valley right now: a family crisis, a scary diagnosis, a loss, depression, or anxiety that won't let go. Psalm 23 doesn't promise you'll never go through valleys. It promises you won't go through them alone. Try reading Psalm 23 slowly, out loud, and putting your own name in it. The LORD is my shepherd. He is with me. And remember that God often shows His presence through people. If you're struggling, let a trusted adult, a counselor, or a friend walk through the valley with you.

Psalm 27, also by David, starts with a question. "The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?" David had real enemies. Armies were after him. But he says that if God is his light and strength, there's no one he needs to fear.

Then he says what he wants most. "One thing I have asked of the LORD, that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the LORD's house all the days of my life, to see the LORD's beauty, and to inquire in his temple." If you could ask God for one thing, what would it be? David didn't ask for success, safety, or revenge. He asked to be close to God.

Psalm 27 also contains one of the most tender verses in the Bible. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up."

> **REAL TALK** **When Parents Let You Down**
>
> Not everyone has parents who are there for them. Some teenagers have a parent who left, a parent who is struggling with addiction or illness, a parent in prison, or a parent who is harsh or unsafe. Psalm 27:10 says that even if your father and mother abandon you, God will take you in. He is the Father who never leaves. If you're living with a parent who is hurting you or making you feel unsafe, please tell a trusted adult like a teacher, school counselor, or pastor. You can also call Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453. You deserve to be safe, and God has not forgotten you.

The psalm ends with advice David probably needed himself. "Wait for the LORD. Be strong, and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the LORD."

Psalm 46 was written by the sons of Korah, and it may have been sung when Jerusalem was under attack. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we won't be

afraid, though the earth changes, though the mountains are shaken into the heart of the seas." The psalmist imagines the worst possible disaster, the whole world coming apart, and says, we still won't be afraid.

Why? Because God is in the middle of His city. Nations rage, kingdoms fall, but God speaks, and the earth melts. Then He says, "Be still, and know that I am God." That's not a gentle invitation to relax. It's more like a command to stop fighting. Stop panicking. Drop your weapons. Remember who's God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Martin Luther's Fortress**

Psalm 46 has comforted believers for thousands of years. In the 1500s, Martin Luther, the German reformer, wrote a hymn based on it called A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. Luther went through times of intense fear, depression, and danger, and he is reported to have sung this psalm with friends when things looked bleak. The hymn is still sung in churches all over the world.

Psalm 91 is a psalm about shelter. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'" Then it uses a beautiful picture of a mother bird. "He will cover you with his feathers. Under his wings you will take refuge."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does Psalm 91 Promise You'll Never Get Hurt?**

Psalm 91 makes big promises: no plague will come near you, no disaster will touch your home, angels will guard you. Some people read it as a guarantee that faithful Christians will never get sick or hurt. But the rest of the Bible shows faithful people suffering all the time. In fact, Satan quoted Psalm 91 to Jesus when he tempted Him to jump off the temple, and Jesus refused to test God that way. Many Christians understand Psalm 91 as describing ultimate protection: nothing can destroy those who belong to God, and in the end, He will bring them safely home. Others see it as a general pattern of God's care. Either way, it's a psalm to pray with trust, not to use as a magic charm.

Four psalms, four pictures: a shepherd, a light, a fortress, and a mother bird. They all say the same thing. You're not alone. God is near, and He's strong enough to protect you.

Notice something about all four of these psalms. None of them promises that life will be easy. Psalm 23 includes a dark valley and enemies. Psalm 27 mentions armies and false witnesses. Psalm 46 imagines mountains falling into the sea. Psalm 91 talks about plagues, arrows, and terrors in the night. The writers weren't naive. They knew the world was dangerous. Their confidence wasn't that bad things would never happen. It was that God would be with them when they did.

That's a more honest kind of comfort, and a stronger one. If your faith depends on nothing ever going wrong, it will crack the first time something does. But if your faith rests on God's presence, it can survive anything. The shepherd doesn't promise a valley-free life. He promises to walk through every valley with you.

> **REAL TALK** **Anxiety and the Psalms**
>
> Many teenagers struggle with anxiety: racing thoughts, a tight chest, trouble sleeping, or constant worry about school, friends, family, or the future. The psalms in this chapter can help. Some people find it calming to breathe slowly while repeating a short line, like The LORD is my shepherd, or Be still, and know. But anxiety can also be a real health condition, and prayer and Bible reading aren't meant to replace getting help. If anxiety is interfering with your life, talk to a parent, a school counselor, or a doctor. Using the help God provides through people is part of trusting Him.

These psalms have also been some of the most loved words in history during times of crisis. People have prayed Psalm 23 at funerals, in hospitals, and on battlefields. Psalm 46 has been read after earthquakes, wars, and national tragedies. Psalm 91 has been

carried by soldiers in their pockets. When people face the worst, these are often the words they reach for. Learning them now means they'll be there when you need them.

REAL TALK **Learning to Wait**

Psalm 27 ends with a command repeated twice: wait for the LORD. Waiting is hard, especially in a world where you can get almost anything instantly: food, videos, messages, answers. But some of the most important things in life can't be rushed, like healing, growing up, a broken friendship being mended, or a prayer being answered. In the Bible, waiting isn't passive. It means trusting God while you keep doing what's right. If you're waiting for something right now, you're in good company. David waited years between being anointed king and actually becoming king.

KEY VERSE

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing.

Psalm 23:1 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Which picture of God in this chapter means the most to you right now: shepherd, light, fortress, or mother bird? Why?
2. Why do you think David switches from talking about God to talking to God in the valley?
3. If you could ask God for one thing, like David did in Psalm 27:4, what would it be?
4. What do you think it means to "be still, and know" that God is God?

TRY THIS *Memorize Psalm 23 this week. Say it out loud every night before you go to sleep, and notice which line speaks to you most.*

CHAPTER 3

Honest Lament

Psalms 13, 22, 42–43, 88

Here's something that surprises a lot of people: the most common kind of psalm isn't praise. It's lament. About a third of the Psalms are cries of pain, confusion, and complaint. They ask God hard questions. They say things that might get you in trouble at church. And God put them in His book.

Psalm 13 is short, and it begins with a question repeated four times. "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart every day? How long shall my enemy triumph over me?"

That's what a lament sounds like. David isn't polite. He's desperate. He feels forgotten by God. He's stuck in his own head, sad every day.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Shape of a Lament**
>
> Most lament psalms follow a pattern. First comes the cry: the psalmist addresses God directly. Then the complaint: describing honestly what's wrong. Then the request: asking God to act. Then the turn: a statement of trust, often starting with but. Finally, many end with praise or a promise to praise. Psalm 13 has all five parts in just six verses. Not every lament follows the pattern perfectly, and some, like Psalm 88, never make the turn at all. But

> the pattern is a helpful guide when you want to pray honestly and don't know how.

After the complaint comes the request. "Behold, and answer me, LORD, my God. Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death." And then, suddenly, the turn. "But I trust in your loving kindness. My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has been good to me."

Nothing has changed in David's circumstances. But he remembers who God is. The word but is one of the most important words in the Psalms. It's the hinge between pain and hope.

Psalm 22 is one of the darkest psalms, and also one of the most important for Christians. It begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning?" David cries day and night, and God doesn't seem to answer. People mock him. His body is falling apart. "I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax." Then it gets stranger. "They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all of my bones. They look and stare at me. They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing."

We'll come back to Psalm 22 in chapter 8, because centuries later, those words came true in an astonishing way. For now, notice that even this psalm turns. By the end, the psalmist is praising God in front of everyone, and declaring that God "has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted."

> **REAL TALK** **You're Allowed to Ask Why**
>
> Some people think it's wrong to question God or tell Him you're angry or disappointed. The lament psalms say otherwise. They show that faith isn't pretending everything is fine. Faith is bringing your real feelings to God, because you believe He's real enough to hear them. Asking why isn't the

> opposite of trust. Often it's how trust starts. You can't have an honest relationship with someone if you're always pretending. That's true with God too.

Psalms 42 and 43 were probably once a single psalm. They share a chorus, repeated three times. The writer is one of the sons of Korah, a temple singer who seems to be stuck far from Jerusalem, maybe in exile. He begins with a famous image. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants after you, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

He remembers how he used to lead crowds to the temple, singing and celebrating. Now he's far away, and people keep asking him, "Where is your God?" He feels overwhelmed, like he's drowning. "All your waves and your billows have swept over me."

And then he talks to himself. "Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise him, the saving help of my countenance, and my God."

> **REAL TALK** **Talking Back to Your Feelings**
>
> Notice what the psalmist does in Psalms 42 and 43. He doesn't ignore his feelings, and he doesn't let them have the last word either. He talks back to them. He asks his own soul, why are you so down? Then he reminds himself of the truth: hope in God. Counselors sometimes teach something similar. When your thoughts spiral, it can help to notice them, name them, and then answer them with what's true. That doesn't make sad feelings disappear instantly. The psalmist had to repeat his chorus three times. But it can help you keep going.

Psalm 88 is different from every other lament. It never makes the turn. It begins, "LORD, the God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before you." Then it goes down and down. "For my soul is full of troubles. My life draws near to Sheol." Sheol is the Hebrew word

for the grave, the place of the dead. "You have laid me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths." The writer, Heman, has been sick and close to death since his youth. He feels rejected by God and abandoned by everyone. "LORD, why do you reject my soul? Why do you hide your face from me?"

And then the psalm ends. The last line, in the WEB, reads: "You have put lover and friend far from me, and my friends into darkness." In Hebrew, the very last word of the psalm is darkness.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Is Psalm 88 in the Bible?**

Psalm 88 is the darkest psalm in the Bible. There's no turn, no hope, no praise at the end. Why would God include it? Many readers believe it's there precisely for people who are in that kind of darkness, so they know they're not alone, and that even their darkest prayers are welcome. Notice too that Heman is still praying. He addresses God as the God of my salvation in the first line. Even in total darkness, he keeps talking to God. That itself is an act of faith.

REAL TALK **When the Darkness Won't Lift**

If Psalm 88 sounds like your life right now, please hear this. Depression is real, and it's not a sign that you're weak or that your faith has failed. Many faithful people throughout history, including Bible writers, have experienced long seasons of darkness. But you don't have to go through it alone, and you shouldn't. Please talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, a pastor, or a school counselor. A counselor or therapist can help, and sometimes a doctor can too. Getting help is not a lack of faith. It's wisdom. If you're having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. Psalm 88 isn't the end of the book. And your darkest chapter isn't the end of your story.

The laments teach us something we badly need: you can be completely honest with God. You don't have to clean up your

prayers. And even when you can't feel Him, He's still the God of your salvation.

One more thing about lament. In many churches today, most of the songs are upbeat and happy. That's not bad. But some Christians have pointed out that if all we ever sing is happy songs, people who are hurting may feel like they don't belong. The Psalms model something different. They give space for joy and for grief, for celebration and for tears, often in the same service. A church that knows how to lament together is a church where hurting people can stay.

The same is true for friendships. Good friends can laugh together. But great friends can also cry together, sit in silence together, and be honest about hard things. If you want to be that kind of friend, learn to lament. Don't rush people out of their sadness. Let them be honest, and be honest yourself.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Sons of Korah**
>
> The sons of Korah, who wrote Psalms 42 and 88 and several others, have a surprising family history. Their ancestor Korah led a rebellion against Moses in the wilderness, and the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels. But Numbers 26 notes that Korah's sons did not die. Generations later, their descendants became gatekeepers and singers at God's temple. A family that began with rebellion ended up leading worship. Some of the most honest and beautiful psalms in the Bible came from a family with a broken past. God loves to write new stories.

It may help to know that some of the most respected Christians in history struggled with deep sadness. Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher in the 1800s, battled depression for much of his life and spoke openly about it. He found comfort in psalms like 42 and 88. Struggling doesn't disqualify you from being used by God.

Sometimes it makes you more able to comfort others who are hurting.

KEY VERSE

Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise him, the saving help of my countenance, and my God.

Psalm 42:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think so many of the Psalms are laments?
2. What do you think about Psalm 88 ending in darkness? Is that comforting or troubling to you?
3. Have you ever felt like God was far away? What did you do?
4. What would it look like for you to talk back to your feelings the way the writer of Psalm 42 did?

TRY THIS *Write your own lament using the five-part pattern: cry, complaint, request, turn, and praise. Be completely honest. If writing it brings up feelings that scare you, share it with a trusted adult.*

CHAPTER 4

Guilt and Forgiveness

Psalms 32, 51, 103

Some of the most powerful psalms aren't about what other people did to the psalmist. They're about what the psalmist did wrong. The early church identified seven penitential psalms, psalms of repentance and confession. Two of the most famous were written by David, and they come from the worst season of his life.

You may remember the story from 2 Samuel. King David saw a woman named Bathsheba bathing, abused his power as king to take her, and then, when she became pregnant, arranged for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle. For about a year, David covered it up and acted like nothing had happened. Then the prophet Nathan confronted him, and David finally admitted, I have sinned against the LORD.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Story Behind Psalm 51**

The heading of Psalm 51 connects it directly to this story. It was written "when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Some scholars think headings like this were added later, but many believe it fits the psalm perfectly. Bathsheba is not the one confessing here. David is. In the 2 Samuel account, the guilt is placed squarely on David, the man with all the power. That's important. Psalm 51 isn't about a love affair. It's about a powerful man confessing that he abused his power and destroyed lives.

Psalm 32 may describe what that year of hiding felt like. It begins with a blessing. "Blessed is he whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD doesn't impute iniquity, in whose spirit there is no deceit."

Then David describes what happened when he tried to hide his sin. "When I kept silence, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sapped in the heat of summer."

Guilt that's buried doesn't stay buried. It eats away at you. David felt it in his body. He couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, and felt drained, like a plant wilting in the summer sun.

> **REAL TALK** **The Weight of a Secret**
>
> Have you ever carried a secret you were ashamed of? Maybe you lied about something, cheated, hurt someone, or did something you knew was wrong, and you've been hiding it ever since. Psalm 32 describes exactly what that feels like. Hidden guilt is exhausting. It affects your sleep, your mood, your relationships, and even your body. The good news is that you don't have to carry it forever. Confession, first to God and often to a trusted person, can lift a weight you didn't even realize was crushing you. And if your secret involves someone hurting you, that's not your guilt to carry. Please tell a trusted adult.

And then comes the turn. "I acknowledged my sin to you. I didn't hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Notice how fast it happens. David hides for a long time, groaning and wasting away. Then he confesses, and God forgives. No waiting period. No probation. Just forgiveness.

Later in the psalm, God Himself speaks. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will counsel you with my

eye on you." The forgiven person isn't just let off the hook. They're welcomed into a relationship where God guides them personally.

Psalm 51 is David's actual confession, and it's one of the most honest prayers ever written. It starts not with David's sin but with God's character. "Have mercy on me, God, according to your loving kindness. According to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin."

David doesn't make excuses. He doesn't blame Bathsheba, or Uriah, or the pressures of being king. "For I know my transgressions. My sin is constantly before me." He takes full responsibility.

Then he says something that sounds strange at first. "Against you, and you only, I have sinned." Of course David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah too. But he realizes that all sin is ultimately against God, because it breaks His law, rejects His goodness, and harms people He made and loves.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Three Words for Sin**
>
> Psalm 51 uses three different Hebrew words for sin in its first few verses. One means rebellion, deliberately crossing a line. One means iniquity, something twisted or bent out of shape. One means missing the mark, like an arrow that falls short of the target. David uses all three. He's not minimizing anything. And he uses three words for forgiveness too: blot out, like erasing a record; wash, like scrubbing a stained garment; and cleanse, like the ceremonial cleansing of something unclean. Whatever kind of sin it is, God has a way to deal with it.

"Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Hyssop was a small plant used in ancient Israel to sprinkle blood or water in cleansing ceremonies. David is asking God to do what no ritual could do: make him completely clean.

Then he asks for something deeper. “Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Don’t throw me from your presence, and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”

The word create is the same word used in Genesis 1, when God created the heavens and the earth. David knows he can’t fix himself. He needs God to make something brand new.

> **REAL TALK** **Guilt vs. Shame**
>
> Guilt says, I did something bad. Shame says, I am bad. Healthy guilt can lead you to confess and change. Shame tends to make you hide, give up, or hate yourself. Psalm 51 shows healthy guilt. David is honest about what he did, but he runs toward God, not away from Him, because he trusts God’s mercy. If you struggle with shame, hearing a voice in your head that says you’re worthless or unforgivable, that voice isn’t from God. God offers a clean heart, not a life sentence. And if shame is making you feel hopeless or like you want to hurt yourself, please talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988.

Near the end, David says what God really wants. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. O God, you will not despise a broken and contrite heart.” God isn’t looking for perfect people. He’s looking for honest ones.

Psalm 103 is what forgiveness sounds like afterward. It’s one of the most joyful psalms in the Bible, and it’s also by David. “Praise the LORD, my soul! All that is within me, praise his holy name! Praise the LORD, my soul, and don’t forget all his benefits, who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies.”

Notice that forgiveness is first on the list.

Then David describes God's character, echoing what God told Moses on Mount Sinai. "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness. He will not always accuse; neither will he stay angry forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us for our iniquities."

And then come some of the most beautiful images of forgiveness in Scripture. "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his loving kindness toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **East from West**
>
> Why does David say east from west instead of north from south? Some readers point out that if you travel north, eventually you reach the North Pole and start heading south. But if you travel east, you can keep going east forever. You never start heading west. Whether or not David had that in mind, the image is clear. God doesn't just move your sin a little way off. He removes it completely, beyond any distance you could measure.

Then David uses a family picture. "Like a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are made. He remembers that we are dust." God isn't surprised by your weakness. He made you. He knows how fragile you are. And His response is compassion.

These three psalms tell a story. Psalm 32 shows the misery of hiding sin and the relief of confessing it. Psalm 51 shows what honest confession sounds like. Psalm 103 shows the joy of being forgiven. Hiding, confessing, rejoicing. That's the path from guilt to freedom.

> **REAL TALK** **Confessing to a Person**
>
> The Bible encourages us to confess our sins to God, and sometimes to other people too. James wrote that believers should confess their sins to one another and pray for each other. Telling a trusted, mature Christian about

something you've done can be scary, but it often brings freedom. Secrets lose their power when they're brought into the light. Choose someone safe, who will keep your confidence, pray for you, and help you move forward, like a parent, pastor, or youth leader. And if what you've done has hurt someone else, part of repentance may be apologizing and trying to make it right.

Notice too that David didn't stop at feeling bad. Psalm 51 ends with David looking forward. He promises to teach other sinners God's ways, so that they will turn back to Him. Forgiveness didn't just clean up David's past. It gave him a new purpose. The same can be true for you. The things you've been forgiven for can become the very things that help you understand and help others who are struggling.

It's important to say something else about David's story. Psalm 51 shows that God forgave David. But forgiveness didn't erase the consequences. Uriah was still dead. Bathsheba had still been wronged. The child born from that union died, and David's family was torn apart by violence in the years that followed. God's forgiveness is complete, but it doesn't mean the damage of sin magically disappears. That's one reason it's so much better to turn from sin early. And it's a reason to take seriously the harm our choices can do to others, even when God forgives us.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Seven Penitential Psalms**

Early Christians grouped seven psalms together as the penitential psalms, psalms of repentance: Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. For centuries, believers prayed them especially during Lent, the weeks before Easter, as a way of honestly facing their sin and turning back to God. Psalm 130 is especially loved. It begins from the depths and asks who could stand if God kept a record of every sin, then answers that there is forgiveness with Him. If you ever need words for confession, these seven psalms are a great place to start.

KEY VERSE

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think hiding sin felt so heavy to David in Psalm 32?
2. What stands out to you about the way David confesses in Psalm 51?
3. What's the difference between guilt and shame? Which one do you struggle with more?
4. Which image of forgiveness in Psalm 103 means the most to you?

TRY THIS *If there's something you've been hiding, confess it to God honestly this week, using Psalm 51 as a guide. If it involves someone else, ask a trusted adult to help you think through how to make it right.*

CHAPTER 5

Anger, Envy, and Hard Psalms

Psalms 73, 137

Some psalms are uncomfortable. They express jealousy, bitterness, and even rage. They say things you might not expect to find in the Bible. But they're there for a reason, and they can teach us what to do with our darkest emotions.

Psalm 73 is written by Asaph, one of David's chief musicians, and it begins Book Three of the Psalms. It starts with a statement of faith, and then immediately admits a problem. "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone. My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Asaph looked around and saw people who didn't care about God living great lives. They were healthy, rich, and popular. They mocked God and got away with it. Everyone admired them.

And Asaph, who had been trying to live right, felt like a fool. "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence," he says. All day long he feels plagued and punished. What's the point of being good, he wondered, if bad people have it better?

REAL TALK **The Comparison Trap**

Asaph didn't have social media, but he would have understood it. Scroll for five minutes and you'll see people who seem to have it all: perfect bodies, perfect vacations, perfect relationships, and endless likes. Many of them don't seem to care about God at all. It's easy to start thinking, why bother? Psalm 73 is honest about that feeling. Envy is a slippery slope, and Asaph says his feet almost slipped. Remember that what you see online is a highlight reel, not real life. And comparison almost always leaves you feeling worse. If scrolling makes you feel jealous, inadequate, or down on yourself, it might be time to take a break.

Asaph says that when he tried to figure it out, it was too painful for him. And then everything changed. "When I tried to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I entered God's sanctuary, and considered their latter end."

He went to worship. And there, in God's presence, he saw things differently. He saw where the wicked were heading. Their success was like a dream that vanishes when you wake up. They were standing on slippery ground.

Then he saw himself clearly too. "For my soul was grieved. I was embittered in my heart. I was so senseless and ignorant. I was a brute beast before you." Envy had made him bitter and foolish.

But here's the most beautiful part. "Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You have held my right hand." Even while Asaph was bitter and confused, God never let go of him.

And then he says some of the most famous words in the Psalms. "Whom do I have in heaven? There is no one on earth whom I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

BACKGROUND CHECK **My Portion**

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, each tribe received a portion of land, except for the priestly tribe of Levi. God told the Levites that He Himself would be their portion. Asaph was a Levite. When he says God is his portion, he means that God is his inheritance, his share, his treasure. The wicked may have money and fame. Asaph has God, and that's better. It's the cure for envy: not getting what others have, but realizing what you already have in God.

Psalm 137 is much harder. It was written during the Babylonian exile, after Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586 BC. It begins with one of the saddest scenes in the Bible. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows in that land, we hung up our harps."

The Babylonians had burned the temple, killed thousands, and dragged the survivors hundreds of miles from home. And then their captors mocked them. "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" Sing us one of your happy temple songs.

"How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?"

The psalmist vows never to forget Jerusalem. And then the psalm takes a terrifying turn. He asks God to remember what the Edomites did when Jerusalem fell, cheering on its destruction. And he speaks to Babylon directly. "Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, he will be happy who repays you, as you have done to us. Happy shall he be, who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard Passage: The Angry Psalms**

Psalm 137:9 may be the most disturbing verse in the Psalms. How can it be in the Bible? Psalms like this are called imprecatory psalms, from a word meaning to call down a curse. Others include Psalms 35, 58, 69, and 109. Christians have understood them in several ways. First, they're honest. The

person writing Psalm 137 had probably watched Babylonian soldiers do exactly this to Israelite children. The psalm doesn't pretend that grief and rage don't exist. Second, notice what the psalmist does with his rage. He doesn't grab a weapon. He brings it to God. He hands his desire for justice over to the only One who can judge fairly. Paul later wrote, "Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath." The angry psalms are a way of doing that. Third, the Bible doesn't present this verse as a command or a model for how to treat our enemies. It records a real cry from real pain. Some Christians have read it as reflecting the Old Testament principle of just repayment, the idea that Babylon would suffer what it had done to others. Others have felt it reflects a human cry that God hears but doesn't endorse. Many land somewhere in between. Finally, Christians read these psalms alongside Jesus, who said, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you." On the cross, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." The angry psalms teach us to be honest about our rage. Jesus teaches us where it ultimately leads: to forgiveness, because God's justice was poured out on the cross.

REAL TALK **What to Do With Rage**

Maybe someone has hurt you so badly that you want them to suffer. That feeling is human. The angry psalms say you can bring even that to God. Tell Him exactly how you feel. Ask Him to bring justice. Then let Him handle it, instead of taking revenge yourself. That doesn't mean pretending what happened was okay, or that you have to stay in a situation where you're being hurt. If someone is abusing or threatening you, tell a trusted adult right away, or call 911 if you're in danger. Bringing your anger to God is often the first step toward the freedom of forgiveness, even if that takes a long time.

Psalm 73 and Psalm 137 show two very different kinds of hard emotions. One is envy, the slow poison of comparison. The other is rage, the explosion of grief and injustice. In both, the writer brings the feeling to God instead of acting on it. That's the lesson. Your hardest feelings belong in prayer.

It's worth pointing out that Asaph's turning point happened in a specific place: God's sanctuary. He didn't figure things out alone in his room, endlessly thinking about how unfair life was. He went to worship, among God's people. Sometimes the best thing you can do when you're stuck in envy, bitterness, or anger is to go where God's people gather, sing truth even when you don't feel it, and listen to God's word. Your feelings may not change instantly. But your perspective often does.

This is one reason church matters, even when it feels boring or you'd rather sleep in. Worship resets your vision. It reminds you that the world isn't just what you see on a screen. There's a bigger story, a better King, and a future that makes today's unfairness look different.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Asaph's Choir**

Asaph was one of the three chief musicians David appointed to lead worship in Jerusalem, along with Heman and Ethan, also called Jeduthun. According to 1 Chronicles, Asaph played cymbals, and his descendants continued to serve as temple singers for centuries. Some of the Asaph psalms may have been written by his descendants, members of what we might call the Asaph choir. Twelve psalms carry his name, Psalm 50 and Psalms 73 through 83. Many of them wrestle with hard questions, like why the wicked prosper and why God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed. Asaph was a worship leader who wasn't afraid to be honest.

Psalm 73 also teaches that envy usually comes from a narrow view. Asaph was looking at a small slice of life, the part where the wicked seemed to win. When he stepped back and saw the bigger picture, including eternity, everything looked different. The next time you're jealous of someone, remember that you're seeing only part of their story, and only part of yours.

REAL TALK **Singing in a Strange Land**

Psalm 137 asks, how can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? Followers of Jesus can sometimes feel like that too. Maybe you're the only Christian on your team, in your friend group, or in your family. Maybe people mock what you believe. The exiles eventually learned that God was with them even in Babylon. Daniel, Esther, and others lived faithfully far from home. You can too. You don't have to fit in perfectly to belong to God. And you can look for other believers who can sing with you.

KEY VERSE

My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:26 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. When have you been envious of someone else's life? What did it do to you?
2. What changed for Asaph when he "entered God's sanctuary"?
3. How do you feel about Psalm 137:9 being in the Bible? Which explanation makes the most sense to you?
4. What's the difference between bringing your anger to God and acting on it yourself?

TRY THIS *If you're angry at someone, write a completely honest prayer about it, then ask God to handle the justice. If envy is your struggle, take a three-day break from social media and notice how you feel.*

CHAPTER 6

Wonder and Being Known

Psalms 8, 19, 139

Some psalms make you want to go outside and look up.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with the same line. "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Then David, who spent many nights under the stars as a shepherd, looks up. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have ordained, what is man, that you think of him? What is the son of man, that you care for him?"

Notice the phrase the work of your fingers. To David, the whole night sky looked like something God made with His fingertips, the way a craftsman makes delicate embroidery.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **How Big Is the Universe?**
>
> David could see a few thousand stars with his naked eye. Today, astronomers estimate that our galaxy alone has hundreds of billions of stars, and that there may be trillions of galaxies. The light from some of them has been traveling for billions of years to reach us. If David felt small looking at the night sky, imagine how he would feel seeing images from a modern space telescope. And yet the more we learn about the size of the universe, the more astonishing David's question becomes. Why would the God who made all that care about us?

But the psalm doesn't end with people feeling insignificant. It goes the other way. "For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor." God made humans to rule over His creation: sheep, oxen, wild animals, birds, and fish. We're tiny, and yet we're crowned with glory. That's the paradox of being human.

Psalm 19 also starts with the sky. "The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork. Day after day they pour out speech, and night after night they display knowledge." The sky is always preaching a sermon, and it doesn't need words. "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."

Then David describes the sun, racing across the sky like a bridegroom coming out of his wedding tent, or a runner sprinting a race. Nothing is hidden from its heat.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Two Books**
>
> Psalm 19 has two halves. The first half is about creation. The second half is about God's word. Many Christians through history have talked about God's two books: the book of nature and the book of Scripture. Creation shows us that God is powerful, wise, and glorious. Scripture shows us who He is personally, what He has done, and how to know Him. Many scientists throughout history have been people of faith who saw studying nature as a way to discover more about the Creator. The two books don't compete. They work together.

Then David switches from the sky to Scripture. "The LORD's law is perfect, restoring the soul. The LORD's covenant is sure, making wise the simple. The LORD's precepts are right, rejoicing the heart. The LORD's commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes." God's word restores, makes wise, brings joy, and gives light. "They are

more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the extract of the honeycomb."

And David ends with a prayer that many people still pray before preaching or teaching. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, LORD, my rock, and my redeemer."

Psalm 139 takes wonder in a different direction. Instead of looking up at the stars, David looks inward, and realizes that God knows him completely.

"LORD, you have searched me, and you know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, LORD, you know it altogether."

God knows when you sit and when you stand. He knows your thoughts before you think them. He knows what you're going to say before you say it.

That could be terrifying. But to David, it's wonderful. "This knowledge is beyond me. It's lofty. I can't attain it."

> **REAL TALK** **Fully Known, Fully Loved**
>
> Most of us are afraid of being completely known. We think, if people really knew everything about me, my thoughts, my past, my secrets, they wouldn't like me. So we hide parts of ourselves. Psalm 139 says that God already knows everything about you, including the parts you hide. And He hasn't left. He's still there, holding you. That's what makes the gospel such good news. You don't have to perform for God. You're already fully known and fully loved.

Then David asks a question. "Where could I go from your Spirit? Or where could I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven,

you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there!" Whether he goes to the highest heaven or the deepest grave, God is there. If he flies on the wings of the dawn to the farthest ocean, "even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me." Even darkness can't hide him from God. "The darkness is like light to you."

Then David goes back to the very beginning of his life. "For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well."

> **REAL TALK** **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**
>
> You live in a world that constantly tells you you're not enough. Not pretty enough, thin enough, strong enough, smart enough, popular enough. Ads, filters, and comparison shout it every day. Psalm 139 says something different. God knit you together on purpose. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Your worth doesn't come from your looks, your grades, your followers, your abilities, or anyone's opinion of you. It comes from the One who made you and loves you. If you're struggling with how you see yourself, with eating, with self-harm, or with feeling worthless, please talk to a trusted adult or counselor. You can also call or text 988 any time. You are not a mistake.

"Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them." Before you were born, God knew you. He planned your days. "How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is their sum! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand."

Psalm 139 does have a hard section, verses 19 through 22, where David asks God to kill the wicked and says he hates God's enemies with perfect hatred. Like the other angry psalms, it reflects David's honest feelings and his desire to be on God's side. But then he

immediately turns the spotlight back on himself. “Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

That’s a brave prayer. David doesn’t just want God to deal with other people’s sin. He invites God to examine his own heart.

Put Psalms 8, 19, and 139 together, and they paint a remarkable picture. The God who flung the stars across space, who wrote His glory into the sky, who gave His perfect word, is the same God who knit you together and knows your every thought. He’s not a distant force. He’s not too busy running galaxies to notice you. The bigger you realize God is, the more amazing it becomes that He knows your name.

Wonder is good for the soul. In a world of screens, schedules, and constant noise, it’s easy to lose the ability to be amazed. Try to make room for it. Go for a walk without your phone. Look closely at a flower, a bug, or a sunset. Lie on the grass at night. Read about how a cell works, or how big the universe is. Then do what David did. Turn your wonder into praise.

BACKGROUND CHECK **C. S. Lewis on Psalm 19**

The writer C. S. Lewis, author of the Narnia books, called Psalm 19 the greatest poem in the Psalms and one of the greatest lyrics in the world. He was struck by how naturally it moves from the blazing sun in the sky to the bright, searching light of God’s law. Just as nothing is hidden from the sun’s heat, nothing is hidden from God’s word. Lewis also wrote a whole book called Reflections on the Psalms, in which he honestly wrestled with the hard psalms and the beautiful ones alike.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Psalm 8 and Jesus**

The book of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 and applies it to Jesus. It points out that humans were meant to rule over creation, but we don’t yet see everything

> under human control. The world is still broken. But Hebrews says we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, and now is crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death for everyone. In other words, Jesus is the true human, the One who fulfills what Psalm 8 says people were made to be.

It's also worth noticing that Psalm 139 doesn't say you're perfect. David ends by asking God to search out any wicked way in him. Being fearfully and wonderfully made doesn't mean you have nothing to work on. It means your value comes first, before your performance. God loves you as you are, and He loves you too much to leave you that way. Both things are true, and you need both.

KEY VERSE

I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well.

Psalm 139:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. When was the last time you looked up at the stars? How did it make you feel?
2. How do you feel about God knowing everything about you, even your thoughts?
3. What messages do you hear every day about your worth? How does Psalm 139 answer them?
4. Why do you think David ends Psalm 139 by asking God to search his own heart?

TRY THIS *Go outside on a clear night and spend ten minutes looking at the sky. Then read Psalm 8 or Psalm 139 out loud, and thank God for one specific thing about the way He made you.*

CHAPTER 7

God's Word and the Road Up

Psalms 119, 121, 126, 133

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It has 176 verses, more than some entire books. And it's all about one subject: God's word.

That might sound boring. A whole psalm about the Bible? But Psalm 119 is actually one of the most creative poems ever written. It's an acrostic. The Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters, and Psalm 119 has twenty-two sections of eight verses each. In the first section, every verse begins with the first letter, aleph. In the second, every verse begins with the second letter, beth. And so on, all the way through the alphabet. Many English Bibles, including the WEB, print the Hebrew letter names as headings for each section.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Why an Alphabet Poem?**
>
> Why would someone write a poem this way? Acrostics were a kind of artistic challenge, and they may also have helped people memorize long passages. But many readers think there's a deeper point. By working through every letter of the alphabet, the psalmist is saying that God's word covers everything, from A to Z. It's complete. Several other psalms, like Psalms 25, 34, 111, 112, and 145, are acrostics too, as is most of the book of Lamentations. They're almost impossible to reproduce in translation, so you have to look closely to see them.

The psalmist uses eight different words for God's word, and almost every verse includes one of them: law, testimonies, precepts,

statutes, commandments, ordinances, word, and promise. Each word highlights something different: God's instruction, His witness, His guidance, His decrees, His commands, His judgments, His speech, and His faithfulness.

But Psalm 119 isn't a dry list of rules. It's a love poem. "How I love your law! It is my meditation all day." The writer isn't just obeying God's word. He's delighting in it, longing for it, treasuring it.

Psalm 119 also has a verse written almost directly to teenagers. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." And two verses later: "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

> **REAL TALK** **Hiding God's Word in Your Heart**
>
> To hide something in your heart means to memorize it, think about it, and let it shape you from the inside. That's one of the best ways to fight temptation. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He answered every temptation by quoting Scripture from memory. When you're tempted to lie, cheat, gossip, look at something you shouldn't, or give up, a verse you've memorized can come to mind at exactly the right moment. Start small. Pick one verse a week. Write it on your phone's lock screen or a sticky note on your mirror. In a year, you'll have more than fifty verses hidden in your heart.

The writer also asks God to help him understand. "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of your law." Reading the Bible isn't just a matter of intelligence. You need God to open your eyes. That's a great prayer to pray every time you open your Bible.

And then comes one of the most famous verses in Psalm 119. "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path."

In the ancient world, people walking at night carried small oil lamps. These lamps didn't light up the whole road. They showed you just enough to see the next step. That's often how God's word

works. It doesn't always show you your whole future. It shows you the next step to take.

Psalm 119 ends in a surprising way. After 175 verses about loving God's word, the writer admits, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I don't forget your commandments." Even after all of that, he knows he still needs God to come find him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Songs of Ascents**

Psalms 120 through 134 each have the same heading: A Song of Ascents. Most scholars believe these were songs pilgrims sang as they traveled up to Jerusalem for the three great yearly festivals. Jerusalem was built on a hill, so from almost anywhere in Israel, you had to go up to get there. These fifteen short psalms may have been the road-trip songs of ancient Israel, sung by families walking together for days. They cover the whole journey, from leaving home in a foreign place to arriving at the temple and worshiping together.

Psalm 121 may have been sung at the start of the journey. "I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?" The hills around Jerusalem could be dangerous. Robbers hid there. Some hills had shrines to false gods. The pilgrim looks up at the hills and asks, where will my help come from? Then answers: "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

The rest of the psalm repeats one word over and over: keep. "He will not allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." God is like a guard who never falls asleep on duty. "The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in, from this time forward, and forever more."

REAL TALK **A Psalm for Leaving Home**

Many families pray Psalm 121 when someone leaves on a trip, starts at a new school, moves away, or heads off to college. If you're facing a transition, whether a move, a new school, a new job, or a family change, Psalm 121 is a great psalm to pray. You can't control everything that happens on the road ahead. But the God who made heaven and earth goes with you, and He never takes a nap.

Psalm 126 is a song about joy after a long sorrow. It probably remembers the return from exile in Babylon. "When the LORD brought back those who returned to Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." It was so good it felt unreal. Even the surrounding nations noticed. "The LORD has done great things for them."

But the second half of the psalm turns into a prayer, because not everything was restored yet. "Restore our fortunes again, LORD, like the streams in the Negev." The Negev is a desert in southern Israel where the streambeds are dry most of the year. But when the rains come, they suddenly flood with water. The psalmist asks God to do that again, to bring sudden life to dry places.

Then comes a promise. "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing, will certainly come again with joy, carrying his sheaves."

REAL TALK **Sowing in Tears**

Planting seed in the ancient world could be a heartbreaking act. In a famine, farmers had to take grain their families could have eaten and bury it in the ground, trusting that it would grow. Psalm 126 says that the tears you sow now can grow into joy later. Maybe you're in a season of sowing in tears, doing the right thing even though it hurts, waiting for something to change, praying without seeing answers. God sees. The harvest may take time. But the promise is that joy is coming.

Psalm 133 is one of the shortest psalms, and it's about something every family, team, and church needs. "See how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!" The pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem came from different tribes, towns, and backgrounds. When they arrived and worshiped together, it was a picture of God's people united.

The psalm uses two odd but beautiful images. Unity is like the precious oil poured on the head of Aaron, the high priest, running down his beard and onto his robes. And it's like the dew of Mount Hermon, the tallest mountain in the region, falling on the hills of Zion. Both images are about something good flowing down and spreading, refreshing everything it touches. That's what unity does. "For there the LORD gives the blessing, even life forever more."

REAL TALK **Getting Along**

Unity doesn't mean everyone is the same or agrees about everything. It means people who are different choosing to love each other, forgive each other, and work together. That's hard in families, friend groups, teams, and churches. It's especially hard in a world that loves to divide people into camps. Psalm 133 says unity is so precious that God commands His blessing there. Is there someone in your family, school, or church you need to make peace with? Taking the first step toward them might be one of the most powerful things you do.

REAL TALK **When the Bible Feels Boring**

Let's be honest. Sometimes reading the Bible feels boring, confusing, or like homework. That's normal, and it doesn't mean something is wrong with you. A few things can help. Try a readable translation. Read with a friend or a group. Use a Bible reading plan, or start with shorter books like the Gospels or the Psalms. Ask questions as you read: What does this say about God? About people? What should I do? Pray the psalmist's prayer from Psalm 119, asking God to open your eyes. And remember that love for God's word often grows

over time, like any relationship. The writer of Psalm 119 didn't love it on day one either.

The Songs of Ascents also remind us that following God is a journey, not a single moment. The pilgrims didn't teleport to Jerusalem. They walked, step by step, day after day, singing as they went. They got tired. Their feet hurt. Some days were harder than others. But they kept going, together, toward the place where God's presence was. That's a good picture of the Christian life. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to keep walking, with God's people, in the right direction.

Taken together, these four psalms give a picture of a healthy spiritual life. Psalm 119 roots you in God's word. Psalm 121 reminds you that God keeps you on the journey. Psalm 126 holds joy and sorrow together and keeps you hoping. Psalm 133 reminds you that you're not meant to travel alone. Word, trust, hope, and community: that's what carried pilgrims up the hill to Jerusalem, and it's what will carry you too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Shorter Is Not Lesser**

Right next to the longest psalm is one of the shortest. Psalm 117 has only two verses, calling every nation to praise God for His love and faithfulness. It's actually the middle chapter of many English Bibles. Psalm 119 shows that God's word is worth endless reflection. Psalm 117 shows that the heart of praise can be said in a single breath. You don't need long prayers to reach God. Sometimes a sentence is enough.

KEY VERSE

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the writer of Psalm 119 wrote it as an acrostic?
2. What's one verse you could hide in your heart this week? Why that one?
3. What transition or journey are you facing where you need Psalm 121's promise?
4. Where do you see division in your life? What would it take to bring unity there?

TRY THIS *Choose one verse from this chapter to memorize. Put it somewhere you'll see it every day, and practice saying it until you can say it without looking.*

CHAPTER 8

The King's Psalms

Psalms 22, 110, 118

Back in chapter 3, we read Psalm 22 as a lament. Now it's time to read it again, because Christians have long seen in it something astonishing.

Psalm 22 was written by David, about a thousand years before Jesus. It describes someone suffering terribly. He feels abandoned by God. He's surrounded by enemies who mock him and shake their heads. They say, he trusts in the LORD, let the LORD rescue him. His bones are out of joint. His strength is dried up. His tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth from thirst. "They have pierced my hands and feet." He can count his bones while people stare at him. And "They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing."

Now compare that to the crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospels tell us that Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" the first line of Psalm 22. The crowds mocked Him and shook their heads. The religious leaders said He trusted in God, so let God rescue Him. He was thirsty. His hands and feet were nailed to a cross. And the soldiers divided His clothes and cast lots for them. The Gospel of John says this happened "that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Crucifixion Before It Was Invented**

Crucifixion as a method of execution was developed by the Persians and later used widely by the Romans, centuries after David lived. In David's time, it was unknown in Israel. Yet Psalm 22 describes a death that sounds strikingly like crucifixion: pierced hands and feet, bones pulled out of joint, extreme thirst, public exposure. Scholars debate the exact meaning of the Hebrew word translated pierced, since ancient manuscripts differ slightly, and some Jewish translations render the line differently. But the Septuagint, a Greek translation made by Jewish scholars about two hundred years before Jesus, has they pierced. Either way, the overall picture of the psalm fits the crucifixion remarkably well.

But Psalm 22 doesn't end in death. The second half turns to praise. The sufferer is rescued, and he declares God's name to his brothers. Then the vision gets bigger and bigger. "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD. All the relatives of the nations shall worship before you." Even future generations will hear what God has done, people "that shall be born," because "he has done it."

Many Christians believe that when Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22 on the cross, He was pointing to the whole psalm, the way you might quote the first line of a song and everyone knows the rest. The psalm moves from abandonment to rescue to worldwide worship. That's the story of the cross and the resurrection.

REAL TALK **Jesus Knows How You Feel**

When Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was experiencing the worst pain anyone has ever known. He wasn't just in physical agony. He was bearing the weight of the world's sin, and for that moment, He felt cut off from His Father. That means there's no darkness you can go through that Jesus doesn't understand. If you've ever felt abandoned by God, He's been there. And He went there for you.

Psalm 110 is the psalm the New Testament quotes more than any other. It's short, only seven verses, and it begins with a mysterious line. "The LORD says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool for your feet.'"

Notice the two different words. The first, written in small capitals, is God's personal name. The second, Lord, means master. David, the king, is writing about someone he calls my Lord. But who could be David's master? David was the king. No one in Israel was above him except God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Jesus' Riddle**
>
> Jesus Himself asked this question. In Matthew 22, He asked the religious leaders whose son the Messiah would be. They answered, the son of David. Then Jesus quoted Psalm 110 and asked, "How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord?" If the Messiah is just David's descendant, why would David call him Lord? The leaders couldn't answer. Jesus was hinting that the Messiah would be more than just a human king. He would be David's son and David's Lord at the same time. Later, Peter quoted Psalm 110 in the first Christian sermon, saying that Jesus had been raised and exalted to God's right hand.

Psalm 110 also says something unusual about this King. "The LORD has sworn, and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.'" In Israel, kings and priests came from different tribes. Kings came from Judah. Priests came from Levi. No one could be both. But Melchizedek, a mysterious figure in Genesis 14, was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High, long before Levi was born. The book of Hebrews spends several chapters explaining how Jesus is this kind of priest-king: one who rules as King and who also offers Himself as the sacrifice for His people.

Psalm 118 is a song of thanksgiving, and it was one of the psalms Jewish families sang at Passover. It may well have been part of the

hymn Jesus sang with His disciples on the night He was betrayed. It begins and ends with a refrain: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever."

The psalmist describes being surrounded by enemies on every side and about to fall. But God helped him. "The LORD is on my side. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" And he declares, "I will not die, but live, and declare the LORD's works."

Then comes the line that the New Testament quotes again and again. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Rejected Stone**
>
> Imagine builders examining stones for a building and tossing one aside as useless. Later, it turns out to be the most important stone of all, the cornerstone that holds the whole building together. Jesus quoted this verse about Himself, warning the religious leaders that they were rejecting the very One God had chosen. Peter quoted it too, and so did Paul. The leaders rejected Jesus and had Him crucified. But God raised Him from the dead and made Him the foundation of a new people.

Psalm 118 also includes the words the crowds shouted when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the week before His death. "Blessed is he who comes in the LORD's name!" They also shouted Hosanna, which means save us now, a word that comes from verse 25. And right after the rejected stone, the psalm says, "This is the day that the LORD has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it!" Christians often sing that verse on Easter Sunday.

These three psalms trace the whole story of Jesus: His suffering on the cross in Psalm 22, His rejection and resurrection in Psalm 118, and His exaltation as King and Priest in Psalm 110. The King the Psalms were waiting for has come.

These psalms also show something important about how to read the Old Testament. The first readers of Psalms 22, 110, and 118 probably didn't fully understand how they would be fulfilled. David wrote out of his own experience as a suffering and victorious king. But the words reached far beyond David. After the resurrection, Jesus opened His disciples' minds to understand how all the Scriptures, including the Psalms, pointed to Him. Reading the Psalms is a bit like watching a movie a second time. Once you know the ending, you notice clues you missed the first time.

That doesn't mean every verse in every psalm is a direct prediction of Jesus. Most psalms are first of all real prayers of real people. But the whole collection is part of a bigger story that leads to Him. As you read, try asking two questions: What did this mean for the original writer? And how does it point to Jesus?

> **REAL TALK** **Jesus Prayed These Too**
>
> It's amazing to think that Jesus grew up singing these psalms. As a boy in Nazareth, He would have learned them by heart. As a twelve-year-old, traveling to Jerusalem for Passover with His family, He probably sang the Songs of Ascents along the road. As an adult, He quoted them in His teaching and prayed them in His suffering. When you pray the Psalms, you're praying the same words Jesus prayed. You're joining His prayers.

For Christians, this is the heart of why the Psalms matter so much. They're not just a collection of nice religious poems. They are part of the story that leads to Jesus. The shepherd psalms point to the Good Shepherd. The lament psalms find their deepest voice in His cry from the cross. The penitential psalms find their answer in His forgiveness. The royal psalms find their King in Him. When you read the Psalms with Jesus in mind, they come alive in a whole new way.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Was Melchizedek?**

Melchizedek appears only briefly in Genesis 14. After Abraham rescued his nephew Lot, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, which may be an early name for Jerusalem, came out to meet him with bread and wine and blessed him. Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. Then Melchizedek disappears from the story. His name means king of righteousness, and Salem means peace. Hebrews sees him as a preview of Jesus: a king of righteousness and peace who is also a priest, whose priesthood doesn't depend on belonging to the tribe of Levi. Psalm 110 is what made the connection.

It's worth noticing that the apostles used these psalms in their very first sermons. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached from Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 to explain the resurrection. When he was arrested and questioned by the religious leaders, he quoted Psalm 118 about the rejected stone. The first Christians didn't think the Psalms were old, dusty poems. They thought the Psalms explained what God had just done in Jesus.

KEY VERSE

The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 118:22 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Which details of Psalm 22 match the crucifixion of Jesus most closely?
2. Why do you think Jesus quoted Psalm 22 on the cross?
3. What's the point of Jesus' riddle about Psalm 110?
4. Have you ever felt rejected? How does it help to know that Jesus was the rejected stone?

TRY THIS *Read Psalm 22 and then Matthew 27 side by side. Make a list of every connection you can find, and talk about it with a friend or family member.*

CHAPTER 9

The Hallelujah Finale

Psalms 100, 145–150

If the Psalms were a concert, the last few songs would be the big finish, with every instrument playing and the whole crowd on its feet.

But first, a short song that's been sung in worship for thousands of years. Psalm 100 is titled simply "A Psalm of thanksgiving." It's only five verses long, and it's full of action. "Shout for joy to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness. Come before his presence with singing."

Then it tells us why. "Know that the LORD, he is God. It is he who has made us, and we are his. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." We belong to Him. He made us. He shepherds us.

"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." This was probably sung by worshipers as they walked through the temple gates. Thanksgiving is how you come in.

And the final verse gives three reasons to praise Him that never change. "For the LORD is good. His loving kindness endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations."

> **REAL TALK** **Thankful Even When You Don't Feel Like It**
>
> Some days, praise comes naturally. Other days, it feels impossible. Psalm 100 gives you reasons to praise God that don't depend on how your day is going.

> God is good. His love lasts forever. His faithfulness doesn't run out. Those things are true on your worst days too. Researchers have found that people who regularly practice gratitude tend to sleep better, feel less stressed, and have more hope. You don't have to fake happiness. But you can choose to name what's good, even in hard times.

Psalm 145 is the last psalm with David's name on it, and it's another acrostic, working through the Hebrew alphabet. It's a song of praise for God's greatness and goodness. "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised! His greatness is unsearchable." You could spend your whole life exploring how great God is and never reach the end.

Then it repeats the description of God we've seen in several psalms already, the one God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. "The LORD is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great loving kindness. The LORD is good to all. His tender mercies are over all his works."

And it includes a promise for anyone who feels far from God. "The LORD is near to all those who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." You don't have to find the perfect words. You just have to call on Him honestly.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **One Generation to Another**
>
> Psalm 145 says that one generation will praise God's works to another. Faith has always been passed down this way, from parents to children, from older believers to younger ones. The Psalms themselves are a gift from generations past. For three thousand years, people have sung these words in temples, synagogues, churches, monasteries, prisons, hospitals, and bedrooms. When you pray a psalm, you're joining a song that started long before you were born and will continue long after. And someday, you might be the one passing it on.

Then comes the grand finale. Psalms 146 through 150 all begin and end with the same Hebrew word: hallelujah. It combines two words,

hallelu, meaning praise, and Yah, a short form of God's name. In the WEB, it's translated "Praise the LORD!"

Psalm 146 is a warning and a promise. "Don't put your trust in princes, in a son of man in whom there is no help." Human leaders, no matter how powerful, will die, and their plans die with them. "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD, his God." Then the psalm describes what kind of God He is. He made heaven and earth. He keeps His promises forever. He brings justice for the oppressed and food for the hungry. He frees prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down, protects foreigners, and cares for orphans and widows.

> **REAL TALK** **Praise That Gets Its Hands Dirty**
>
> Psalm 146 shows that praising God isn't just about singing. It's about understanding what God cares about. He cares about the oppressed, the hungry, prisoners, the disabled, immigrants, orphans, and widows. If those are the people God cares about, those should be the people His followers care about too. Real worship includes both singing and serving. You might volunteer at a food bank, sit with a lonely kid at lunch, visit someone in a nursing home, or welcome a new student who doesn't speak English well. That's praise too.

Psalm 147 celebrates God's power and His tenderness side by side. "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars. He calls them all by their names." The same God who names every star in the universe bandages broken hearts. He's not too big to care about you, and He's not too small to handle your problems.

Psalm 148 calls on everything in creation to praise God. It starts in the heavens, with angels, armies of heaven, the sun, the moon, and the shining stars. Then it moves down to the earth: sea creatures,

the deep oceans, fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and livestock, creeping things and flying birds. Then kings and nations, rulers and judges, "both young men and maidens, old men and children." Everything and everyone, from galaxies to grandparents to teenagers, is invited to praise God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Creation's Choir**

Saint Francis of Assisi, who lived in the 1200s, loved Psalm 148. He wrote a famous song inspired by it, called the Canticle of the Sun, in which he praised God for Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind, and Sister Water. It later became the hymn All Creatures of Our God and King, still sung in many churches today. The idea that all of creation praises God, simply by being what God made it to be, appears throughout the Bible.

Psalm 149 calls God's people to "Sing to the LORD a new song." It invites dancing, tambourines, and harps. It celebrates that God takes pleasure in His people. The LORD delights in you.

And then comes Psalm 150, the final psalm. It's six verses of pure praise. Every line begins with praise. Where should we praise God? In His sanctuary and in His mighty heavens. Why? For His mighty acts and His surpassing greatness. How? With the trumpet, the harp and lyre, the tambourine and dancing, stringed instruments and flute, and loud, crashing cymbals.

REAL TALK **Loud Cymbals Allowed**

Psalm 150 isn't quiet. It calls for trumpets, drums, dancing, and loud cymbals. Some people think worship has to be solemn and silent. Sometimes it is, and that's good. But the Bible also celebrates loud, joyful, energetic praise. Whatever your personality, there's a way for you to praise God. You might sing, play an instrument, dance, write, paint, run, or shout. You might whisper a prayer in the quiet of your room. God made you, and He delights in your praise, whatever it sounds like.

And then, the very last verse of the very last psalm. "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!"

Think about where the Psalms began. Psalm 1 described the blessed person delighting in God's word. Psalm 2 announced God's King. Then came 148 psalms full of every human emotion: fear, grief, guilt, anger, envy, wonder, longing, joy. The Psalms went down into the valley of the shadow of death and into the darkness of Psalm 88. They wept by the rivers of Babylon. But they don't end there. They end with everything that has breath praising God.

That's the direction of the whole Bible, and the direction of every life that belongs to God. The story doesn't end in darkness. It ends in praise.

> **REAL TALK** **Make the Psalms Your Own**
>
> You don't have to wait until you're an expert to start praying the Psalms. Here are a few ideas. Read one psalm a day, and you'll finish all 150 in about five months. Use the When You Feel quick-finder at the front of this book when you're going through something specific. Read a psalm out loud, slowly, and stop at any line that stands out to you. Put your own name or situation into it. Write your own psalm, following the pattern of a lament or a praise psalm. Find songs based on the Psalms and listen to them on the way to school. Over time, the words of the Psalms will become your words.

The Psalms are a school of prayer. They teach you to talk to God about everything. Over a lifetime of reading them, you'll find that the Psalms have a word for almost every season. When you're thrilled, there's a psalm for that. When you're crushed, there's a psalm for that. When you've blown it, when you're scared, when you're angry, when you're amazed, there's a psalm for that too. God gave His people a songbook big enough for the whole of human life, and then He promised to listen to every song.

As you finish this book, remember that the Psalms aren't just something to read once and put away. They're meant to be lived with, over a whole lifetime. The psalm that means nothing to you now might be the one that carries you through a hard year in the future. The psalm that seems too happy today might be exactly what you need to sing when something wonderful happens. Keep reading them. Keep praying them. Let them teach you how to talk to God about everything.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Hallelujah Around the World**
>
> The word hallelujah is one of the few Hebrew words that has been carried into almost every language on earth. Christians in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and everywhere else sing it in worship, often without translating it. It also appears in the New Testament, in Revelation 19, where a great multitude in heaven shouts hallelujah as they celebrate God's victory. The Psalms end with hallelujah, and so does the story of the whole Bible. One day, people from every nation, tribe, and language will sing it together.

Finally, notice who gets the last word in the Psalms. Not the enemies, not the doubters, not the darkness. The last word belongs to praise. That doesn't mean we skip over lament to get there. The road to Psalm 150 runs straight through Psalms 22, 88, and 137. But it does mean we know where the road ends. Every tear in the Psalms is headed toward a hallelujah.

KEY VERSE

The LORD is near to all those who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Psalm 145:18 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Which reason to praise God in Psalm 100 means the most to you today?
2. What does Psalm 146 say God cares about? How could you care about those things too?
3. How does it feel to know that the God who names the stars also heals broken hearts?
4. Why do you think the Psalms end with praise rather than lament?

TRY THIS *Write your own Psalm 150. List at least ten reasons to praise God and ten ways you could praise Him. Then read it out loud, as loudly as you dare.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Jesus grew up praying the Psalms. They were His prayer book. He quoted them when He taught, and He sang with His disciples on the night He was betrayed. And when He hung on the cross, He prayed them. He cried out the opening line of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And with His last breath, He prayed from Psalm 31: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” When Jesus had no words left, the Psalms gave Him words.

Jewish readers treasure the Psalms as the heart of their worship and prayer, and pray them daily. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, came to believe that the Psalms are ultimately about Jesus. After His resurrection, Jesus told His disciples that “all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms concerning me must be fulfilled.” He is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23: “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” He is the truly righteous Man of Psalm 1, the only one who ever perfectly delighted in God’s law. He is the suffering One of Psalm 22, whose hands and feet were pierced. He is the rejected stone of Psalm 118 who became the cornerstone. And He is the risen King of Psalms 2 and 110, now seated at God’s right hand. The Psalms pray toward Him, and through Him, we can pray them too.

Here’s what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He hears every prayer and every song, even the ones that come out as tears.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

David confessed that his sin was constantly before him. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the King the Psalms were waiting for.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. Jesus prayed Psalm 22 on the cross, suffering in our place.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Psalm 130 asks who could stand if God kept a record of sins. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Take refuge in Him.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. The Psalms show that God welcomes honest ones. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, You know me better than I know myself. You've searched me and You know my heart. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Have mercy on me, according to Your loving kindness. Thank You that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. Create in me a clean heart. Be my shepherd, my refuge, and my King. Teach me to bring You every feeling, and to praise You all my life. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read one psalm a day. Start with Psalms 1, 23, 51, 139, and 150, then keep going.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Sing. The Psalms were meant to be sung. Find worship music based on the Psalms and sing along, even badly.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. The Psalms are full of doubts, complaints, and hard questions, and God put them in His book anyway. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if the Psalms are right, there is a God who hears every cry and every song, and He's listening to yours.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

Psalm 150:6 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The King Who Gives Wisdom

Proverbs, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

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THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Gives Wisdom: The Book of Proverbs, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Proverbs might be the most teen-focused book in the Bible. Much of it was written as advice from a parent to a young person about to step out into the world. Over and over it says, my son, listen. It’s about friends, words, money, work, anger, dating, temptation, and who you’re becoming.

Proverbs doesn’t read like a story. It reads more like a collection of sayings, short, punchy, memorable lines, the ancient version of the quotes people post online, except these have lasted three thousand years. Some are funny. Some are blunt. Some will make you think for days.

So why read it? Because you’re making decisions right now that will shape the rest of your life. Proverbs is a crash course in wisdom, the skill of living well in God’s world. And unlike a lot of advice you’ll get, it comes from the One who designed life in the first place.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

Proverbs has 31 chapters, and most of chapters 10 through 29 are individual sayings that jump from topic to topic. So instead of going chapter by chapter, this book is organized by theme in seven chapters: the fear of the LORD and trust, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, words and reputation, friends, drama, and anger, work,

money, and integrity, heart, boundaries, and family, and finally the words of Agur and King Lemuel's mother.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who wrote Proverbs, how it's organized, and one crucial thing about how to read it: proverbs are principles, not promises. Read that part first. It will save you a lot of confusion.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to understand the verses about the rod of discipline, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Proverbs often, but explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twentieth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Proverbs was written, in large part, as instruction from parents to young people, so it's a natural fit for this age. This book is organized by theme rather than chapter. It opens with a crucial framing: proverbs are general principles about how life usually works, not guaranteed promises. They're meant to be read alongside Job and Ecclesiastes, which honestly address the exceptions. This helps readers avoid both disillusionment and the false guilt that can come from reading verses like 22:6 as ironclad guarantees.

Real Talk boxes apply Proverbs to friendships, peer pressure, gossip, texting and social media, anger, work, money, generosity, purity, and family life. A fair hard-passage box addresses the verses about the rod of discipline, presenting how Christians have understood them while clearly distinguishing loving, biblical discipline from abuse. A safety box points any reader who is being hurt at home to a trusted adult, Childhelp, 911, and 988.

The final chapter presents the Proverbs 31 woman as a celebration of strength, competence, and character rather than a checklist to measure up to. The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament presents Jesus as the wisdom of God and one greater than Solomon, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure Proverbs in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will begin with the fear of the LORD, and grow into a wise, kind, honest, and courageous person.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

Proverbs is wisdom literature, like Job and Ecclesiastes. In the Bible, wisdom isn't just being smart. It's the skill of living well: knowing how to make good choices, treat people rightly, handle money, control your temper, and honor God in everyday life. The Hebrew word for wisdom was even used for the skill of craftsmen and artists. Wisdom is the art of living.

Who Wrote It?

The book opens with the words, the proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel. First Kings says Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs, and people came from all over the world to hear his wisdom. But Proverbs is a collection, and it names other contributors too: a group called the wise, the men of King Hezekiah who copied out more of Solomon's proverbs about two hundred years later, a man named Agur, and King Lemuel, who passes on what his mother taught him. Some sayings in chapters 22 through 24 closely resemble an Egyptian wisdom text called the Instruction of Amenemope, which suggests Israel's sages knew and learned from the wisdom of neighboring cultures, while placing everything under the fear of the LORD.

How It's Organized

Chapters 1 through 9 are longer speeches, mostly a parent speaking to a son, along with poems in which Wisdom and Folly are pictured

as two women calling out to young people. Chapters 10 through 29 are mostly short, two-line sayings, often arranged with little obvious order. Chapters 30 and 31 contain the words of Agur and of King Lemuel's mother, ending with the famous poem about a woman of strength. Many proverbs use parallelism, like the Psalms: the second line repeats, contrasts, or completes the first.

Principles, Not Promises

This is the most important thing to understand about Proverbs. A proverb is a short saying about how life generally works. It isn't a guarantee. Think of the saying, the early bird gets the worm. It's usually true, but not always. Proverbs works the same way. When it says hard work leads to wealth, or that training up a child in the right way means they won't depart from it (22:6), it's describing a reliable pattern in God's world, not a vending machine where you put in good behavior and always get the promised result. Sometimes diligent people stay poor. Sometimes children raised by faithful parents walk away from God, and it isn't the parents' fault. That's why God also gave us Job, about a righteous man who suffered, and Ecclesiastes, which admits that the race is not always to the swift. Read Proverbs as wise principles, read Job and Ecclesiastes as honest reminders of the exceptions, and trust God with what you don't understand. Proverbs even contains sayings that seem to contradict each other, like 26:4 and 26:5, as if to say: wisdom isn't about applying rules mechanically. It's about knowing which principle fits the moment.

Who Is It For?

Proverbs says it was written to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young. The word simple in

Proverbs doesn't mean unintelligent. It means inexperienced, open, and easily influenced, someone who hasn't yet decided which way to go. That describes most teenagers, and honestly, a lot of adults too. Proverbs also says the wise will listen and grow wiser still. No one outgrows it.

How to Read a Proverb

Proverbs are short on purpose. They're designed to be memorable, like a good quote or a catchy line from a song. But short sayings can be easy to misread. A few tips help. First, read slowly and notice the two halves of each line. Often the second half contrasts with the first, and the contrast is the point. Second, ask what kind of person the proverb is describing: the wise, the fool, the simple, the sluggard, the scoffer, or the righteous. Third, think of a real situation where the proverb would apply, and one where it might not. Fourth, read it alongside the rest of the Bible. And fifth, try living it for a week. Proverbs was written to be practiced, not just studied.

The Map

Chapter 1: The fear of the LORD and trust.

Chapter 2: Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly.

Chapter 3: Words and reputation.

Chapter 4: Friends, drama, and anger.

Chapter 5: Work, money, and integrity.

Chapter 6: Heart, boundaries, and family.

Chapter 7: Agur and King Lemuel's mother.

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Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

Where Wisdom Begins

Proverbs 1:1–7; 2; 3:1–12

Proverbs opens like a mission statement. It tells you exactly why it was written: "to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young man."

In other words, this book was written for you. Then, before the first lesson, comes the foundation for everything else. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction."

That single verse is the thesis of the whole book. It appears, in slightly different forms, again and again in Proverbs, at the beginning, the middle, and the end. If you remember nothing else from Proverbs, remember this: wisdom starts with God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **What Does Fear Mean?**
>
> When Proverbs talks about the fear of the LORD, it doesn't mean being terrified of God, like being scared of a monster under your bed or a bully at school. The Hebrew word can mean fear, but it also means awe, deep respect, and reverence. Think about how you'd feel standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or watching a massive thunderstorm roll in, or meeting someone you deeply admire. You'd feel small, amazed, and respectful all at once. That's closer to what the fear of the LORD means. It's taking God seriously:

recognizing that He is God and you are not, that He is holy and good, and that His opinion matters more than anyone else's. Proverbs also says the fear of the LORD is to hate evil, so it's tied to how you live. And it's not a cold or distant fear. People who fear God in this way also trust Him, love Him, and feel safe with Him.

Why is the fear of the LORD the beginning of knowledge? Because if you get God wrong, you'll get everything else wrong too. If you think you're the center of the universe, every decision will revolve around you. If you think there's no God, you'll have no ultimate reason for right and wrong. But if you start with God, as Creator, King, and Father, then everything else starts to make sense. You can see the world as it really is.

The verse also introduces a character who will show up throughout Proverbs: the fool. In Proverbs, a fool isn't someone with a low IQ. Lots of very smart people are fools in the Proverbs sense. A fool is someone who refuses to listen, who thinks he already knows it all, and who despises correction. That might sound familiar. Remember the saying at the front of this book: hire a teenager while they still know it all. Proverbs is basically one long invitation to stop being a know-it-all and start being wise.

REAL TALK **Know-It-All Syndrome**

It's normal, when you're a teenager, to feel like adults don't understand you, and sometimes they don't. It's also normal to start questioning what you've been taught. That's part of growing up, and it can be healthy. But there's a difference between asking questions and refusing to listen to anyone. Proverbs says the fool is right in his own eyes, but the wise person listens to advice. The smartest people you know are probably the ones who are most willing to learn from others. You don't have to agree with everything adults say. But being willing to listen is the first step toward wisdom.

Then the first speech in Proverbs begins with a parent speaking to a child. "My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching." Notice that both parents are teachers here. In ancient Israel, mothers had a crucial role in passing on wisdom, and Proverbs ends with a mother's wisdom too.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why My Son?**

Proverbs often addresses "my son," because it was written in a culture where fathers usually trained sons for public life. But its wisdom is for everyone. Wisdom herself is pictured as a woman, the last chapter is a mother's teaching, and the book closes by celebrating a wise woman. When you read my son, you can hear my child. These words are for daughters just as much as for sons.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Four Kinds of People**

Proverbs describes several kinds of people, and it helps to know them. The simple are inexperienced and easily influenced, still deciding which way to go. The fool has decided against wisdom and refuses correction. The scoffer, or mocker, goes further and openly ridicules what's good. And the wise person fears the LORD, listens, and keeps learning. Proverbs is mostly written to the simple, hoping to win them over to wisdom before they settle into foolishness. If you feel like you're still figuring things out, that's exactly who this book is for.

Chapter 2 tells you how to find wisdom. It's not passive. You have to go looking for it. "My son, if you will receive my words, and store up my commandments within you, so as to turn your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."

Think about how hard people work to find treasure: digging, searching, refusing to give up. That's how Proverbs says to look for wisdom. And then it gives a surprising twist. "For the LORD gives wisdom." You search for it, and in the end, God gives it to you as a gift.

Then comes one of the most famous passages in the Bible, in chapter 3. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

> **REAL TALK** **Trust With All Your Heart**
>
> Trusting God with all your heart means relying on Him completely, not just in church, but in every part of life: your friendships, your future, your fears, your decisions. Don't lean on your own understanding doesn't mean don't think. God gave you a brain, and He wants you to use it. It means don't make your own understanding the final authority. Your perspective is limited. You can't see the future. You don't know everything. So when your feelings or reasoning pull one way and God's word pulls another, trust Him. To acknowledge Him in all your ways means bringing Him into every decision. Pray about your choices. Ask what honors Him. And when it says He will make your paths straight, that doesn't mean your life will be easy or that you'll always know what's ahead. It means God will guide you and get you where you need to go.

The rest of the passage builds on that trust. "Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear the LORD, and depart from evil." Honor the LORD with your money, giving Him the first and best, not the leftovers. And when God corrects you, don't resent it. "For whom the LORD loves, he corrects, even as a father reproves the son in whom he delights." God's correction is a sign of His love, not His rejection.

Chapter 3 also includes a simple command about kindness. "Don't let kindness and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck.

Write them on the tablet of your heart." Kindness and truth go together. Truth without kindness can be cruel. Kindness without truth can be fake. Wisdom holds them together.

It's worth noticing how often Proverbs promises good things to those who follow wisdom: long life, peace, favor, health, full barns. Remember what we said at the start. These are principles, not guarantees. They describe the way God designed life to work, and they're generally true. But in a broken world, there are exceptions. That's why trusting God matters so much. You don't follow wisdom because it's a formula for getting what you want. You follow it because you trust the One who gives it.

Chapter 3 also contains a verse about doing good. "Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it." Wisdom isn't only about avoiding bad things. It's about doing good when you have the chance. If you can help someone today, don't put it off until tomorrow.

> **REAL TALK** **Wisdom Isn't Just for Smart People**
>
> Some teenagers assume wisdom is for straight-A students or people who always know the right thing to say. Proverbs disagrees. It says wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD, not with your test scores. A student who struggles in school can be deeply wise, and a brilliant student can be a complete fool. Wisdom shows up in how you treat people, how you handle temptation, how you spend your time, and whether you're willing to learn. Anyone can grow in it. All it takes is a humble heart and a willingness to listen to God.

KEY VERSE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5–6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between being afraid of God and fearing God in the way Proverbs describes?
2. Why do you think wisdom has to begin with God?
3. In what area of your life is it hardest to trust God instead of your own understanding?
4. Why is it important to remember that proverbs are principles, not promises?

TRY THIS *Pick one decision you're facing this week, big or small. Before you decide, pray about it, ask a wise adult for advice, and think about what would honor God.*

CHAPTER 2

Two Voices Calling

Proverbs 1–9

Imagine you're walking through a city, and two voices are calling out to you from opposite sides of the street. Both are inviting you into their house. Both promise a good time. One will lead you to life. The other will lead you to death. Which one will you follow?

That's the picture Proverbs 1 through 9 paints. Two women, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly, are calling out to young people, each trying to win them over. They're personifications, ways of picturing wisdom and foolishness as people. But the choice they represent is very real.

Before we meet them, though, Proverbs warns about a different kind of invitation. "My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent." The parent describes a gang of young men inviting a friend to join them. Come with us, they say. Let's ambush someone, take what they have, and split the loot. Throw in your lot with us. We'll all share one purse.

> REAL TALK **Peer Pressure**
>
> The gang in Proverbs 1 doesn't say, come do something evil. They say, come be one of us. Their real pitch is belonging. That's how peer pressure usually works. It's rarely someone forcing you to do something. It's the desire to fit in, to be included, to not be left out. Proverbs says that the gang's plan will eventually destroy them. The trap they set for others will catch them instead.

> Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is say no and walk away, even if it means being alone for a while. And remember, real friends won't ask you to become someone you're not. If you're being pressured into something dangerous, illegal, or harmful, talk to a trusted adult.

Then Wisdom appears for the first time. "Wisdom calls aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the public squares." She isn't hiding in a library or a church. She's out in the busy places of life, where people make deals and decisions. And she's frustrated. "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? How long will mockers delight themselves in mockery, and fools hate knowledge?"

She warns that if people ignore her, they'll eventually face the consequences of their own choices, and when disaster comes, it will be too late. But she ends with a promise. "But whoever listens to me will dwell securely, and will be at ease, without fear of harm."

Chapters 5 through 7 return again and again to one specific temptation: sexual sin. The parent warns the son about the adulteress, a woman who is unfaithful to her husband. "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil, but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword."

In chapter 7, the parent tells a story. He's looking out his window at dusk and sees a young man, "void of understanding," walking down the street toward the house of a seductive woman. It's getting dark. She comes out to meet him, flatters him, and invites him in. Her husband is away, she says. No one will know. "With persuasive words, she led him astray." And he follows her "as an ox goes to the slaughter," not realizing it will cost him his life.

REAL TALK **Walking Toward Temptation**

Notice something about the young man in Proverbs 7. He didn't just stumble into trouble. He walked toward it. He went down her street, near her corner, at night. He put himself in a place where saying no would be almost impossible. That's a pattern with a lot of temptation. It's much easier to avoid the street than to resist once you're at the door. This applies to sexual temptation, including pornography and pressure in dating relationships, but also to other things: going to the party where you know there will be drugs, opening the app you know is bad for you, being alone with someone you know you shouldn't be. Wisdom means making decisions ahead of time about where you won't go. And if you've already made mistakes, God's grace is bigger than your failures. If someone has pressured or forced you into something sexual, that is not your fault. Please tell a trusted adult, or call RAINN at 1-800-656-4673.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why So Much About Sex?**

Proverbs 1 through 9 spends a lot of time on sexual temptation. Why? Partly because the original audience was young men about to enter adulthood, for whom this was a huge temptation. But it's also because the Bible sees sexuality as powerful and precious. God designed sex as a good gift to be enjoyed within the lifelong covenant of marriage. Chapter 5 actually celebrates married love, telling a husband to rejoice in his wife. The warnings aren't because sex is bad. They're because it's so good that misusing it can do deep damage to people, families, and communities.

It's important to say clearly that Proverbs warns about the adulteress because the original readers were young men, not because women are the problem. The same warnings apply in every direction. Anyone, male or female, can use flattery, pressure, or manipulation to lead someone into something harmful. And anyone can be the one walking down the wrong street. Wisdom is for everyone.

Then comes one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. In chapter 8, Wisdom speaks again, and this time she tells her own story. "Doesn't wisdom cry out? Doesn't understanding raise her voice?" She says her words are true and right, and that she's more valuable than silver, gold, or jewels. "For wisdom is better than rubies. All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it."

Then she goes all the way back to the beginning of the world. "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth existed." Before the oceans, mountains, or fields existed, Wisdom was there. "When he established the heavens, I was there." When God set boundaries for the sea and marked out the foundations of the earth, "then I was the craftsman by his side. I was a delight day by day, always rejoicing before him, rejoicing in his whole world. My delight was with the sons of men."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Wisdom at Creation**

Proverbs 8 pictures Wisdom as being with God when He created the world, like a master builder working beside Him, and like a child playing joyfully in the new creation. It's a poetic way of saying that God built the world wisely. The universe has order, patterns, and design, which is why wise living works: it goes with the grain of how God made things. Living foolishly is like trying to build a house while ignoring the laws of physics. Early Christians saw something more in this passage. The New Testament describes Jesus, the Word of God, as being with God in the beginning, the One through whom "All things were made." Christians have debated how closely to connect Lady Wisdom with Jesus. Some see Proverbs 8 as a direct picture of Christ. Others see it as a poetic personification that Jesus fulfills in a deeper way. Either way, the New Testament calls Jesus the wisdom of God.

Then, in chapter 9, the two women make their final invitations. "Wisdom has built her house. She has carved out her seven pillars."

She has prepared a feast, set the table, and sent out invitations. From the highest point in the city, she calls: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" Come, eat my bread and drink my wine. "Leave your simple ways, and live."

Then the scene shifts. Lady Folly is sitting at the door of her house. "The foolish woman is loud, undisciplined, and knows nothing." She calls out to people walking by, using almost exactly the same words: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here." But her menu is different. "Stolen water is sweet. Food eaten in secret is pleasant." Her offer is the thrill of what's forbidden. But there's something her guests don't know. Her house is full of the dead.

REAL TALK **Same Invitation, Different Ending**

Notice that Wisdom and Folly use almost the same words to invite people in. That's the tricky part. Foolish choices rarely look foolish at first. They look exciting, fun, and freeing. Folly's pitch, stolen water is sweet, is the pitch behind a lot of temptation: the forbidden thing must be better, because it's forbidden. Wisdom's invitation sounds less exciting at first, but it leads to life. When you face a choice, don't just ask what feels good right now. Ask where this path leads. Look past the front door to what's inside the house.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Seven Pillars**

Wisdom's house in Proverbs 9 has seven pillars. Scholars aren't sure exactly what they represent. In the Bible, seven often symbolizes completeness, so the seven pillars may picture a house that is perfectly built, strong, and complete. Some think it echoes the seven days of creation, connecting Wisdom's house to the world God built with wisdom in Proverbs 8. Either way, it's a picture of stability. Folly's house has no foundation at all. Its guests are already in the grave.

Here's the thing about Proverbs 1 through 9: it doesn't pretend the choice is easy. Folly is attractive. It's loud, exciting, and right there on the corner. Wisdom requires patience, discipline, and trust. But

the parent in Proverbs keeps pleading, over and over, because he loves his child and can see where each path leads. When adults who love you warn you about something, it may feel like they're trying to ruin your fun. Often, they're just trying to keep you out of Folly's house, because they've seen what's inside.

KEY VERSE

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 9:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the gang in Proverbs 1 focused on belonging instead of the crime itself?
2. What "streets" do you need to avoid to stay away from temptation?
3. What does Proverbs 8 say about the way God made the world? Why does that matter for how we live?
4. How are Lady Wisdom's and Lady Folly's invitations similar? How are they different?

TRY THIS *Think about one area where you're tempted to walk down Folly's street. Make a specific plan to avoid it this week, and tell someone you trust about your plan.*

CHAPTER 3

Words and Reputation

Proverbs 10–26 (selected)

If you added up every proverb about one topic, the winner might be words. Proverbs talks about the tongue, the lips, and the mouth more than almost anything else. Why? Because words have enormous power, more than most of us realize.

Here's the big one. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit." Your words can give life: encouraging, comforting, guiding, healing. Or they can bring death: crushing, shaming, destroying. And whatever you plant with your words, you'll eventually eat.

Proverbs puts it another way too. "There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals." Words can stab. Words can heal. Most of us have experienced both.

REAL TALK **Words Online**

Proverbs was written long before phones, but it's never been more relevant. Today, your words can reach thousands of people in seconds, and they can stay online forever. A cruel comment, a screenshot, a rumor in a group chat, or an angry post can spread like wildfire and do damage you can never fully undo. James wrote, "See how a small fire can spread to a large forest!" Before you post, text, or comment, ask yourself: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? Would I say it to their face? Would I be okay if my grandmother, my future boss, or God read it? And if someone is using words to harass, bully, or

> threaten you online, save the evidence and tell a trusted adult. You don't have to face it alone.

Proverbs has a lot to say about gossip. "The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels: they go down into a person's innermost parts." Gossip is tasty. It's fun to hear and fun to share. That's what makes it so dangerous. It goes down easily and sticks.

"One who brings gossip betrays a confidence, but one who is of a trustworthy spirit is one who keeps a secret." If someone tells you a secret, and you pass it on, you've betrayed them. And Proverbs warns about friends who gossip: "therefore don't keep company with him who opens wide his lips." If someone gossips to you about others, they're probably gossiping about you too.

Here's a picture that explains how gossip keeps drama alive. "For lack of wood a fire goes out. Without gossip, a quarrel dies down." Every piece of gossip is another log on the fire. If you stop passing it on, the fire eventually goes out.

> **REAL TALK** **How to Stop Gossip**
>
> It's hard not to gossip, especially when everyone around you is doing it. Here are a few ideas. When someone starts gossiping, change the subject. Or ask, have you talked to them about this? Or simply say, I don't feel comfortable talking about them when they're not here. Don't forward screenshots or repeat rumors. If you hear something about someone, ask whether it's true, kind, and your business. And if you've gossiped and hurt someone, apologize. You'll be amazed how much drama disappears when you refuse to be the fuel.

Proverbs also talks about how to handle conflict with words. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." When someone yells at you, your instinct might be to yell back. But a calm, gentle response often lowers the temperature. It doesn't

mean being a pushover. It means choosing not to pour gasoline on the fire.

Proverbs praises the person who thinks before speaking. “The heart of the righteous weighs answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes out evil.” And: “He who answers before he hears, that is folly and shame to him.” How many arguments start because someone responded before they really listened?

Sometimes the wisest thing is to say less. “In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.” The more you talk, the more likely you are to say something you’ll regret. “Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles.”

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Answer a Fool, or Don’t?**
>
> Proverbs 26:4 and 26:5 sit right next to each other and seem to say opposite things. “Don’t answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.” Then: “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Which is it? Both. The editors put them side by side on purpose. Sometimes arguing with a foolish person just drags you down to their level, so it’s better to stay quiet. Other times, if you say nothing, they’ll think they’re right and keep doing harm, so you need to speak up. Wisdom is knowing which situation you’re in. That’s a great example of why proverbs aren’t mechanical rules. They require discernment. Think about online arguments: sometimes it’s wise to scroll past, and sometimes it’s right to speak the truth.

Words can also bring life. “Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a kind word makes it glad.” “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” “A gentle tongue is a tree of life.” And here’s a beautiful one: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” The right word at the right time is like a piece of fine jewelry, a precious gift.

REAL TALK **Sarcasm and Jokes**

Proverbs 26 describes a person who deceives a neighbor and then says, I was only joking. That's like someone throwing firebrands and arrows. A lot of hurtful words today come wrapped in humor: roasting, sarcasm, and jokes at someone else's expense. Teasing between close friends can be fun, but it's easy to cross a line. If someone is hurt, saying it was just a joke doesn't undo the damage. Pay attention to whether everyone is laughing, or only some people.

Proverbs also connects words with reputation. "A good name is more desirable than great riches." Your name, meaning your reputation, your character as others know it, is worth more than money. And your words build it or destroy it. Proverbs warns against bragging: "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth." And it warns against lying: "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who do the truth are his delight."

REAL TALK **Your Digital Reputation**

In the ancient world, your reputation lived in your town. Today, it also lives online, and it can follow you for years. Colleges and employers sometimes look at social media. Friends take screenshots. Things you post at fourteen can resurface at twenty-four. That's not meant to scare you. It's a reason to think about what kind of name you want. Proverbs says even a child is known by his actions. You're building your reputation now, one post, one word, one choice at a time. And if you've made mistakes, the good news is that reputations can be rebuilt with time, honesty, and consistent good choices.

REAL TALK **The Power of a Compliment**

Proverbs says pleasant words are sweet to the soul and health to the bones. Researchers have found that kind words really do affect people's well-being. A sincere compliment, a word of encouragement, or a simple thank you can change someone's whole day. Try noticing something good about someone

> and telling them specifically. Not just nice job, but I really admired how you handled that. You may never know how much it meant to them.

It's also worth noticing how often Proverbs connects words with listening. The wise person listens before speaking, weighs answers carefully, and is slow to respond. In a world where everyone wants to be heard, listening has become rare, and valuable. Try it with a friend this week. Ask a question, then really listen to the answer without planning what you'll say next. You may find that listening is one of the most life-giving things your words can do.

KEY VERSE

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 18:21 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Think of a time when someone's words gave you life. Think of a time when words hurt you. Which did you remember longer?
2. Why is gossip so tempting? What makes it so destructive?
3. When was the last time a gentle answer, from you or someone else, calmed a conflict?
4. What kind of reputation do you want to have? What words would help you build it?

TRY THIS *For one day, try to say only things that are true, kind, and necessary, in person and online. At the end of the day, write down what you noticed.*

CHAPTER 4

Friends, Drama, and Anger

Proverbs 12–29 (selected)

Your friends will shape you more than almost anything else. Proverbs knows that. "One who walks with wise men grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."

That's a simple principle, but it's incredibly powerful. You become like the people you spend the most time with. Their habits, attitudes, language, and values rub off on you, often without you even noticing. Spend time with people who are kind, honest, and growing, and you'll grow too. Spend time with people who are cruel, reckless, or always in trouble, and you'll get hurt.

> REAL TALK **Choosing Your Circle**
>
> This doesn't mean you should only hang out with perfect people, or that you should drop someone the moment they make a mistake. Jesus was a friend of sinners, and we're called to love everyone. But there's a difference between being kind to someone and letting them shape you. Your closest friends, the ones you trust, confide in, and follow, should be people who pull you toward good things. Ask yourself: When I'm with this person, do I become a better version of myself, or a worse one? Do they encourage me to make good choices, or bad ones? It can be painful to step back from a friendship, but sometimes it's the wisest thing you can do.

What does a good friend look like? Proverbs gives a lot of answers. "A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity." A

true friend sticks around when things get hard. Proverbs contrasts that with fair-weather friends. "A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." It's better to have a few loyal friends than hundreds of followers.

A good friend is also honest with you. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. The wounds of a friend are faithful, although the kisses of an enemy are profuse." A real friend will tell you the truth, even when it hurts. An enemy might flatter you to your face and stab you in the back.

And then there's one of the most famous proverbs about friendship. "Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Iron Sharpens Iron**

In the ancient world, a blade was sharpened by rubbing it against another piece of iron. The process involved friction and sparks, but both pieces came out sharper. Good friendships work the same way. Friends sharpen each other by challenging each other, asking hard questions, disagreeing respectfully, and pushing each other to grow. That means good friendship isn't always comfortable. Sometimes there's friction. But the result is that both people become sharper, wiser, and stronger. A friendship where you never challenge each other might be comfortable, but it isn't making either of you better.

REAL TALK **Signs of a Toxic Friendship**

Proverbs warns against friends who gossip, who have a hot temper, and who flatter you while hiding bad intentions. Today we might call some of those friendships toxic. Signs can include: they make you feel bad about yourself, they pressure you into things you don't want to do, they're jealous or controlling, they gossip about you, they only show up when they need something, or you feel anxious or drained after spending time with them. If you see those patterns, it's okay to set boundaries or step back. And if a

friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend is threatening you, controlling you, or hurting you, please talk to a trusted adult right away.

Proverbs also has a lot to say about how to handle drama and conflict. "He who covers an offense promotes love; but he who repeats a matter separates best friends." When a friend hurts you, you have a choice. You can let it go, or you can keep bringing it up and telling others about it. Proverbs says that keeping score and spreading the story destroys friendships. "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs."

That doesn't mean you should ignore serious problems. Some things need to be talked about. But a lot of drama comes from small things that get blown up because people won't let them go. "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger. It is his glory to overlook an offense." Choosing not to take offense at every little thing is a sign of maturity.

Then there's anger. Proverbs is full of warnings about it. "He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a quick temper displays folly." "A fool vents all of his anger, but a wise man brings himself under control." "A wrathful man stirs up contention, but one who is slow to anger appeases strife."

And here's a proverb that redefines strength. "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city." Controlling your temper is a bigger accomplishment than conquering a city. That's because it's harder.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A City Without Walls**

Proverbs 25:28 says, "Like a city that is broken down and without walls is a man whose spirit is without restraint." In the ancient world, a city's walls were its protection. A city without walls was open to anyone who wanted to attack it. Proverbs says a person without self-control is just as vulnerable.

Without self-control, every impulse, temptation, and angry feeling can come rushing in and take over. Self-control isn't about being uptight. It's about having healthy walls that protect what matters.

REAL TALK **Handling Your Anger**

Anger itself isn't always wrong. God gets angry at injustice, and so did Jesus. But uncontrolled anger hurts people, including you. If you struggle with your temper, here are a few things that can help. Notice the warning signs in your body, like a racing heart, clenched fists, or a hot face. Walk away before you say or do something you'll regret. Breathe slowly. Go for a run. Write down what you're feeling. Talk to someone you trust once you've calmed down. And pray. If anger is causing serious problems in your relationships, at school, or at home, or if you're afraid you might hurt someone, talk to a counselor or trusted adult. If you're ever in danger, call 911.

Proverbs also says something wise about drama: some fights aren't worth joining. Proverbs 26 compares meddling in a quarrel that isn't yours to grabbing a stray dog by the ears. You'll get bitten. Not every argument in the group chat needs your opinion. Sometimes the wisest thing you can do is stay out of it, pray, and be kind to everyone involved.

Proverbs also warns about being friends with angry people. "Don't befriend a hot-tempered man. Don't associate with one who harbors anger, lest you learn his ways and ensnare your soul." Anger is contagious.

And it warns against revenge. "Don't say, 'I will pay back evil.' Wait for the LORD, and he will save you." Proverbs even says not to celebrate when your enemy falls. That's a remarkable standard, centuries before Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jonathan and David**

The Bible's most famous friendship is between David and Jonathan, King Saul's son. Jonathan should have been David's rival, since David was chosen to be king instead of him. But Jonathan loved David, protected him from Saul's anger, and encouraged him to trust God, even at great cost to himself. Their friendship is a living picture of Proverbs: a friend who loves at all times, who sticks closer than a brother, and who sharpens his friend toward God.

Proverbs also offers a quiet word about loneliness. "A neighbor who is near is better than a distant brother." Sometimes the people who help you most aren't the ones you'd expect. If you feel like you don't have good friends right now, that's painful, and you're not alone. Pray for a friend. Look for people who are kind and growing, even if they're not in the popular crowd. Join a youth group, club, team, or volunteer group. And try being the kind of friend Proverbs describes. Often the best way to find a good friend is to be one.

KEY VERSE

Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance.

Proverbs 27:17 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Who are the people you spend the most time with? How are they shaping you?
2. What's the difference between a friend who sharpens you and a toxic friend?
3. When is it wise to overlook an offense, and when do you need to talk about it?
4. What helps you control your anger? What makes it harder?

TRY THIS *Think of a friend who sharpens you. This week, tell them how much you appreciate them, and ask them to keep being honest with you.*

CHAPTER 5

Work, Money, and Integrity

Proverbs 6; 10–30 (selected)

Proverbs has some surprisingly practical advice about work, and it starts with a tiny teacher. “Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise; which having no chief, overseer, or ruler, provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.”

A sluggard is a lazy person, and Proverbs has a lot of fun with this character. The sluggard turns over in bed like a door on its hinges. He’s so lazy he puts his hand in the dish and won’t even lift it to his mouth. He makes excuses: There’s a lion outside! I’ll be killed in the streets! Anything to avoid going to work.

But the ant is different. No one has to tell her what to do. There’s no boss standing over her. She just works, steadily and wisely, storing up food in the summer so she’ll have enough in the winter.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Wisdom of Ants**

Ancient people noticed that ants gather and store food, and modern scientists have confirmed just how organized they are. Harvester ants collect seeds and store them in underground chambers. Some colonies have millions of workers, each doing a specific job, with no single leader giving orders. They cooperate, plan ahead, and keep working even when no one is watching. Proverbs points to them as a model for anyone who struggles with motivation.

Then Proverbs gives a warning. “How long will you sleep, sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so your poverty will come as a robber, and your scarcity as an armed man.”

Notice the phrase a little. Laziness doesn’t usually ruin your life in one big moment. It sneaks up on you. A little more sleep. A little more scrolling. One more episode. I’ll do it tomorrow. Then one day you realize the assignment is due, the opportunity is gone, or the habit is set.

> **REAL TALK** **Procrastination**
>
> Almost everyone procrastinates sometimes. You have a big project, and suddenly cleaning your room or reorganizing your playlist seems really important. Procrastination isn’t always laziness. Sometimes it comes from fear of failing, feeling overwhelmed, or not knowing where to start. A few things can help. Break big tasks into small steps. Set a timer and work for just twenty minutes. Put your phone in another room. Tell someone your goal so they can check on you. Celebrate small wins. And remember the ant: steady, small efforts add up over time. If you feel stuck all the time, unable to start anything, or exhausted no matter how much you sleep, that might be a sign of something like depression or anxiety, so talk to a parent, counselor, or doctor.

Proverbs connects hard work with good results. “He becomes poor who works with a lazy hand, but the hand of the diligent brings wealth.” “The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the desire of the diligent shall be fully satisfied.” The sluggard wants things, but he doesn’t work for them.

Remember, though, that these are principles. Proverbs isn’t saying that all poor people are lazy. In fact, it says a lot about poverty caused by injustice, oppression, and disaster. And it isn’t saying that

hard work always makes you rich. It's saying that, generally, diligence leads to provision and laziness leads to lack.

Proverbs cares deeply about how you get your money. "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but accurate weights are his delight." In ancient markets, merchants used scales and weights to measure goods. A dishonest merchant might use one set of weights when buying and another when selling, cheating customers without them knowing. God hates that kind of cheating.

> **REAL TALK** **Honest Scales Today**
>
> You might not use a set of scales, but the principle still applies. Honest scales mean doing your own homework instead of copying. It means not using AI or someone else's work and calling it your own when you're not supposed to. It means telling the truth on your timesheet at work, giving back extra change when a cashier makes a mistake, and not lying about a product you're selling online. It means being the same person when no one is watching. Integrity is doing the right thing even when you could get away with the wrong thing. "He who walks blamelessly walks surely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out."

Proverbs also warns that dishonest money doesn't last. "Wealth gained dishonestly dwindles away, but he who gathers by hand makes it grow." Get-rich-quick schemes, cheating, and shortcuts may seem to pay off for a while, but they usually collapse. Slow, honest, steady effort builds something that lasts.

And Proverbs says that integrity is worth more than money. "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in his ways, and he is rich." A clean conscience is worth more than a fat bank account.

Proverbs also gives some very practical money advice. "The rich rule over the poor. The borrower is servant to the lender." Debt can

become a kind of slavery. That doesn't mean all borrowing is wrong, but it's a warning to be careful. Many adults today are crushed by credit card debt, student loans, and payments for things they couldn't really afford.

> **REAL TALK** **Money Habits Start Now**
>
> The money habits you build as a teenager will probably follow you into adulthood. A few wise habits from Proverbs: Spend less than you earn. Save some of every dollar you get, even if it's small. Be careful about debt, especially high-interest credit cards and buy-now-pay-later plans. Don't fall for get-rich-quick schemes, including some online investment hype. Give generously. And remember that money is a tool, not a god. Jesus said you can't serve both God and money.

But the biggest money theme in Proverbs isn't saving or earning. It's generosity. "There is one who scatters, and increases yet more. There is one who withholds more than is appropriate, but gains poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat. He who waters shall be watered also himself."

That's a surprising principle. Generous people often end up richer, not always in money, but in joy, friendship, and blessing. Stingy people often end up poorer, even if they hold on to every penny.

Proverbs especially cares about the poor. "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him." How you treat the poor is how you treat God, because God made them. And here's a remarkable one: "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD; he will reward him." When you give to someone in need, it's as if you're lending to God Himself, and God always pays His debts.

Proverbs also warns what happens to those who ignore the poor. "Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he will also cry out, but shall not be heard."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Proverbs and the Poor**

Proverbs is sometimes misread as saying that poor people are always to blame for their poverty. That's not true. Yes, Proverbs warns that laziness can lead to poverty. But it also talks about poverty caused by injustice, oppression, and the greed of the powerful. It condemns those who move boundary stones to steal land, who cheat with false weights, and who take advantage of the weak. It calls God the defender of the poor. Proverbs paints a balanced picture: individuals are responsible for their choices, and communities are responsible for caring for the vulnerable.

REAL TALK **Your First Job**

Many teenagers get their first job during high school, like babysitting, mowing lawns, working at a restaurant, or helping at a family business. Proverbs has great advice for that first job. Show up on time. Work hard even when no one is watching. Be honest about your hours and your mistakes. Treat customers and coworkers with respect. Learn from people who have more experience. Save some of what you earn. And give some away. A reputation as a reliable, honest worker will open doors for the rest of your life.

Proverbs also warns about pride, which often comes with success. "Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall." And: "When pride comes, then comes shame, but with humility comes wisdom." Success can make you think you did it all yourself. Proverbs reminds you that God directs your steps. "A man's heart plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps." And: "Don't boast about tomorrow; for you don't know what a day may bring."

So make plans, work hard, be honest, save wisely, and give generously. But hold it all loosely, because your future is in God's

hands, not yours. "Commit your deeds to the LORD, and your plans shall succeed."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Seven Things God Hates**
>
> Proverbs 6 contains a list of seven things the LORD hates: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that rush into evil, a false witness who tells lies, and one who stirs up conflict among family and friends. Notice how many of them involve words and attitudes, not just actions. Lying shows up twice. And the last one, sowing discord, is a reminder that God cares deeply about unity and relationships. Integrity isn't only about how you handle money. It's about the whole person.

Work in Proverbs isn't just about money, though. It's about faithfulness. The ant isn't trying to become famous or rich. She's just doing her job well, day after day. That kind of steady faithfulness is one of the most underrated qualities in the world. It shows up in the student who does homework carefully, the athlete who shows up to practice, the employee who works hard even when the boss isn't around, and the friend who keeps their promises. Paul later wrote that whatever you do, you should work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord. Your homework, your chores, and your part-time job can all be acts of worship.

KEY VERSE

The liberal soul shall be made fat. He who waters shall be watered also himself.

Proverbs 11:25 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What can you learn from the ant? Where in your life do you most need that lesson?
2. What are some modern examples of dishonest scales?
3. Why do you think Proverbs says generous people end up richer?
4. How does knowing that God directs your steps change the way you make plans?

TRY THIS *This week, give something away generously: money, time, or something you own. Then make a simple plan to save a small amount of every dollar you receive this month.*

CHAPTER 6

Heart, Boundaries, and Family

Proverbs 4; 13–31 (selected)

If you could protect only one thing in your life, what would it be? Proverbs has an answer. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life.”

In the Bible, the heart isn’t just your emotions. It’s the center of who you are: your thoughts, desires, choices, and loves. Everything you do flows out of it, like water from a spring. If the spring is poisoned, everything downstream is poisoned too. If it’s clean, life flows out.

That’s why Proverbs says to guard it. Not just watch it casually, but guard it with all diligence, like a soldier on duty.

> REAL TALK **Guarding Your Heart**
>
> What does it look like to guard your heart? It means paying attention to what goes in. The shows you watch, the music you listen to, the content you scroll through, the friends you trust, and the relationships you get into all shape your heart. Proverbs continues: put away a perverse mouth, let your eyes look straight ahead, and watch the path of your feet. Guard your mouth, your eyes, and your feet, and you’ll protect your heart. This doesn’t mean shutting out the world or never feeling anything. It means being thoughtful about what you let shape you. It also applies to dating. Guarding your heart means not giving it away too quickly or to someone who won’t take care of it.

Boundaries are part of guarding your heart. A boundary is like a fence that protects what’s valuable. Healthy boundaries mean you

can say no to things that would harm you, even when others want you to say yes. Proverbs talks about avoiding certain people, places, and paths, not because you think you're better than anyone, but because you know your heart is precious.

Proverbs also warns about a sneaky danger. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Your heart can deceive you. Something can feel completely right and still be wrong. That's why you need God's word and wise people around you to help you see clearly.

> **REAL TALK** **Fear of Man**
>
> Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts his trust in the LORD is kept safe." The fear of man is caring so much about what other people think that you'll do almost anything to please them. It's a trap. It can make you go along with things you know are wrong, stay silent when you should speak up, or base your whole worth on likes and approval. The cure isn't to stop caring about people. It's to care more about what God thinks. When you know you're loved and accepted by Him, you're free to say no to the crowd.

Guarding your heart also means paying attention to your inner life. What are you worried about? What do you want most? What are you angry about? What thoughts keep coming back? Proverbs encourages you to look inward honestly, and to bring what you find to God. Journaling, prayer, and talking with someone you trust can all help you understand what's happening in your heart. You can't guard what you never look at.

Proverbs also has a lot to say about family. Remember, much of the book is written as a parent speaking to a child. "My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching; for they will be a garland to grace your head, and chains around

your neck." Wise instruction from parents is like jewelry that makes you more beautiful.

The New Testament repeats this. Paul wrote, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." He quoted the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," and pointed out it comes with a promise. But Paul also wrote to parents: "You fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath, but nurture them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Honor goes both ways.

> **REAL TALK** **Honoring Imperfect Parents**
>
> Honoring your parents doesn't mean pretending they're perfect. No parent is. It means treating them with respect, listening to their advice, being honest with them, and appreciating what they've done for you. It's possible to disagree with your parents respectfully. It's also possible to honor parents who have hurt you, by being honest, setting healthy boundaries, and refusing to be cruel in return. Honoring them never means obeying them when they ask you to do something wrong or harmful, and it never means staying silent about abuse. If your family situation is complicated because of divorce, addiction, absence, or conflict, talk to a pastor or counselor who can help you figure out what honoring looks like for you.

It's worth saying that most families aren't facing abuse, but many face real conflict. Arguments about phones, curfews, grades, chores, friends, and faith are normal. Proverbs offers wisdom here too: a gentle answer turns away wrath, listening before speaking prevents misunderstandings, and humility helps everyone. Try having hard conversations when everyone is calm, not in the middle of a fight. Assume the best about each other. And remember that your parents are learning too.

Proverbs also has several verses about discipline that can be hard to read. "One who spares the rod hates his son, but one who loves him

is careful to discipline him." "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline drives it far from him." "Don't withhold correction from a child. If you punish him with the rod, he will not die."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard Passage: The Rod of Discipline**

Verses about the rod of discipline have been understood in different ways. Some Christians believe they support careful, limited physical discipline, such as spanking young children, done calmly and lovingly, never in anger, and never causing injury. Others believe the rod is a picture of discipline in general, pointing out that the same Hebrew word is used for a shepherd's staff, which guides and protects sheep, and that the main point is that loving parents correct their children rather than ignoring their behavior. Many Christians today choose non-physical forms of discipline, and child development experts generally recommend them. Christians disagree on spanking, and families should think this through prayerfully. But on one thing, all faithful readers should agree: Proverbs never gives permission for abuse. Discipline in Proverbs is always connected to love, wisdom, and the good of the child. Abuse is something completely different. Hitting in anger, beating, leaving marks or injuries, humiliating, threatening, starving, locking up, or terrifying a child is not biblical discipline. It is abuse, and God hates it. Jesus welcomed children and gave strong warnings to anyone who would harm them. The goal of biblical discipline is a child who grows in wisdom and feels safe and loved. If the result is a child who is afraid, injured, or crushed, something has gone terribly wrong.

REAL TALK **If You're Being Hurt at Home**

If an adult in your home is hurting you, threatening you, leaving marks or bruises, touching you inappropriately, or making you afraid for your safety, that is not your fault, and it is not discipline. You deserve to be safe. Please tell a trusted adult right away: a teacher, school counselor, coach, pastor, or another relative. You can call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453 any time, day or night, to talk with someone who can help. If you're in danger right

now, call 911. If you're feeling hopeless or thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. Telling someone is not betraying your family. It's protecting yourself, and maybe others too.

Proverbs also talks about receiving correction well, and that applies to everyone, not just children. "He who conceals his sins doesn't prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Wise people can admit when they're wrong. They listen to correction and learn from it. Fools get defensive. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: "All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Finally, Proverbs has one of the most quoted and misunderstood verses about families. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Proverbs 22:6**

Many parents have taken comfort from this verse. Many others have been crushed by it, because they raised their children faithfully and those children walked away from God. Is the verse a guarantee? Remember what we said at the start: proverbs are principles, not promises. Proverbs 22:6 describes a general pattern. Children who are trained wisely and lovingly often carry those values with them for life. But children are not robots. They make their own choices, and even good parents can have children who wander. God Himself is a perfect Father, and His children, Adam and Eve and Israel, rebelled against Him. If you're a teenager wrestling with your faith, this verse is not a threat. And if you have a sibling who has walked away, it's not a verdict on your parents. Keep praying. The story isn't over.

Proverbs also reminds us that family is meant to be a place of growth for everyone. Parents learn from their children, too. Grandparents pass down stories and faith. Siblings sharpen each other, sometimes with a lot of friction. Proverbs calls grandchildren

the crown of the aged, and fathers the glory of their children. A family isn't a perfect team. It's a group of imperfect people learning, together, how to love each other wisely.

KEY VERSE

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life.

Proverbs 4:23 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What are you letting into your heart that might be shaping you more than you realize?
2. What's one healthy boundary you need to set right now?
3. What does it look like to honor your parents, even when you disagree with them?
4. Why is it so important to understand the difference between discipline and abuse?

TRY THIS *Write a short note or text to a parent or guardian, thanking them for something specific they've taught you. If home doesn't feel safe, talk to a trusted adult this week instead.*

CHAPTER 7

Agur and Lemuel's Mother

Proverbs 30–31

The last two chapters of Proverbs come from two people we know almost nothing about. Their voices are different from Solomon's, and they make a fitting ending to the book.

Chapter 30 begins, "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh." We don't know who Agur was. He might not even have been an Israelite. And he starts with something surprising for a wisdom writer: he says he doesn't know very much. "Surely I am the most ignorant man, and don't have a man's understanding. I have not learned wisdom, neither do I have the knowledge of the Holy One."

> REAL TALK **The Humility of Agur**
>
> Agur is a breath of fresh air. After twenty-nine chapters of confident advice, here's a wise man who says, honestly, I don't know much. That's not false modesty. It's real humility. The more you learn, the more you realize how much you don't know. Some of the wisest people in history have also been the most humble. Agur reminds us that wisdom isn't about having all the answers. It's about knowing who does. You don't have to pretend to be smarter than you are. It's okay to say, I don't know.

Then Agur asks a series of questions that sound a lot like God's questions to Job. "Who has ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound

the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you know?"

The answer, of course, is God. Only He controls the wind and the waters. And Agur's question about the son's name has made Christians think of Jesus, the Son who came down from heaven.

Then Agur says something about God's word. "Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him." Even though Agur doesn't know much, he knows where to find truth.

And then he prays one of the most practical prayers in the Bible. "Two things I have asked of you. Don't deny me before I die. Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, deny you, and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

> **REAL TALK** **Neither Poverty Nor Riches**
>
> Agur's prayer is wise because he knows himself. He knows that if he has too much, he might forget God and think he doesn't need Him. And he knows that if he has too little, he might be tempted to steal. So he asks for just enough. That's the opposite of what our culture usually wants. We're told to want more: more money, more stuff, more followers, more of everything. Agur asks for enough. Jesus taught His disciples to pray something similar: give us today our daily bread. What would it look like for you to be content with enough?

Agur also loves lists. He has several numbered lists, like riddles: three things that are never satisfied, four things too amazing to understand, four things that are small but wise. "There are three things which are too amazing for me, four which I don't understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a

man with a maiden." Agur notices the world carefully and lets himself be amazed. That's a kind of wisdom too.

Chapter 31 begins with an unusual introduction. "The words of King Lemuel—the revelation which his mother taught him." We don't know who Lemuel was either. But we know his mother was a wise woman who gave her son serious advice about how to be a good king.

She warns him not to waste his strength on women who would destroy him, and not to get drunk, because drunk kings forget the law and fail to protect the vulnerable. And then she gives him a charge that's still powerful today. "Open your mouth for the mute, in the cause of all who are left desolate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and serve justice to the poor and needy."

> **REAL TALK** **Speak Up for the Voiceless**
>
> Lemuel's mother taught her son that power comes with responsibility. A king's job wasn't to enjoy luxury. It was to protect people who couldn't protect themselves. You might not be a king, but you have more influence than you think. You can speak up when someone is being bullied. You can stand with a classmate who is excluded or mocked because of who they are. You can care about the unborn, the disabled, the elderly, refugees, children in poverty, victims of trafficking, and others who often have no voice. Proverbs 24 says, "Rescue those who are being led away to death!" Wisdom isn't just about your own life. It's about using your voice for others.

Lemuel's mother also has something to say about alcohol. She warns that kings shouldn't drink, because drunkenness makes them forget the law and pervert justice for the oppressed. Proverbs elsewhere warns that wine is a mocker and that people who linger over drinks end up with bruises they can't explain and eyes that see strange things. For teenagers, alcohol and drugs are not only illegal

but especially harmful to a developing brain. If you or a friend is struggling with substance use, please talk to a trusted adult. Asking for help is a wise choice, not a weak one.

Then Proverbs ends with one of its most famous passages, a poem about a woman of strength. "Who can find a worthy woman? For her value is far above rubies."

The poem is an acrostic, like some of the Psalms. Each of its twenty-two verses begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, as if to say, here is excellence from A to Z.

And what a woman she is. She works eagerly with her hands. She's like a merchant ship, bringing food from far away. She gets up before dawn. She evaluates a field and buys it, then plants a vineyard with her own earnings. "She arms her waist with strength, and makes her arms strong." She runs a successful business making and selling clothing. "She opens her arms to the poor; yes, she extends her hands to the needy." She isn't worried about the future. "Strength and dignity are her clothing. She laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom. Kind instruction is on her tongue."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Woman of Valor**

The Hebrew phrase translated worthy woman is eshet chayil. The word chayil is often used for strength, ability, wealth, and even military valor. It's the same word used for mighty warriors in the Old Testament. So this poem isn't describing a quiet, weak woman. It's describing a woman of strength, courage, and excellence. In Jewish tradition, Proverbs 31 is often sung by husbands to their wives on Friday nights at the start of the Sabbath, as a song of praise, not a checklist. And Jewish women sometimes encourage each other by saying eshet chayil, woman of valor, when they see one another doing something brave or good. In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth comes right after Proverbs, and Boaz calls Ruth an eshet chayil, a worthy woman.

She was a poor widow and a foreigner, not a wealthy businesswoman. Her strength was her character.

REAL TALK **Celebration, Not Comparison**

Some people read Proverbs 31 as an impossible checklist that every woman must live up to: get up before dawn, run a business, sew clothes, manage a household, help the poor, and never be afraid. If that's how you read it, you'll probably feel like a failure. But that's not how the poem works. It's a portrait of wisdom in action, a celebration of strength, competence, and character. It's the final picture of Lady Wisdom from chapters 1 through 9, now living out wisdom in real life. Notice what it praises most: not her looks, but her character. "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised." For girls, the message is that God values your strength, intelligence, work, compassion, and courage, not just your appearance. For guys, the message is to admire and look for character, not just looks, and to praise the strong, wise women in your life. And for everyone, it's a picture of what it looks like to live wisely.

Notice how the book of Proverbs ends where it began. It started with "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." It ends with "a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised." The whole book is framed by the fear of the LORD. Wisdom begins there, and wisdom ends there.

The very last line of Proverbs says, "Give her of the fruit of her hands! Let her works praise her in the gates!" The city gates were where leaders gathered and important decisions were made. Proverbs ends by saying that a wise life speaks for itself, in public, for everyone to see.

It's also beautiful that the last voice in Proverbs is a mother's. The book began with a parent's instruction, and it ends with a mother teaching her son how to lead, how to protect the vulnerable, and what kind of character to admire. Wisdom is handed down.

Somewhere in your life, there are people who have been handing it down to you. Someday, you'll hand it down to others.

As we come to the end of Proverbs, it's worth stepping back. Proverbs isn't a book you read once and finish. It's a book you live with. Many Christians read one chapter of Proverbs a day, matching the date on the calendar, so they read the whole book every month. Over years, its sayings sink in and come to mind exactly when you need them: when you're about to send an angry text, when a friend is pressuring you, when you're tempted to cheat, when you're deciding how to spend your money. Wisdom grows slowly, like a tree. But it grows.

KEY VERSE

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

Proverbs 31:30 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Agur begins by saying he doesn't know much? What does that teach about wisdom?
2. What would it look like for you to pray Agur's prayer, neither poverty nor riches?
3. Who are the voiceless people in your school or community? How could you speak up for them?
4. How is reading Proverbs 31 as a celebration different from reading it as a checklist?

TRY THIS *Think of a woman of strength in your life, like a mother, grandmother, teacher, or friend. Write her a note telling her specific ways she shows wisdom, strength, and character.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Proverbs says that wisdom is more valuable than gold, and it pictures Wisdom as being with God at creation, rejoicing in the world and delighting in humanity. Solomon, the wisest man of his time, wrote much of it. And yet Solomon himself didn't live by his own advice. He ended his life chasing wealth, power, and hundreds of wives who turned his heart away from God. Even the wisest human being couldn't live out wisdom perfectly.

Jewish readers treasure Proverbs as practical wisdom for faithful living, and some later Jewish writers connected Wisdom with God's law. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, came to see Jesus as the fullest expression of God's wisdom. Paul wrote that Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God," and that in Him are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Jesus said of Himself, "someone greater than Solomon is here." Where Solomon failed, Jesus succeeded. He lived the life Proverbs describes, perfectly. And the greatest act of wisdom in history looked like foolishness to the world: the cross, where Jesus died for foolish people like us. The good news is that wisdom isn't just something you have to work harder to get. It's a gift. James wrote, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He wants you to live wisely and well.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Proverbs says there is a way that seems right but leads to death. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the wisdom of God.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. The cross looked foolish to the world, but it was God's wisdom to save us.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Proverbs teaches wise living, but no one lives it perfectly. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Begin with Him.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. Wisdom begins with turning to God. You can talk to Him right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I want to be wise, but I know I've often chosen foolishness. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus, the wisdom of God, lived the life I couldn't live and died the death I deserved, and that You raised Him from the dead. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Teach me to fear You, to trust You with all my heart, and not to lean on my own understanding. Give me wisdom, because You promised to give it to anyone who asks. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Proverbs has 31 chapters. Read the chapter that matches the day of the month, and you'll finish it every month.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Walk with the wise. Find an older Christian you respect, and ask them to meet with you and share what they've learned.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Proverbs says the wise keep listening and keep learning. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Proverbs is right, wisdom is calling out in the streets, inviting you in, and the fear of the LORD is where it all begins.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5–6 (WEB)

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The King Who Outlasts the Sun

Ecclesiastes, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Outlasts the Sun: The Book of Ecclesiastes, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Ecclesiastes is written by someone who had it all and still felt empty. He tried everything: education, partying, building, buying, achievement, fame. And at the end of each experiment he wrote the same word. Smoke. Vapor. It slipped through his fingers.

Ecclesiastes might be the most honest book in the Bible. It asks questions a lot of people are afraid to ask out loud. What’s the point? Why do good people get hurt? Why does hard work sometimes go nowhere? Why does everything I chase leave me wanting more? And what happens when I die?

So why read it? Because you live in a world that keeps promising that the next thing will finally make you happy: the next phone, the next relationship, the next achievement, the next hundred followers. Ecclesiastes has already tested those promises, and it tells you the truth about them. Then it points you toward the only thing that lasts.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Ecclesiastes in five chapters: the grand experiment (Ecclesiastes 1–2), a time for everything (3), injustice, loneliness, and friendship (4–5:7), money, unfairness, and today’s gifts (5:8–10:20), and remember your Creator (11–12).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who the Preacher was, what the key word hevel means, and how to read a book that sometimes sounds surprisingly gloomy. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as who wrote Ecclesiastes or how to read its darkest lines, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Ecclesiastes in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-first book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Ecclesiastes speaks powerfully to a generation surrounded by endless options, constant comparison, and the pressure to find meaning in achievement, possessions, and online status. This book explains the Hebrew word hevel, vapor or smoke, and shows how things slip through our fingers when we make them our ultimate meaning, while also highlighting the book's surprising call to enjoy simple daily gifts from God.

Ecclesiastes is honest about despair. A compassionate Real Talk box around chapter 4 encourages any reader who feels empty, hopeless, or alone to talk to a trusted adult or counselor and lists 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Other boxes address loneliness and friendship, comparison and envy, money, unfairness, procrastination, and making the most of youth.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how life under the sun aches because death seems to get the last word, and how the New Testament presents Jesus as the One who stepped under the

sun, defeated death, and makes ordinary faithfulness matter forever, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure Ecclesiastes in their own rich ways, reading it each year at the Feast of Booths. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and will find in Him the meaning that nothing under the sun can give.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature, like Job and Proverbs. But where Proverbs gives short, confident sayings about how life usually works, Ecclesiastes steps back and asks whether any of it ultimately matters. It reads like the journal of a brilliant, restless thinker who tested every path to happiness and wrote down the results with brutal honesty. It mixes reflections, poems, proverbs, and advice. Some parts sound hopeless. Others are full of joy. That tension is part of the point.

Who Is the Preacher?

The book introduces its speaker as Qoheleth, a Hebrew word that means something like the one who gathers people, or the Teacher or Preacher. The Greek translation of that title gives us the name Ecclesiastes. He is called the son of David, king in Jerusalem, and his story of unmatched wisdom, wealth, building projects, and pleasure sounds a lot like Solomon. Jewish and Christian tradition has long held that Solomon wrote it, perhaps late in life, looking back on his mistakes. Many scholars today think a later writer used Solomon's life as a kind of persona, a way of asking what life looks like for someone who had everything, pointing out features of the Hebrew that seem to come from a later time. Some think a narrator collected the Preacher's words and added the opening and closing verses, which speak about the Preacher in the third person. Either

way, the book's message is the same, and Christians on both sides of the question accept it as God's word.

The Key Word: Hevel

The most important word in Ecclesiastes is the Hebrew word hevel. It appears about thirty-eight times. Older translations, including the WEB, translate it vanity, as in vanity of vanities, all is vanity. But hevel literally means vapor, breath, mist, or smoke. Think of your breath on a cold morning: you can see it, but you can't hold it. Or smoke from a campfire: it's real, but when you grab at it, your hand comes back empty. That's what the Preacher means. Things like money, pleasure, success, and status are real, but they're fleeting and can't be held on to. When you try to make them your ultimate meaning, they slip right through your fingers. Hevel can also carry the sense of something baffling, a mystery you can't figure out.

Under the Sun

Another key phrase in Ecclesiastes is under the sun, which appears about thirty times. It describes life as we see it from ground level, in this world, without looking beyond it. Under the sun, everything eventually dies, and the same things happen to the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad. Much of Ecclesiastes is the Preacher honestly describing what life looks like from that view. But he also keeps pointing upward, to God, who is above the sun, and to the gifts He gives.

How to Read It

Because the Preacher is so honest about his frustration, some lines in Ecclesiastes can sound shocking, or even like they contradict the rest of the Bible. It helps to remember that he is often describing

what life looks like under the sun, and testing ideas to see where they lead. The book's final verses give the conclusion he reached. Jewish communities read Ecclesiastes every year during the Feast of Booths, a joyful harvest festival, which says something about how they understood it: not as a depressing book, but as a wise and honest one that teaches people to enjoy God's gifts without worshiping them.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Ecclesiastes 1–2): The grand experiment.

Chapter 2 (Ecclesiastes 3): A time for everything.

Chapter 3 (Ecclesiastes 4–5:7): Injustice, loneliness, and friendship.

Chapter 4 (Ecclesiastes 5:8–10:20): Money, unfairness, and today's gifts.

Chapter 5 (Ecclesiastes 11–12): Remember your Creator.

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5 Remember Your Creator *11–12* .....

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CHAPTER 1

The Grand Experiment

Ecclesiastes 1–2

Ecclesiastes doesn't ease you in. It opens with a shout. "'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'"

Remember what that word means. Hevel: vapor, breath, smoke. You could translate the line, Smoke of smoke! Everything is smoke! In Hebrew, saying something twice like that, vanity of vanities, is a way of making it as strong as possible, like saying the holy of holies or the king of kings. The Preacher is saying everything is the most fleeting, slippery, can't-hold-on-to-it thing imaginable.

Then he asks the question that drives the whole book. "What does man gain from all his labor in which he labors under the sun?" You work, study, practice, and grind. What do you actually get out of it, in the end?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Smoke and Mirrors**

Hevel is the same word as the name Abel, the son of Adam and Eve whose life was cut short in Genesis 4. His life was like a breath, there and gone. When the Preacher says all is hevel, he isn't saying nothing exists or nothing matters at all. He's saying that nothing under the sun lasts or can give ultimate meaning. Some scholars also hear a sense of absurdity or enigma in the word, things that don't make sense. Try reading the book with the word vapor or smoke in mind whenever you see vanity. It often makes things clearer.

The Preacher looks at nature and sees endless cycles. Generations come and go. The sun rises and sets, then hurries back around to rise again. The wind blows south, then north, then around and around. Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Everything keeps moving, but nothing seems to get anywhere. “All things are full of weariness beyond uttering. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”

That last line might be the most relatable thing ever written. You can watch a hundred videos and still want another. You can listen to music all day and still want more. You can scroll for hours and never feel full.

Then he says something that sounds strange in a world obsessed with the next new thing. “That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun.” Phones change. Fashions change. But the deep stuff of human life, love, envy, ambition, loss, the search for meaning, stays the same. And then he adds, people forget. No one remembers the people who came before, and no one will remember us either.

> **REAL TALK** **Nothing New Under the Sun**
>
> It might seem like your generation faces totally new problems. In some ways, it does. Social media, AI, and constant connection are new. But the deeper struggles are ancient. People have always wanted to be seen, to be liked, to belong, to matter, and to be remembered. People have always compared themselves to others and felt like they didn’t measure up. The Preacher reminds you that you’re not the first person to feel this way, and you won’t be the last. That’s actually comforting. It means the wisdom of people who walked this road before you, including the Bible, still applies.

Then the Preacher introduces himself. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem, and he decided to run an experiment. He would search out by wisdom everything that happens under heaven. He had all the resources in the world. If anyone could find meaning, he could.

Experiment number one: wisdom and knowledge. He became wiser than everyone before him. He studied everything. And he found that "in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." The more he learned, the more he saw how broken the world was, and the more it hurt. Knowledge alone couldn't fix the crooked things.

Experiment number two: pleasure. "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure;' and behold, this also was vanity." He tried laughter and partying. He tried wine. He tried to see whether fun could make life meaningful.

Experiment number three: projects and possessions. "I made myself great works. I built myself houses. I planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and parks." He built pools, bought servants, gathered huge herds and flocks, collected silver and gold, and hired singers and musicians. He had the best of everything.

And he had status. "So I was great, and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem." He was the most famous, admired, powerful person around. He didn't hold back. "Whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I didn't withhold my heart from any joy."

> **REAL TALK** **Clout**
>
> Today, the Preacher might have been an influencer with millions of followers, a mansion, a fleet of cars, and a feed full of luxury vacations. His fans would have thought he had the perfect life. A lot of people today chase clout: likes,

views, followers, popularity, being seen. It's not wrong to enjoy being appreciated. But clout is hevel. It's smoke. One day you're trending, the next day you're forgotten. And no number of followers can fill the deep need to be truly known and loved. Many famous people have said that reaching the top left them emptier than they expected. If your worth rises and falls with your numbers, you'll always be anxious. There's a better place to find it.

Then comes the result of the experiment. "Then I looked at all the works that my hands had worked, and at the labor that I had labored to do; and behold, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun."

A chasing after wind. Try it sometime. Go outside on a windy day and try to catch the wind in your hands. That's what it felt like. All that effort, and his hands were empty.

Then the Preacher hits his lowest point. He realizes that the wise and the foolish both die. "The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness—and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all." He realizes that everything he built will be left to someone else, who might be a fool and waste it all. "So I hated life, because the work that is worked under the sun was grievous to me." He lies awake at night. "Even in the night his heart takes no rest."

REAL TALK **Achievement Burnout**

A lot of teenagers today are under enormous pressure to achieve: perfect grades, perfect test scores, the right college, varsity sports, leadership roles, impressive activities. Some of that can be good. But when your whole identity depends on achievement, you can end up like the Preacher: exhausted, anxious, unable to sleep, and wondering what the point is. If you're feeling burned out, you're not lazy or weak. Talk to a parent, school counselor, or trusted adult about what you're carrying. You were created to be loved, not just to perform.

But then, at the end of chapter 2, a different note appears. It's quiet, but it's important. "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God."

Notice the shift. When the Preacher tried to squeeze meaning out of pleasure, work, and possessions, they turned to smoke. But when he received simple things, like food, drink, and the satisfaction of good work, as gifts from God's hand, he found something good. The problem wasn't the gifts. The problem was trying to make them God.

That's one of the big lessons of Ecclesiastes. Good things make terrible gods. But they can be wonderful gifts.

> **REAL TALK** **The Party Experiment**
>
> The Preacher's pleasure experiment sounds a lot like what some people your age are told will make them happy: the party scene, drinking, hooking up, chasing the next thrill. He tried it all, with unlimited money and no one to stop him, and he says it left him empty. Pleasure isn't bad. God invented it. But pleasure chased for its own sake shrinks. The thrill that felt huge last month barely registers this month, so you need more to feel the same thing. That's how many addictions start. If you or a friend is struggling with alcohol, vaping, drugs, pornography, or anything else that has started to feel out of control, please talk to a parent, school counselor, or doctor. You're not the first, and there is real help and real hope.

It's worth noticing how honest the Preacher is about his own heart. He doesn't blame his parents, his culture, or his circumstances. He simply admits that he got everything he wanted and it still wasn't enough. That kind of honesty is rare. Most people keep chasing, convinced that the problem is that they haven't gotten quite enough yet. One more achievement, one more purchase, one more

relationship, and then I'll be happy. The Preacher had already reached the end of that road, and he came back to tell us there was nothing there.

If you're a Christian, you might wonder whether Ecclesiastes is telling you not to work hard, study, have fun, or dream big. It isn't. The Preacher still says wisdom is better than folly, as light is better than darkness. Elsewhere he tells you to work with all your might. The point is not that these things are worthless. The point is that they are not God. They can't carry the weight of your whole life. Put them in the right place and they become good gifts. Put them in God's place and they will crush you.

There's one more thing to notice. The Preacher's experiment was mostly about himself. Look at the language: I made myself, I built myself, I planted myself, I got myself. Me, myself, and mine. Maybe part of the reason it all felt so empty is that he was living for himself alone. Jesus later said that whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for His sake will find it. Meaning is often found not by grabbing more for yourself, but by giving yourself away to God and to others.

KEY VERSE

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does hevel mean? How does thinking of it as vapor or smoke change how you understand the book?
2. Which of the Preacher's experiments, wisdom, pleasure, projects, or status, do you think people your age chase the most?
3. Why do you think having everything still left the Preacher feeling empty?
4. What's the difference between enjoying a good thing as a gift and trying to make it your ultimate meaning?

TRY THIS *Make a list of three things you've been chasing lately, like grades, followers, a relationship, or possessions. Next to each, write how it would look to enjoy it as a gift from God instead of making it your meaning.*

CHAPTER 2

A Time for Everything

Ecclesiastes 3

Ecclesiastes 3 contains one of the most famous poems ever written. You might have heard it at a funeral, a wedding, or a graduation, or in a song. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.”

Then comes a list of fourteen pairs of opposites. “A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

The list keeps going. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to sew. “A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fourteen Pairs**

The poem has fourteen pairs, which is seven times two. In the Bible, seven often stands for completeness. The Preacher is painting a picture of all of life, from birth to death, with everything in between. Some of the pairs are surprising. A time to kill? A time to hate? The Preacher isn’t telling us to go out and do those things. He’s describing the reality of life in a broken world, where there really are times for war, for opposing evil, and for grief. In the

1960s, the folk band The Byrds turned this poem into a hit song called Turn! Turn! Turn!, and it has been sung and quoted ever since.

The poem is beautiful, but it also raises a question. If everything has its season, who decides the seasons? We don't. We can't choose when we're born or when we die. We can't make grief end on schedule. We can't force a season of building to come when we're in a season of breaking down. Life moves in rhythms we don't control.

That can feel frustrating. But it can also be freeing. You don't have to make every season happen. You can trust the One who does.

REAL TALK **What Season Are You In?**

Maybe you're in a season of weeping right now. Maybe someone you love has died, a friendship has ended, or your family is going through something hard. Ecclesiastes says it's okay to weep. There's a time for it. You don't have to rush to the laughing part. Or maybe you're in a season of building, full of energy and new opportunities. Enjoy it. Seasons change. The hard ones won't last forever, and neither will the easy ones. Wisdom means recognizing what season you're in and living faithfully in it, not wishing you were somewhere else.

Then the Preacher steps back and asks his big question again. "What profit has he who works in that in which he labors?" If all of life is just seasons coming and going, what's the point?

And then he writes one of the most profound sentences in the Bible. "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can't find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end."

Look at those three pieces. First, God has made everything beautiful in its time. Even the hard seasons have a place in His design. We may not see it yet, but God is weaving something beautiful.

Second, God has set eternity in our hearts. Humans aren't like animals that live only for the moment. We long for something permanent. We ask why. We want our lives to matter forever. We feel the ache when things end. That longing was put there by God.

Third, we can't figure it all out. We see a small slice of the story. Only God sees the whole thing, from beginning to end.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Eternity in Our Hearts**

Many thinkers have noticed what the Preacher describes here. Humans seem to be built for something more than this world can give. Augustine, a Christian thinker who lived about sixteen hundred years ago, prayed to God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You. C. S. Lewis wrote that if we find in ourselves a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most likely explanation is that we were made for another world. The Preacher's point is that the ache you feel, the sense that life should mean more, isn't a malfunction. It's a clue.

That's why everything under the sun feels like vapor. It isn't that the things themselves are bad. It's that we were made for eternity, and they're not eternal. Trying to satisfy an eternal longing with temporary things is like trying to fill the ocean with a garden hose.

REAL TALK **That Restless Feeling**

Have you ever gotten something you really wanted, a new phone, a ticket to a concert, a relationship, a spot on the team, and felt a little letdown afterward? Or felt a strange restlessness late at night, like something is missing even though nothing is technically wrong? That might be the eternity God set in your heart, reminding you that you were made for more. The answer isn't to stop enjoying good things. It's to bring that restlessness to God, who is the only One big enough to fill it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hard Passage: A Time to Kill, a Time to Hate?**

Some lines in the poem make readers uncomfortable. Is the Bible really saying there's a time to kill and a time to hate? The Preacher is describing life as it actually unfolds in a fallen world, not handing out permission slips. Many interpreters connect a time to kill with things like just war, self-defense, or, in ancient Israel, the harvesting of animals for food, and a time to hate with hating evil itself, as Scripture elsewhere tells God's people to hate what is evil and hold on to what is good. Christians disagree about some applications, such as when war is justified. But nothing in the poem cancels Jesus' command to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Hate evil. Love people, including the ones who are hard to love.

So what should we do, if we can't figure everything out? The Preacher's answer is surprisingly simple. "I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live. Also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labor, is the gift of God." Enjoy life. Do good. Receive daily gifts with gratitude.

And trust that God's work lasts, even when ours doesn't. "I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; and God has done it, that men should fear before him."

The rest of chapter 3 wrestles with injustice. The Preacher sees that in the places where there should be justice, like courtrooms, there's wickedness instead. He says that God will judge the righteous and the wicked, because there's a time for every work. Then he notices that humans and animals both die and return to dust. "Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward?" He's asking honestly, from under the sun, what happens after death. He doesn't have the full answer yet. The rest of the Bible, and especially the resurrection of Jesus, will give it.

> **REAL TALK** **A Time to Speak**
>
> The poem says there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak. That's real wisdom for a world where everyone feels pressure to comment on everything immediately. Not every group chat needs your reply. Not every argument online needs your opinion. Sometimes the wise thing is to stay quiet, listen, and think. But there are also times when silence is wrong, like when a friend is being bullied, when someone is in danger, or when the truth needs to be told. Wisdom is knowing the difference, and asking God for help when you're not sure.

The idea of seasons can also help you be patient with yourself. Maybe you feel behind. Your friends seem to have their lives figured out, they've found their thing, they're dating, they know what college they want, and you don't. Ecclesiastes reminds you that God's timing isn't the same for everyone. Some flowers bloom in spring and some in autumn. You're not late. You're in your season. Growth takes time, and God is not in a hurry with you.

The seasons can also help you love other people well. When a friend is grieving, it's not the time for jokes or quick fixes. Paul wrote that we should rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. When a friend is celebrating, it's not the time to bring up your problems or compete with their good news. Paying attention to what season someone else is in is one of the kindest things you can do.

Notice too that the poem begins with birth and death. Every season of life happens between those two moments, and neither is in our control. That's humbling. But the Preacher doesn't leave us there. He says God has made everything beautiful in its time. Christians believe that one day God will make even death itself part of a beautiful story, when He raises His people to life. The final season hasn't come yet.

KEY VERSE

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can't find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Which pair in the poem of Ecclesiastes 3 describes the season you're in right now?
2. What do you think it means that God has set eternity in our hearts?
3. When have you felt the restlessness the Preacher describes? What did you do with it?
4. How can trusting that God makes everything beautiful in its time help you in a hard season?

TRY THIS *Write down the season you're in right now, using one of the pairs from Ecclesiastes 3. Then write a short prayer asking God to help you live faithfully in it, and to make it beautiful in His time.*

CHAPTER 3

Injustice, Loneliness, and Friendship

Ecclesiastes 4–5:7

Chapter 4 begins with some of the darkest observations in Ecclesiastes. “Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of those who were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.”

Notice the phrase repeated twice: they had no comforter. The Preacher sees people being crushed by those in power, and no one is there to wipe their tears. It’s so painful that he says the dead are better off than the living, and those who were never born are better off still, because they haven’t seen the evil done under the sun.

That’s a very dark thing to say. And the Bible doesn’t hide it.

> REAL TALK **When Life Feels Empty**
>
> Maybe you’ve felt what the Preacher felt in chapter 4: that life is so painful or pointless that it would be better not to exist. If you’ve felt that way, you’re not alone, and you’re not a bad person or a bad Christian. The Bible includes these words because God knows people feel this way. But please don’t keep those feelings to yourself. Talk to a trusted adult today, like a parent, school counselor, pastor, coach, or doctor. A counselor or therapist can help you work through emptiness, depression, or grief, and getting help is a sign of

strength. If you're having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. Notice that the Preacher didn't stop writing in chapter 4. His book keeps going, and so can your story. There are people who want to be your comforter.

Next, the Preacher looks at work and achievement, and he notices something uncomfortable about what drives a lot of it. "Then I saw all the labor and achievement that is the envy of a man's neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind." A lot of hard work isn't really about the work. It's about competition, wanting to be better than someone else, wanting what they have, wanting them to envy you.

He offers a better way. "Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labor and chasing after wind." It's better to have a little and be at peace than to have twice as much and be exhausted, anxious, and always comparing.

REAL TALK **The Comparison Game**

Comparison drives so much of life: grades, looks, followers, clothes, phones, colleges, relationships, achievements. The Preacher saw it three thousand years ago, and he called it chasing the wind. You can never win the comparison game, because there's always someone ahead of you. Proverbs calls envy rot in the bones. A good question to ask is: Am I doing this because I love it and it's good, or because I want to beat someone or impress someone? Try to celebrate other people's successes instead of resenting them. And remember that a quiet handful of contentment is worth more than two exhausted handfuls of envy.

Then the Preacher describes one of the saddest characters in the book. "There is one who is alone, and he has neither son nor brother. There is no end to all of his labor, neither are his eyes satisfied with wealth." This man works nonstop. He has no family,

no friends, no one to share his life with. And he never stops to ask the obvious question: who am I doing all this for?

That leads into one of the most beloved passages in Ecclesiastes. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn't have another to lift him up."

The Preacher gives three pictures of why friendship matters. First, when you fall, a friend can pick you up. Second, "if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one keep warm alone?" On cold nights in the ancient world, travelers huddled together to stay warm. Friends warm each other. Third, "If a man prevails against one who is alone, two shall withstand him." A friend has your back.

Then he ends with a beautiful line. "And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Threefold Cord**

A rope made of three strands woven together is much stronger than three separate strands, or even two. Ecclesiastes 4:12 is often read at weddings, where many Christians interpret the three strands as a husband, a wife, and God at the center of their marriage. That's a beautiful application. But the original context is broader: it's about any friendship, partnership, or community. The point is that we're stronger together than alone, and stronger still when more people are woven in. Many Christians also see God as the strand who holds every relationship together.

REAL TALK **Loneliness**

Loneliness is one of the biggest struggles teenagers face today, even in a world where you can be connected to hundreds of people online. You can have a thousand followers and no one to call at 2 a.m. The Preacher says it's not good to be alone. If you're lonely, you're not weird, and it's not your fault. Here are some ideas. Look for one person, not a whole group. Join

something: a youth group, a club, a team, a volunteer project. Ask someone to hang out, even if it feels awkward. Be the friend you wish you had, by noticing the person sitting alone. And talk to a trusted adult if loneliness is making you feel hopeless. God made you for relationships. He'll help you find them.

REAL TALK **Friends Online and Off**

Online friendships can be real and meaningful, especially if you live far from people who share your interests or faith. But the Preacher's pictures of friendship are very physical: lifting someone who fell, keeping each other warm, standing back to back. Screens can't fully do that. Try to have at least a few friends you see in person, who know your face, your family, and your bad days. And be careful with online friends you've never met. If someone online asks you to keep secrets, send photos, or meet in person, tell a trusted adult right away. Real friends don't pressure you into hiding things.

The chapter ends with a story about a king. "Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who doesn't know how to receive admonition any more." A young person who is wise and willing to learn is better off than a powerful old king who won't listen to anyone. Age and power don't make you wise. Teachability does. That's good news for teenagers: you don't have to wait until you're older to be wise. But the Preacher also notes that even the popular young king who replaces the old one will eventually be forgotten. Popularity is hevel too.

Chapter 5 begins with a short section about worship. "Guard your steps when you go to God's house; for to draw near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools." The Preacher warns against going through the motions of religion without really paying attention. It's better to listen than to perform.

Then he says, “Don’t be rash with your mouth, and don’t let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and you on earth. Therefore let your words be few.”

> **REAL TALK** **Few Words**
>
> The Preacher isn’t telling you to stop praying. The Psalms are full of long, honest prayers. He’s warning against careless words, empty promises, and showing off. Some people make big promises to God when they’re scared or emotional, like, God, if You get me through this test, I’ll read my Bible every day forever, and then forget about it. The Preacher says it’s better not to make a promise than to make one and break it. When you talk to God, be honest, be humble, and mean what you say. And remember to listen too. Sometimes the best prayer is a few honest words followed by silence.

The Preacher’s warning about words also fits with the rest of chapter 5. He says that just as dreams come with lots of worries, a fool’s speech comes with lots of words. People who talk the most aren’t always the wisest. Sometimes they’re just the loudest. Think about how much noise fills your day: notifications, videos, podcasts, comments, opinions. The Preacher invites you into something rare: quiet. Coming to God with a quiet, listening heart is an act of trust. It says, You are God, and I am not. I don’t need to impress You. I’m here to listen.

Notice how chapters 4 and 5 fit together. The Preacher looks at oppression, envy, loneliness, and empty religion, and in the middle of it all he points to friendship and to honest worship. Those are two of God’s best answers to a lonely, unfair world: people who walk with you, and a God who listens to you. You need both. A friend can lift you up when you fall. God can hold you when no one else is around.

REAL TALK **Being the Friend Who Lifts**

It's easy to read Two are better than one and think about the friends you wish you had. But it's also a challenge to be that kind of friend. Are you the person who lifts others up when they fall, or the one who walks past? Do you notice when a friend has gone quiet, seems sad, or is pulling away? Sometimes lifting someone up looks like a text that says, Hey, I've been thinking about you. Sometimes it's sitting with them at lunch. And sometimes it's telling a trusted adult when a friend says something that worries you, like that they want to hurt themselves. That isn't betraying them. It might save their life.

There's also something to learn from the Preacher's honesty in chapter 4. He doesn't rush past the tears of the oppressed. He looks at them. A lot of people scroll past suffering in the news because it's too much to take in. That's understandable. But God sees every tear, and He calls His people to be comforters. You can't fix every injustice in the world, but you can comfort the person in front of you, and you can speak up when you see someone being crushed.

KEY VERSE

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn't have another to lift him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Preacher was so troubled that the oppressed had no comforter? How could you be a comforter to someone?
2. How much of what you do is driven by comparison? What would change if it weren't?
3. Who are the people who would pick you up if you fell? Whose cord are you part of?
4. What do you think it means to let your words be few before God?

TRY THIS *Reach out to someone who might be lonely this week. Sit with them, invite them somewhere, or send them an encouraging message. Then thank God for one friend who has picked you up when you fell.*

CHAPTER 4

Money, Unfairness, and Today's Gifts

Ecclesiastes 5:8–10:20

If you could have any amount of money, how much would be enough? Most people, when they're honest, would say: a little more than I have now. The Preacher saw right through that. "He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity."

That's one of the most accurate sentences ever written about money. If you love money, you'll never have enough. Every raise becomes the new normal. Every purchase creates a new want. Studies of lottery winners and wealthy people often find that, after a short burst of happiness, they're no more satisfied than before.

The Preacher notices more problems with wealth. When your stuff increases, so do the people who want a piece of it. Rich people worry so much about their money that they can't sleep, while "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much." And in the end, you can't take any of it with you. "As he came out of his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labor, which he may carry away in his hand."

REAL TALK **Never Enough**

Advertisers spend billions of dollars every year trying to convince you that you need something you don't have. Influencers show off hauls, unboxings, and luxury lifestyles. It's easy to feel like you'll finally be happy once you get the right shoes, the right phone, or the right car. Ecclesiastes says that's a trap. Jesus said the same thing: "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses." A good practice is to notice the moment you start wanting something. Ask yourself, Will this really satisfy me? Wait a week before buying anything big. And practice gratitude for what you already have.

But then the Preacher says something that surprises people who think Ecclesiastes is just gloomy. "Behold, that which I have seen to be good and proper is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor, in which he labors under the sun, all the days of his life which God has given him; for this is his portion."

He goes on to say that when God gives someone wealth and the ability to enjoy it, "this is the gift of God." Money isn't evil. Possessions aren't evil. The ability to enjoy them is a gift from God. The problem comes when you love them, worship them, or think they can give you ultimate meaning.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Enjoyment Refrain**

Seven times in Ecclesiastes, the Preacher pauses his hard observations to say something like: there's nothing better than to eat, drink, and enjoy your work, because it's a gift from God. You can find these refrains in chapters 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, and 11. Some readers have thought the Preacher was being cynical, as if he were saying, life is meaningless, so you might as well party. But the refrains always connect enjoyment to God's hand and God's gift. Most Christian readers see them as glimmers of light breaking through the clouds. When you stop trying to squeeze ultimate meaning out of life, you're finally free to enjoy it.

The middle chapters of Ecclesiastes, 6 through 10, are a collection of observations and proverbs. Some are about the shortness of life. “A good name is better than fine perfume.” Some are about wisdom in daily life. “Don’t be hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.” Some are about nostalgia. “Don’t say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For you do not ask wisely about this.” There’s even one about how a little foolishness can ruin a lot of wisdom. “Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to produce an evil odor; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor.” One dumb post can ruin a good reputation.

One of the most surprising lines says it’s better to go to a funeral than to a party, because a funeral reminds you that life is short. “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living should take this to heart.” That isn’t morbid. It’s wise. Remembering that your life is limited can help you spend it on what matters.

> **REAL TALK** **Good Days and Hard Days**
>
> “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider.” That’s simple but powerful advice. When life is going well, enjoy it, and don’t feel guilty for being happy. When life is hard, stop and think. Ask what you can learn, who you can lean on, and how God might be at work. Both kinds of days come from God’s hand, and both are part of your story.

The Preacher also faces one of life’s most frustrating realities: it’s unfair. Sometimes good people get treated like the wicked deserve, and wicked people get treated like the good deserve. The Preacher calls that hevel. He sees that no one, however wise, can figure out all of God’s work under the sun. The harder you try, the more it slips away.

And then he writes a line that every student, athlete, and job seeker should know. “I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.”

The fastest runner doesn’t always win. The strongest army doesn’t always win. The smartest person doesn’t always get the job. The most skilled person doesn’t always get noticed. Sometimes the runner trips. Sometimes someone gets sick on the day of the test. Sometimes the other person just happened to know the coach.

> **REAL TALK** **When Life Isn’t Fair**
>
> You might work incredibly hard and still not make the team. You might study for weeks and still bomb the test. You might be the best candidate and still not get chosen. That hurts, and Ecclesiastes doesn’t pretend it doesn’t. But it also frees you from a dangerous lie: that everything that happens to you is a perfect reflection of your worth. It’s not. Time and chance happen to everyone. Work hard, because diligence matters. But don’t measure your value by your results. Your worth was settled by God before you ever stepped onto the field. And if something unfair is happening because of real injustice, like discrimination, bullying, or abuse, speak up and tell a trusted adult.

So how do you live in a world like that? The Preacher’s answer in chapter 9 is one of the most joyful passages in the Bible. “Go your way—eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.” Wear clean clothes. Enjoy the people you love. Love your spouse someday, if God gives you one. Enjoy your days, because they are your portion.

And then: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” Life is short, and you don’t know what tomorrow will bring. So don’t wait. Do what’s in front of you, and do it with your whole heart. Paul

said something similar: “whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”

REAL TALK **Today’s Simple Gifts**

What are the simple gifts in your life? Maybe it’s a really good sandwich. A sunset. A song that gives you chills. Laughing with your friends until your stomach hurts. A hug from your mom. A walk with your dog. A hot shower on a cold day. The first warm day of spring. Ecclesiastes says those aren’t small things. They’re gifts from God’s hand. You can’t make them your ultimate meaning, but you can receive them with joy and gratitude. Try putting your phone down and paying attention. Joy is often hiding in ordinary moments.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Is Ecclesiastes Contradicting Itself?**

Readers have long noticed that Ecclesiastes seems to say opposite things. Wisdom is better than folly, but the wise and foolish die alike. Life is hateful, but life is sweet. Enjoy your work, but work is chasing after wind. Some readers think the Preacher is quoting ideas and then answering them. Others think he is honestly recording how life feels from different angles, the way a journal might. Others see the tension as the point: under the sun, life really is both beautiful and broken, and only God can hold it together. Ancient Jewish teachers debated whether the book belonged in Scripture because of these tensions, and they concluded that it did, because it begins and ends with words of truth and the fear of God.

The middle chapters also contain a famous warning about trying too hard to be perfect. The Preacher notes that there is not a righteous person on earth who always does good and never sins. That’s humbling and freeing at the same time. You’re going to mess up. Everyone does. Wisdom isn’t pretending to be perfect. It’s being honest about your failures, asking for forgiveness, and getting back up.

There’s also wisdom here about anger, patience, and pride. “The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.” Patience is a quiet

kind of strength. It waits instead of exploding. It listens instead of interrupting. It lets things play out instead of forcing them. In a culture that wants everything instantly, patience is almost a superpower.

Chapter 9 also says that a living dog is better than a dead lion. In the ancient world, dogs were not cute pets. They were scavengers, and calling someone a dog was an insult. Lions were the kings of the animals. But the Preacher says a living dog is better off, because the living still have hope. As long as you are alive, there is hope. That's worth remembering on your hardest days. Your story isn't over.

REAL TALK **Gratitude Changes Your Brain**

Researchers who study happiness have found that people who regularly practice gratitude, such as writing down things they're thankful for, often report feeling happier and less stressed. The Preacher got there long before scientists did. Contentment doesn't come from getting more. It comes from noticing and receiving what you've already been given. Paul wrote from a prison cell that he had learned to be content in every situation. Contentment is something you learn, and you can start practicing it today.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sheol**

In chapter 9, the Preacher says there is no work or plan or knowledge in Sheol, where you are going. Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave or the realm of the dead. Much of the Old Testament speaks about it in shadowy terms, as a place of silence where the dead are cut off from life under the sun. Readers disagree about how much the Preacher knew about life after death. Some think he simply didn't know. Others think he was speaking only about this world, from the under the sun view. Over time, God revealed more, through prophets like Daniel, who spoke of people rising from the dust, and finally through Jesus, who rose from the dead and promised eternal life to all who trust Him. The Preacher's point still stands: you only get this life once, so live it fully now.

REAL TALK **When Chance Feels Cruel**

Time and chance can cut deeper than losing a game. Sometimes a car accident, a diagnosis, a layoff, or a natural disaster changes everything in a moment, and it seems completely random. Ecclesiastes doesn't give a neat explanation, and neither should we. But the rest of the Bible says that even what feels like chance is not outside God's care. Jesus said not a single sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father, and that you are worth more than many sparrows. You can grieve, ask hard questions, and be angry about what happened, and God can handle it. If a sudden loss has left you struggling to cope, please talk to a parent, school counselor, or pastor. You don't have to carry it alone.

KEY VERSE

He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think people who love money are never satisfied?
2. When have you seen time and chance affect the outcome of something, even when someone worked hard?
3. What's the difference between enjoying God's gifts and worshiping them?
4. What are three simple gifts you've enjoyed this week?

TRY THIS *Keep a gift list for one week. Every day, write down three simple gifts from God that you enjoyed. At the end of the week, read the whole list and thank Him.*

CHAPTER 5

Remember Your Creator

Ecclesiastes 11–12

The last two chapters of Ecclesiastes are written directly to young people. After eleven chapters of experiments and observations, the Preacher turns to you.

He starts with some advice about taking risks. "Cast your bread on the waters; for you shall find it after many days." That might sound strange, but it probably means something like: be generous, invest boldly, and take good risks, because your efforts will pay off in ways you can't predict. He adds, "Give a portion to seven, yes, even to eight." Spread your generosity and your efforts widely.

Then he warns against waiting for the perfect moment. "He who observes the wind won't sow; and he who regards the clouds won't reap." If a farmer waits until the weather is perfect, he'll never plant anything. "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening don't withhold your hand; for you don't know which will prosper."

> **REAL TALK** **Waiting for Perfect**
>
> Do you ever put things off until conditions are perfect? I'll start working out when I have more time. I'll try out for the play when I'm more confident. I'll talk to that person when I know exactly what to say. I'll start reading my Bible when life calms down. The Preacher says if you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never do anything. You don't know which of your efforts will succeed.

> So sow your seed anyway. Try the thing. Send the application. Start the habit. Some seeds won't grow, but some will.

Then he says something wonderful about youth. "Truly the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to see the sun." Life is good. Enjoy it. "Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."

Notice the balance. The Preacher isn't telling young people to stop having fun. He's telling them to enjoy life, follow their dreams, and see the world. But he adds a reminder: you're accountable to God for how you live. Freedom and responsibility go together.

And then comes the verse this whole book has been building toward. "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Remember**
>
> In the Bible, to remember doesn't just mean to think about something. It means to act on it, to pay attention, and to live in light of it. When God remembers His people, He acts to help them. When the Preacher tells you to remember your Creator, he's telling you to put God at the center of your life now, not someday. The word Creator is a reminder that God made you. You belong to Him. Your life is His gift, and He knows how it's supposed to work.

Why remember Him in your youth? Because youth is when habits form, when the direction of your life is set, and when you have the most energy and time. And because, as the Preacher goes on to describe, youth doesn't last.

What follows is one of the most vivid poems in the Bible, a picture of growing old. The Preacher describes it like a great house falling into ruin. The sun, moon, and stars grow dark, perhaps a picture of failing eyesight or the joy fading from life. “The keepers of the house shall tremble,” which might be shaking hands or arms. “The strong men shall bow themselves,” probably bent legs or back. “The grinders cease because they are few,” which most readers take as losing teeth. “Those who look out of the windows are darkened,” eyes going dim.

The poem continues. The doors to the street are shut, maybe hearing fading. Old people wake up early at the sound of a bird. They’re afraid of heights and of falling. “The almond tree shall blossom,” which many think pictures white hair, since almond blossoms are white. The grasshopper drags itself along, slow and heavy. Desire fails.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Reading the Poem of Aging**

Interpreters have different views on the details of Ecclesiastes 12. Many read it as a symbolic description of the human body growing old: arms, legs, teeth, eyes, ears, and hair. Others read it as a picture of a household or a village shutting down after a death, with servants trembling and mourners in the streets. Still others see it as a storm darkening the world. These views can overlap. Whatever the details, the message is clear: life is short, bodies age, and death comes to everyone. The Preacher isn’t trying to scare young people. He’s trying to wake them up.

Then the poem ends with death, pictured as a silver cord snapping and a golden bowl breaking, a pitcher shattered at the spring and a wheel broken at the well. “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” Earlier, in chapter 3, the Preacher asked who knows whether the spirit goes upward. Here, he gives an answer: the spirit returns to God.

REAL TALK **Old People in Your Life**

Think about the older people in your life: grandparents, great-aunts, elderly neighbors, people at church. They were once young, just like you. They had dreams, crushes, friends, and fears. Many of them have wisdom you won't find on the internet. Ecclesiastes 12 is a reminder to honor them, listen to their stories, and spend time with them while you can. Ask a grandparent what they wish they'd known at your age. You might be surprised by what you learn. And remember that one day, if God gives you a long life, you'll be the one with white hair, hoping someone younger will listen.

REAL TALK **Thinking About Death**

Ecclesiastes talks about death a lot, and that can feel heavy or even scary. It's normal to wonder what happens when we die, or to feel anxious about losing people you love. Thinking about death isn't morbid when it helps you live wisely. Moses prayed, "So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Counting your days means remembering that they're limited, so you spend them on what matters most. But if thoughts about death are constant, frightening, or make you feel like you want to die, please talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988. You don't have to sort through those feelings alone.

The book comes back around to where it began. "'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher. 'All is vanity!'" Everything under the sun is vapor.

Then a narrator steps in to sum things up. He says the Preacher was wise, and he carefully arranged many proverbs and sought out words of truth. "The words of the wise are like goads." A goad was a sharp stick farmers used to poke oxen and keep them moving in the right direction. Wise words sting sometimes, but they keep you on track. He also says, with a touch of humor that every student will appreciate, "of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

And then comes the bottom line of the entire book. “This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Bottom Line**

After all the experiments, observations, frustrations, and joys, Ecclesiastes ends simply. Fear God. Keep His commandments. Remember that God sees everything and will judge it. That might sound heavy, but it’s actually the answer to the whole book. If everything under the sun is vapor, then meaning must come from above the sun. And if God will judge every work, then our lives aren’t meaningless after all. What we do matters to Him. The fear of God here means awe, reverence, and trust, the same fear Proverbs opened with: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Here’s a fascinating detail: Ecclesiastes never once uses God’s personal covenant name, the LORD. It always simply says God, the Creator above the sun, which fits a book looking at life from ground level. Wisdom starts with the fear of God, and Ecclesiastes ends there.

The judgment the Preacher mentions can sound frightening, and it is serious. But it also means that nothing is wasted or forgotten by God. Every hidden kindness, every quiet act of faithfulness, every tear, every wrong done to the oppressed, God sees it all. Under the sun, injustice often wins and good deeds go unnoticed. But under the sun isn’t the end of the story.

REAL TALK **Don’t Wait Until Later**

A lot of people think, I’ll get serious about God later. When I’m older. After college. Once I’ve had my fun. The Preacher’s advice is the opposite: remember Him now. Not because God wants to take away your fun, but because life with Him is the best life there is, and because none of us knows how many days we have. Paul told young Timothy not to let anyone look

down on him because he was young, but to set an example in speech, life, love, faith, and purity. You don't have to wait to matter to God or to serve Him. Your faith can be real right now.

It's striking that Ecclesiastes saves its most direct appeal for the young. The Preacher had already lived his life, made his mistakes, and tested every path. Now he turns to the next generation and essentially says, Don't do what I did. Don't spend your life chasing the wind and discover too late that it was empty. Start with God. Build your life on Him from the beginning, and enjoy every good gift along the way.

That doesn't mean you'll never struggle with the things Ecclesiastes describes. You'll still feel restless sometimes. You'll still be tempted to chase clout, money, pleasure, and achievement. You'll still face unfairness and loss. But you'll face them with a Creator you remember, a God who is above the sun and who holds your life in His hands.

The image of the silver cord and the golden bowl is also worth pausing on. Silver and gold are precious. The point is that a human life is valuable, even though it's fragile. You are precious to God, not because you're impressive, rich, or famous, but because He made you. That's the deepest answer to the emptiness the Preacher felt. Your life isn't vapor to God. He made you, He knows you, and He remembers you.

REAL TALK **Cast Your Bread**

Casting your bread on the waters can look like a lot of things at your age. Being kind to the new kid. Helping a younger sibling with homework. Giving some of your babysitting money to a family in need. Practicing your instrument when no one is listening. Volunteering at a food pantry. Saying yes to a chance to serve at church. You might not see the results right away, and

you might never find out how much it mattered. But the Preacher says you'll find it after many days. Generosity and faithfulness have a way of coming back around, often in ways you'd never expect.

KEY VERSE

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them;"

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Preacher wants young people to remember God now and not later?
2. What seed have you been waiting to sow until conditions are perfect?
3. How does knowing that life is short change how you want to live?
4. Why do you think Ecclesiastes ends with fear God and keep His commandments?

TRY THIS *Ask an older person you know what they wish they had known at your age, and write down their answer. Then write a short prayer asking God to help you remember Him in the days of your youth.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Ecclesiastes aches because, under the sun, death seems to get the last word. The wise die like fools. The rich leave their money to someone else. The hardest worker and the laziest person end up in the same grave. Again and again, the Preacher runs into that wall. And yet he also senses that God has set eternity in our hearts. We were made for more than vapor.

Jewish readers treasure Ecclesiastes for its honesty and its call to fear God and enjoy His gifts. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw that the Preacher's deepest questions find their answer in Jesus. Paul wrote that creation "was subjected to vanity," using the same word the Greek translation used for hevel, but "in hope" that it "will be delivered from the bondage of decay." Jesus stepped under the sun. He lived an ordinary human life, worked with His hands, ate and drank with friends, wept at a grave, and died. Then He did what no one under the sun had ever done. He rose from the dead. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Because He lives, death doesn't get the last word anymore. And that changes everything about ordinary life. Paul wrote, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." In Jesus, nothing done for Him is vapor.

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He set eternity in your heart, so nothing less than Him will ever fully satisfy.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Ecclesiastes says there is not a righteous person on earth who never sins. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus stepped under the sun and beat death.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again, so death doesn't get the last word.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

The Preacher tried to earn meaning and came up empty. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Remember your Creator.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. The Preacher would tell you to let your words be few and honest. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've chased things that couldn't satisfy me, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus stepped into this world, died for my sins, and rose from the dead, so that death doesn't get the last word. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Fill the emptiness in my heart that nothing else can fill. Help me remember You now, in my youth, and enjoy the good gifts You give without making them my god. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Ecclesiastes 3 and 12, then 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter about how Jesus beat death.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Enjoy a simple gift. Share a meal with people you love this week, and thank God for it out loud.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. The Preacher asked hard questions for twelve chapters. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Ecclesiastes is right, everything under the sun is vapor, and the only thing that lasts is the God above it, who is calling you to remember Him now.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (WEB)

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The King Whose Love Never Fails

Song of Solomon, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Whose Love Never Fails: The Song of Solomon, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Here's something that surprises a lot of people: there's a love song in the Bible. Not a hymn, not a prayer, not a list of rules. A real love song, full of longing, delight, nervousness, missing someone, finding them again, and promising to be faithful forever.

Some people feel a little awkward about that. Isn't the Bible supposed to be serious and spiritual? But the God who made the stars also made hearts that skip a beat. Love, attraction, and romance aren't embarrassing accidents. They're His idea. And because they're powerful, He cares about how we handle them.

So this book is going to talk honestly and respectfully about love: what it is, why it's worth waiting for, how to treat people well, how to spot a relationship that isn't healthy, and why the greatest love story of all isn't one you have to wait for. It's one you can step into right now.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through the Song of Solomon in five chapters: why a love song is in the Bible (Song of Songs 1), don't awaken love before its time (2–3:5), the wedding and building each other up (3:6–5:1), when love gets tested (5:2–7:13), and love as strong as death (8).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains the book's names, how Jews and Christians have read it, and how its

ancient nature pictures work. Read it first, because some of the images make a lot more sense once you know what they meant.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with a friend, parent, or leader; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how literally or symbolically to read the Song, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes the Song in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-second book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some warmth and humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

The Song of Solomon is a unique book, a love poem that celebrates romance and marriage. This book handles it tastefully and age-appropriately. It never describes anything graphic, and it explains the Song's poetic images in general terms. Its goal is to help teens see love, attraction, and faithfulness as good gifts from God, without shame and without pressure.

The book gives honest, non-shaming guidance on boundaries, waiting, and respect, built around the Song's three-time refrain about not awakening love before its time. It includes a Real Talk box on body image and self-worth, and a safety box that explains the difference between healthy and controlling or abusive relationships and lists trusted adults, Love Is Respect (1-866-331-9474), RAINN (1-800-656-4673), 988, and 911.

The opening section fairly presents the main ways Jews and Christians have read the Song: as a literal love song celebrating marriage, as an allegory of God's love for His people or Christ's love

for the church, or as both. The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament presents Jesus as the Bridegroom who laid down His life for His people, while respecting that Jewish readers treasure the Song in their own rich ways, reading it each year at Passover. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. Some readers may want to talk them through with a parent or a trusted leader. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them think. Values that have been thought through tend to last.

My prayer is that every reader will see love as God's good gift, will treat others with honor, and will know the love that many waters can't quench.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

The Song of Solomon is a love poem, or maybe a collection of love poems, written mostly as a conversation between a young woman and the man she loves, with a group of friends called the daughters of Jerusalem chiming in. Some translations, including the WEB, even add little labels like Beloved, Lover, and Friends to show who is speaking. It's poetry, not a story told in order, so it jumps around in time, moves between dreams and real life, and repeats ideas like a song repeats its chorus. It never mentions the law, the temple, or prayer, and God's name appears only once, near the very end. And yet it's one of the most treasured books in Scripture.

What's in a Name?

The book's first line calls it the Song of songs, which is Solomon's. In Hebrew, saying something that way, like holy of holies or king of kings, means the greatest of its kind, so the title means the best song ever. That's why the WEB calls it the Song of Songs, while many other Bibles call it the Song of Solomon. Both names refer to the same book. Solomon wrote over a thousand songs, according to 1 Kings, and tradition has linked this one to him. Some scholars think the phrase means the song is dedicated to Solomon, or written in his style, or about him, rather than by him. In this book, I'll use both names, and Scripture references will follow the WEB's name, Song of Songs.

How Have People Read It?

For most of history, many Jewish and Christian readers read the Song mainly as an allegory, a picture of something bigger. Jewish teachers saw in it the love between God and Israel. Christian writers from the early church through the Reformation often saw Christ's love for the church, or for the believer's soul. Many modern readers, including many Christians, read it first as a literal love song that celebrates romantic love and marriage as God's good gift, pointing out that the Bible elsewhere celebrates marriage and that poetry about real human love is worth having in Scripture. A large number of readers today say both: it's a real love song, and because the Bible calls God's relationship with His people a marriage, human love at its best points to God's love. This book reads it that way, while respecting each view.

Nature Metaphors

The Song is full of images from nature and ancient life: gazelles, doves, lilies, vineyards, gardens, spices, fruit, mountains, and towers. To modern ears, some sound funny. If someone told you your hair looked like a flock of goats, you'd probably be confused. But in ancient Israel, these were compliments. A flock of black goats streaming down a hillside in the sun was beautiful. Doves stood for gentleness and loyalty. Towers stood for strength and dignity. Gardens and vineyards were pictures of delight, beauty, and something precious that belongs to someone. The poet isn't giving a scientific description. He's saying, You remind me of the most beautiful things I know. When you read the Song, ask what feeling each picture creates, not what it would look like literally.

Why It Matters for You

The Song shows that love and attraction are good, that faithfulness is beautiful, that people should be treated with honor, and that love is worth protecting and waiting for. In a culture that often treats love as either cheap or confusing, that's a breath of fresh air.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Song of Songs 1): Why a love song is in the Bible.

Chapter 2 (Song of Songs 2–3:5): Don't awaken love before its time.

Chapter 3 (Song of Songs 3:6–5:1): The wedding and building each other up.

Chapter 4 (Song of Songs 5:2–7:13): When love gets tested.

Chapter 5 (Song of Songs 8): Love as strong as death.

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CHAPTER 1

Why a Love Song Is in the Bible

Song of Songs 1

Imagine opening your Bible, flipping past Ecclesiastes, and landing on a page where a young woman is talking about how much she misses the guy she loves. That's how the Song of Solomon begins. No introduction about kings or prophets. Just a title, and then a heart that's full.

The very first line tells you what kind of book this is. "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's." The greatest song. And what is it about? Love.

Right away, the young woman says that his love is better than wine, and that even his name is like perfume poured out. In other words, just thinking about him makes the whole room feel different. If you've ever had a crush, you probably know a little of that feeling. Your heart beats faster when you see a certain name on your phone. You replay a conversation in your head. You notice everything about a person.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **God's Name in the Song**
>
> The Song of Solomon is one of only two books in the Bible, along with Esther, that hardly mentions God directly. His name appears just once, near the end, in a phrase about love being like a flame of the LORD. Some early readers wondered whether a love song belonged in Scripture at all. Around the end of the first century, a famous rabbi named Akiva answered that all the writings

are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies. Jews and Christians alike have recognized it as God's word, a book that shows His fingerprints on one of the most powerful parts of human life.

So why is a love song in the Bible? Because God created love. On the very first pages of Scripture, God makes a man and a woman and says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." He brings them together, and the man practically writes a poem when he sees her. Genesis says that "they will be one flesh," and that the first couple "were both naked, and they were not ashamed." Before sin entered the world, love between a husband and wife was pure, joyful, and free of shame.

The Song takes us back toward that garden. It celebrates attraction, romance, friendship, and faithfulness as good gifts from a good God. It doesn't treat love as dirty or embarrassing. It also doesn't treat it as cheap or casual. It treats it as precious.

REAL TALK **Is It Okay to Like Someone?**

Some teens feel guilty for having crushes, as if being attracted to someone were wrong. It isn't. God made you with a heart that can be drawn to another person, and that's part of growing up. Liking someone isn't sin. What matters is what you do with those feelings: whether you treat the other person with respect, whether you keep your own values, and whether you let God guide your heart. It's also completely okay if you're not interested in dating right now, or haven't had a crush. Everyone grows at a different pace, and your worth has nothing to do with your relationship status.

Then the young woman says something that surprises a lot of readers. "I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains." She continues, "Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me." Her brothers had been angry with her and had made her work outside in

the vineyards, and the sun had darkened her skin. In a culture where the city girls might have looked down on her for working outside, she felt self-conscious.

But notice what she says. Not just dark. Dark and lovely. She's aware that some people might judge her appearance, but she also knows she's beautiful. Kedar's tents were made of black goat hair, a familiar sight in the desert. Solomon's curtains were rich and royal. She is saying, You might see something ordinary, but I'm beautiful and precious.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dark and Lovely**

In ancient Israel, people who worked outdoors, like farmers and shepherds, were usually tanned by the sun, while wealthy city people often stayed indoors. So the young woman's comment is most likely about her life of hard outdoor work and the way others might judge her for it. Her words have meant a lot to readers in many cultures, including many Black Christians and others who have faced prejudice about their skin. The Bible never treats any skin color as less beautiful than another. Every person is made in God's image.

REAL TALK **Your Body and Your Worth**

A lot of teenagers struggle with how they look. Maybe it's your skin, your weight, your height, your acne, your hair, or the way your body is changing. Social media can make it worse, with filtered faces and edited bodies that aren't even real. If you've ever stood in front of the mirror and felt like you didn't measure up, you're not alone. The young woman in the Song felt that way too. But she also said, I am lovely. God says the same about you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, as Psalm 139 says. When God chose David to be king, He said, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Take care of your body as a gift, but don't let a mirror or a feed decide your worth. If you're struggling with an eating disorder, harming yourself, or thoughts that you'd be better off gone, please talk to a parent, counselor, or doctor, or call or text 988. You are worth caring for.

As the chapter goes on, the young woman asks where she can find her beloved, who is a shepherd, and he answers playfully. Then they take turns giving each other compliments. He tells her she is beautiful and that her eyes are like doves. She tells him that he is handsome and delightful. They talk about sitting together under the trees, with the cedar beams over them like the roof of a house.

That back-and-forth is one of the sweetest parts of the Song. They aren't trying to impress each other or compete. They're delighting in each other. Each one makes the other feel seen and valued.

> **REAL TALK** **Words That Build Up**
>
> Notice that the couple in the Song keeps speaking kind, honoring words to each other. Healthy love does that. It notices what's good in the other person and says it out loud. Unhealthy relationships often do the opposite: insults disguised as jokes, constant criticism, or comments that make someone feel small. You don't need to be dating to practice this. Encourage your friends. Tell your siblings what you appreciate about them. Thank your parents. Learning to build people up with your words now will make every relationship in your life better, including a future marriage if God gives you one.

The first chapter also shows that love isn't only about feelings. The two of them are friends. They talk, laugh, and enjoy being together. Later in the book, she'll say of him, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend." Friendship is the foundation of lasting love. Attraction may start a relationship, but friendship, respect, and faithfulness are what keep it going.

So why is there a love song in the Bible? Because God isn't embarrassed by love. He invented it. He wants us to know that it's good, that it's powerful, and that it deserves to be treated with care. And, as we'll see later, He wants us to see in human love a picture of an even greater love, His love for us.

REAL TALK **Comparison and the Daughters of Jerusalem**

The young woman felt the daughters of Jerusalem staring at her. Today, the staring often happens through a screen. You see someone's highlight reel and compare it to your behind-the-scenes life. You count likes and wonder why you got fewer. You see couples posting about each other and feel left out. Comparison can make you feel unlovable, but it's built on a lie, because almost nobody posts their real, ordinary, messy life. If scrolling makes you feel worse about yourself, it might be time to take a break, mute certain accounts, or set time limits. Spend more time with people face to face. And remember that God's opinion of you doesn't change with your feed.

It's worth noticing something about how the Song talks. The young woman speaks first, and she speaks the most. In many ancient cultures, women's voices were rarely heard in public, and love poetry was often written by men about women. But in the Song, the young woman's feelings, hopes, and words take center stage. She isn't a silent prize to be won. She is a full person with her own voice, opinions, and dignity. The Song honors both the man and the woman as equals in love.

That matters for how you treat people. Whether you're a guy or a girl, the Song invites you to see others as whole people, not just bodies, trophies, or status symbols. Someone you like has their own thoughts, fears, dreams, and relationship with God. Love that is worthy of the name sees all of that and honors it.

The Song also reminds us that love is a big part of being human, but it isn't the only part. Some people will marry and some won't. Jesus never married, and neither did Paul, and both lived full, meaningful lives. Paul even said singleness could be a gift that allowed him to serve God with fewer distractions. If God leads you to marriage someday, wonderful. If He doesn't, you aren't missing out on the

most important love. The deepest love of all, as we'll see at the end of this book, is available to everyone.

KEY VERSE

I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains.

Song of Songs 1:5 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think some people are surprised that there's a love song in the Bible?
2. What does it tell you about God that He created love and attraction?
3. Why do you think the young woman says she is both dark and lovely? How does that apply to how you see yourself?
4. How can you use your words to build people up this week?

TRY THIS *Write down three things you like about yourself that have nothing to do with your appearance. Then write one sentence thanking God for making you on purpose.*

CHAPTER 2

Don’t Awaken Love Before Its Time

Song of Songs 2–3:5

Chapter 2 opens with the young woman describing herself humbly. “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” Sharon was a coastal plain covered in wildflowers. She might be saying, I’m just one ordinary flower among many. But her beloved answers right away. “As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” To him, she stands out from everyone.

She answers back that he is like an apple tree in a forest, a tree that gives shade and sweet fruit. “His banner over me is love.” In ancient times, armies marched under banners to show who they belonged to. She’s saying that his love is like a flag over her, telling everyone that she belongs with him and is safe with him.

Then comes something important. In the middle of all this romance, the young woman stops and speaks to her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem. “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Refrain**

This line appears three times in the Song, in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, almost like a chorus. To adjure someone means to ask them to make a serious promise. Roes and hinds are gazelles and deer, gentle, beautiful animals that are easily startled, perhaps a picture of how delicate love is. The young woman, who knows how powerful love is, is warning her friends: don't rush it. Don't try to force romance or stir up desire before the right time. Love isn't something to play with. It's something to protect.

Notice who says this. It isn't a strict parent or a grumpy teacher. It's the young woman herself, the one who is in love. She isn't against love. She's for it. And because she understands how strong it is, she knows it shouldn't be awakened too soon.

What does it mean to awaken love before its time? Think of love and desire like a fire. In a fireplace, fire is wonderful. It warms the whole house. But a fire in the wrong place can burn the house down. God designed the deepest kind of love, including physical intimacy, to be enjoyed within the safety of a lifelong commitment, marriage. Awakening it too early is like lighting a fire before you've built the fireplace.

REAL TALK **Boundaries, Waiting, and Respect**

The world often tells teenagers that everyone is doing it, that waiting is old-fashioned, and that there's something wrong with you if you're not in a relationship. The Song says something different: love is worth waiting for. Waiting isn't about being afraid of love or ashamed of your body. It's about protecting something precious. Here are a few wise ideas. Decide your boundaries ahead of time, before you're in a heated moment. Avoid situations that make it harder to keep them, like being alone together late at night. Group hangouts are a great way to get to know someone. Talk to a parent or trusted adult about your questions. And remember that respect

goes both ways. No one should ever pressure you, and you should never pressure anyone. A person who truly loves you will respect your no.

REAL TALK **If You've Already Crossed a Line**

Maybe you're reading this and thinking, It's too late for me. If you've made choices you regret, please hear this: God's grace is bigger than your past. Jesus didn't come for people who have it all together. He came for people who need forgiveness, which is all of us. You can bring anything to Him. You can make a fresh start today, and you are not damaged goods. Talking with a pastor, counselor, or trusted adult can help. And if something happened to you that you didn't choose, if someone pressured or forced you, that is not your fault, and it is not your sin. Please tell a trusted adult, or contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673 to talk with someone confidentially.

Next, the young woman hears her beloved coming. "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills." He's like a gazelle, running to see her. He calls to her to come away, because winter is past and spring has arrived. Flowers are blooming, birds are singing, and the fig trees and vines are budding.

The springtime imagery fits. Spring is a time of new life, new beginnings, and excitement. It's also a reminder that every season has its time, just like Ecclesiastes said. Spring can't be rushed. It comes when it comes.

Then comes an interesting line. "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that plunder the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Little Foxes**

In ancient Israel, foxes were a real problem for vineyard owners. They dug holes, chewed on vines, and ate the grapes. Little foxes could slip through the walls and do damage before anyone noticed. In the Song, the vineyard in blossom is a picture of a growing love relationship. The little foxes are small

problems that can ruin it if they aren't caught early: little lies, jealousy, unkind words, pride, selfishness, or a habit of not listening. Big problems in a relationship often start as little foxes that no one bothered to deal with.

The little foxes apply to more than romance. Friendships, family relationships, and even your relationship with God can be damaged by small things you ignore. A little resentment. A little dishonesty. A little neglect. Catching the foxes early is a sign of wisdom and love.

Then she says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." It's a picture of mutual belonging. Not one person owning or controlling the other, but two people giving themselves to each other freely.

REAL TALK **Dating Pressure**

Some teens feel like they're behind if they haven't dated yet. Others feel pressure from friends to get together with someone, or to go further than they want to. Here's the truth: there's no deadline. Many wise people didn't date at all in high school, and they're glad. If you do date, it's wise to involve your parents, to keep things public and group-centered, and to ask yourself whether the relationship is helping both of you grow closer to God and become better people. And if a friend is being pressured, stand with them. Saying, You don't have to do anything you don't want to, can be a gift.

REAL TALK **Talking With Your Parents**

Talking with your parents about crushes, dating, or love might feel awkward. That's normal. But your parents or guardians have been through it, and most of them want to help, not embarrass you. Try starting small: ask them how they met, or what they wish they'd known at your age. If talking with your parents isn't possible or safe, find another trusted adult, like a youth leader, a relative, or a school counselor. You don't have to figure out love on your own.

Chapter 3 begins with what sounds like a dream. At night, she searches for her beloved and can't find him. She goes out into the city, asks the watchmen, and finally finds him. She holds on to him

and won't let go. It's a picture of longing, the ache of missing someone. And then, once again, she repeats the refrain: don't stir up or awaken love until it so desires.

It's as if, every time the Song reaches a moment of strong emotion, it pauses to remind us: love is powerful. Handle it with care.

> **REAL TALK** **Why Wait?**
>
> Some people think waiting is just an arbitrary rule. But there are good reasons behind it. Love and physical intimacy create deep emotional bonds, and those bonds are meant to be protected by commitment. When they're awakened too early, it can lead to heartbreak, confusion, regret, pressure, and sometimes real physical consequences. Teen relationships also tend to be short, and that's normal, because you're still growing and figuring out who you are. Waiting gives you time to become the person you want to be before you give your heart away completely. It isn't about missing out. It's about saving the best for the right time and the right person.

Waiting doesn't mean you have to pretend you have no feelings. It means you choose what to do with them. You can admit you like someone. You can pray about it. You can talk with a parent or mentor. You can be friends. You can enjoy group activities. You can focus on growing as a person. And you can trust that God knows what He's doing with your story, even if it feels slow.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that God wants each person to learn to control their own body "in sanctification and honor." Notice the word honor. God's guidelines for love aren't about shame. They're about honor, treating yourself and others as precious, because they are.

KEY VERSE

I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires.

Song of Songs 2:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the young woman, who is in love, is the one who warns against awakening love too soon?
2. What does it look like to set healthy boundaries before you're in a relationship?
3. What are some little foxes that can ruin a relationship or friendship?
4. Why is it important that love includes respect for the other person's no?

TRY THIS *Write down two or three boundaries you want to keep in future relationships, and share them with a parent or trusted adult who can encourage you.*

CHAPTER 3

The Wedding and Building Each Other Up

Song of Songs 3:6–5:1

In the middle of the Song, a parade appears on the horizon. "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all spices of the merchant?" It's a royal wedding procession. Sixty mighty warriors surround the carriage, which King Solomon made from the wood of Lebanon, with silver posts, a gold base, and a purple seat.

Then the friends are invited to come and see. "Go out, you daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother has crowned him, in the day of his weddings, in the day of the gladness of his heart."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Weddings**

In ancient Israel, weddings were huge community celebrations. The groom and his friends would often go in a procession to bring the bride to his home, with music, dancing, and torches. The celebration could last a whole week, with feasting and joy. Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana, turning water into wine so the party could continue. Many readers think that the wedding in the Song is the center of the whole book, with the courtship before it and married life after it. Whether the groom is literally Solomon or a

young shepherd pictured as a king for the day, the point is that this is the happiest day of his life.

Notice the phrase the gladness of his heart. Marriage isn't presented as a cage or a burden. It's presented as joy. In a culture where some people make fun of marriage or say it doesn't matter, the Song celebrates it as one of the happiest things in life.

Then, in chapter 4, the groom speaks to his bride. He says, "Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful." He goes on to describe her using a long series of nature pictures, the kind of poem called a wasf in Arabic love poetry. Her eyes are like doves. Her hair is like a flock of goats coming down a mountain. Her smile is like a flock of freshly washed sheep. Her neck is like a tall tower with shields hanging on it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Ancient Compliments**

To modern readers, these compliments can sound hilarious. Goats? Sheep? A tower? But to people in ancient Israel, they were beautiful. Imagine a herd of black goats flowing down a sunlit hillside, their dark hair shimmering as they move. That's a picture of flowing, beautiful hair. Sheep coming up from the washing were bright white and perfectly matched, every one with a twin, so none were missing. That's a picture of a bright, complete smile. A tower decorated with shields stood tall and strong. That's a picture of dignity and confidence. The poet is using the most beautiful things he knows to describe the person he loves. If he lived today, he might compare her to a sunset, a starry sky, or a favorite song.

Then he says something tender. "You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you." He's not saying she's literally flawless. He's saying that, to him, she is completely lovely. Love sees the beauty in a person and treasures it.

He also calls her "my sister, my bride." That might sound strange today, but in ancient love poetry, calling your beloved sister was a way of saying, You're family to me. You're my closest companion. It's a word of deep friendship and belonging.

> **REAL TALK** **Building Each Other Up**
>
> The groom in the Song spends a long time telling his bride what he loves about her. That's a great picture of what healthy love does. It builds the other person up. It notices and celebrates. It makes them feel safe and treasured. Compare that to relationships where someone constantly criticizes, compares, or pressures. You can practice building people up right now, in your friendships and your family. And when you're older, look for someone who does that for you, and be that kind of person for them. Love that tears down isn't love at all.

Next, the groom describes his bride as "a locked up garden; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain." In the ancient world, a locked garden was a private place, beautiful and precious, open only to the one who had the key. Many readers see this as a picture of the purity and faithfulness she has saved for her husband. She belongs to him alone, and he to her alone.

> **REAL TALK** **You Are Not an Object**
>
> The Song never treats people as objects to be used. The groom and bride honor each other, wait for each other, and give themselves freely. That's very different from how love is often shown online, where people are treated like products to be judged, rated, and used. Pornography, in particular, teaches people to see others as objects rather than as image bearers of God, and it can be addictive and harmful. If you've encountered it, you're not alone, and there's no shame in asking for help. Talk to a parent, pastor, or counselor. God designed love to be about honor, commitment, and real connection, not consumption.

The section ends with a celebration. The bride invites her groom into her garden, and he says he has come. Then the friends cheer them on, telling them to eat and drink and enjoy their love. It's a joyful, tasteful picture of a wedding night, described entirely in poetic images of gardens, spices, honey, and wine.

Notice that the friends approve. They're celebrating. This isn't something secret or shameful. It's the joyful beginning of a lifelong commitment, blessed by the community and by God.

That's the big picture the Song paints. Love is good. Attraction is good. Waiting is wise. And within marriage, God's gift of love can be enjoyed freely and joyfully, without shame. The bride and groom in the Song aren't rushing, using, or pressuring each other. They're honoring each other, and that makes all the difference.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Garden and Eden**
>
> Gardens show up again and again in the Song: vineyards, orchards, spices, fountains, and flowers. Many readers think this isn't an accident. The Bible's story begins in a garden, Eden, where the first man and woman lived together without shame in God's presence. After sin, they were sent out of the garden. The Song's garden imagery seems to echo that first garden, a picture of love as God intended it, restored. And the Bible's story ends in a garden city, where a river of life flows and the tree of life grows. Love, at its best, is a little taste of paradise.

One more detail in this section is worth noticing. Five times in chapters 4 and 5, the groom calls her my bride. The word shows up only in this part of the Song, after the wedding procession. That's one reason many readers believe the poem places the celebration of physical love within marriage. The covenant comes first, and then the celebration. That order isn't an arbitrary rule. It's a picture of safety. Love flourishes best where it's protected by a promise.

It's also worth saying that marriages in real life aren't always like the Song. Some marriages are hard, and some end in divorce. If your parents are divorced or your family has been through a painful breakup, the Song isn't meant to make you feel ashamed or hopeless. God's love can heal broken stories, and your own future isn't decided by your family's past. Many people who grew up in hard homes go on to build loving, faithful families of their own.

> **REAL TALK** **Practicing Love Now**
>
> You don't have to wait until you're married to learn how to love well. In fact, the habits you build now will shape every relationship you ever have. Practice patience with your siblings. Practice keeping your promises to friends. Practice honesty with your parents. Practice apologizing when you're wrong, and forgiving when someone else is. Practice noticing the person who is left out. Paul wrote, "In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate to one another; in honor prefer one another." That's a training ground for faithful love, and it starts today.

KEY VERSE

You are all beautiful, my love. There is no spot in you.

Song of Songs 4:7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Song presents marriage as a time of joy rather than a burden?
2. Which ancient compliment in chapter 4 do you think is the funniest? What modern image would you use instead?
3. What are some ways you can build others up with your words?
4. How is the love in the Song different from the way love is often shown in media?

TRY THIS *Write a note to someone in your family telling them three specific things you appreciate about them, and give it to them this week.*

CHAPTER 4

When Love Gets Tested

Song of Songs 5:2–7:13

Every love story has hard moments, and the Song is honest about that. Right after the joy of the wedding, chapter 5 describes a misunderstanding.

It's night. The young woman is half asleep. "I was asleep, but my heart was awake. It is the voice of my beloved who knocks." He's at the door, asking her to let him in. His hair is wet with the night dew. But she hesitates. She's already in bed. She's comfortable. She says, in effect, I've already gotten ready for bed. Do I really have to get up?

By the time she gets up and opens the door, he's gone. "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved left, and had gone away. My heart went out when he spoke. I looked for him, but I didn't find him. I called him, but he didn't answer."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Dream or Reality?**
>
> Many interpreters think this scene, like the one in chapter 3, is a dream or a dreamlike poem. Others read it as a real event. Either way, it captures something true about relationships: sometimes one person reaches out and the other isn't ready, and then the moment slips away. Readers who see the Song as a picture of God and His people often compare this scene to Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says He stands at the door and knocks. Both

readings point to the same lesson: when love knocks, don't wait too long to answer.

The scene gets worse. As she searches for him in the city at night, the watchmen find her and treat her harshly, beating her and taking her cloak. It's a painful moment in the poem, a picture of how lost and vulnerable she feels. Commentators note that, unlike the watchmen in chapter 3, these guards are cruel. The Song doesn't hide that sometimes the world is not kind.

REAL TALK **When Someone Hurts You**

If anyone has ever physically hurt you, threatened you, or touched you without your permission, that is never okay, and it is never your fault. You deserve to be safe. Please tell a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. You can contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673 any time to talk with someone confidentially. If you're in danger right now, call 911. And if you're feeling hopeless or thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988. Speaking up is brave, and help is available.

Still, she doesn't give up. She asks her friends to help her find him and tell him that she's faint with love. They ask her, essentially, What's so special about him? And she answers with a beautiful poem describing him. He's radiant and strong, the best among ten thousand. She describes his head, his eyes, his hands, and his strength using pictures of gold, doves, jewels, marble, and cedars. And then she says, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend."

When her friends ask where he's gone, she realizes she knows. He's gone down to his garden. And she says again, with confidence, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." The misunderstanding hasn't broken their bond.

REAL TALK **Handling Conflict Well**

Every relationship has misunderstandings, whether it's with a friend, a sibling, a parent, or someday a spouse. Sometimes one person reaches out and the other is distracted or tired. Sometimes feelings get hurt. The Song shows a healthy response: she realizes she was wrong, she goes looking for him, and she remembers all the good things about him. Here are some wise ways to handle conflict. Don't let it fester. Go to the person and talk. Own your part, even if it's small. Listen more than you talk. Remember what you appreciate about the other person. And forgive. Healthy relationships aren't relationships with no conflict. They're relationships where conflict leads to understanding instead of breaking apart.

In chapter 6, the beloved reappears, and there's no hint of anger or punishment. He tells her again that she's beautiful, "awesome as an army with banners." He says that even among queens and princesses, she is unique, his one and only. Their reconciliation is gentle and complete.

That's a picture of what reconciliation can look like. He doesn't hold the moment at the door over her head. He doesn't make her earn her way back. He welcomes her with words of love.

Chapter 7 continues with another poem of praise, this time starting from her feet and moving up. Then the young woman speaks, full of confidence. "I am my beloved's. His desire is toward me." Notice how her words have grown. Back in chapter 2, she said, My beloved is mine, and I am his. Later, I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. Now she simply rests in belonging to him and in his desire for her. She's secure.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Reversal of Genesis**

Some scholars notice that the phrase his desire is toward me in 7:10 echoes Genesis 3:16. After the fall, God told Eve that her desire would be toward her husband, and he would rule over her, a description of how sin would twist

relationships between men and women into struggles for control. In the Song, it's reversed. The husband's desire is toward his wife, and there's no ruling or control, only mutual love. Many readers see the Song as a picture of love being restored toward what God intended in Eden.

The chapter ends with her inviting him to go out into the countryside together, to walk through the vineyards in spring and see whether the vines have budded. It's a peaceful, happy picture of a couple who have come through a hard moment stronger.

REAL TALK **Healthy or Controlling?**

The love in the Song is free, mutual, and respectful. Neither person controls the other. That's an important picture, because some relationships, even among teenagers, become controlling or abusive. Healthy relationships include respect, honesty, trust, kindness, and freedom to have your own friends, opinions, and boundaries. Unhealthy or abusive relationships may include jealousy that feels scary, checking your phone or location, telling you what to wear or who to talk to, isolating you from friends and family, insults, threats, pressure to do things you don't want to do, or any kind of physical harm. Some controlling partners say, I'm only doing this because I love you. That isn't love. Love doesn't control, threaten, or hurt. If something in your relationship feels wrong, please talk to a trusted adult. You can also call Love Is Respect at 1-866-331-9474 or text LOVEIS to 22522, any time. If you've been sexually assaulted, contact RAINN at 1-800-656-4673. If you're in danger, call 911. If you're feeling hopeless, call or text 988.

Paul's famous description of love fits the Song well. "Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil." That last phrase means love doesn't keep a record of wrongs. The beloved in the Song shows exactly that kind of love when he welcomes her back.

REAL TALK **Jealousy, Good and Bad**

The Song calls love fierce, and some readers wonder whether that means jealousy is good. There's a difference. Healthy commitment means you want to be the only one, and you're faithful to each other. Unhealthy jealousy is suspicious, possessive, and controlling: demanding to see someone's messages, getting angry when they talk to friends, or accusing them without reason. That kind of jealousy comes from insecurity and fear, not love. If you notice it in yourself, talk to someone you trust about where it's coming from. If you notice it in someone you're dating, take it seriously. It often gets worse over time.

The middle of the Song is also a reminder that love takes effort. The young woman's moment of hesitation at the door wasn't a terrible sin. She was just tired and comfortable. But small moments of selfishness and distraction can create distance in any relationship. The cure is attention. Notice the people you love. Make time for them. Put the phone down when they're talking. Show up when it's inconvenient. Those small choices build trust over time.

Another thing to notice is how the friends help. When the young woman can't find her beloved, she asks the daughters of Jerusalem for help, and they ask her good questions that help her remember why she loves him. Good friends do that. They don't feed drama, gossip, or tear down the people you care about. They help you see clearly, remember what matters, and make things right. Be that kind of friend, and look for that kind of friend.

REAL TALK **Breakups and Heartbreak**

Not every relationship ends in reconciliation. Sometimes friendships end, and dating relationships break up. Heartbreak can hurt more than people admit. You might lose sleep, feel embarrassed, struggle to focus, or wonder if something is wrong with you. Those feelings are real, and it's okay to grieve. Give yourself time. Lean on friends and family. Talk to God honestly about

your hurt; the Psalms are full of honest prayers. Avoid checking the other person's social media over and over, which usually makes it worse. And remember that a breakup doesn't decide your worth. If sadness lingers for weeks or turns into hopelessness, talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988.

KEY VERSE

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He browses among the lilies.

Song of Songs 6:3 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Song includes a scene of misunderstanding and searching?
2. What are some healthy ways to handle conflict in a friendship or relationship?
3. What are some warning signs that a relationship is controlling or unhealthy?
4. How does the beloved's response in chapter 6 show what forgiveness looks like?

TRY THIS *Think of a relationship where there's been a misunderstanding. This week, take one step toward making it right, like a kind message, an apology, or a conversation.*

CHAPTER 5

Love as Strong as Death

Song of Songs 8

The final chapter of the Song brings everything together. It starts with the young woman wishing she could show her love openly, without anyone thinking it strange. Then, for the third time, she repeats the refrain to her friends. "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up, nor awaken love, until it so desires."

By now, the refrain is like an old friend. It shows up at the beginning, the middle, and the end. Even after the wedding, after the misunderstanding and the reconciliation, she's still saying the same thing: love is powerful, so don't rush it. That's wisdom for every season.

Then the friends ask, "Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" Remember the wedding procession in chapter 3, which also came up from the wilderness? Now the couple is walking together, and she's leaning on him. It's a picture of trust and companionship, two people who have grown together and can rely on each other.

And then come the most famous lines in the Song. "Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD. Many waters can't quench love, neither can

floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned."

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Seal on Your Heart**

In the ancient world, a seal was a small stamp or carved stone, often worn on a cord around the neck or on a ring, that was pressed into clay or wax to mark ownership or make something official, like a signature. It was one of a person's most precious possessions. When the young woman says, Set me as a seal on your heart, she's saying, Keep me close, as close as the thing you value most. Let everyone know that I belong to you and you belong to me. It's a picture of commitment, the kind of lifelong faithfulness that marriage is meant to be.

Then she explains why. Love is strong as death. Death is the one power no one can defeat. It takes everyone eventually. But love, she says, is just as strong. It holds on. It doesn't let go.

The word jealousy here doesn't mean insecure, possessive suspicion. It means a fierce, passionate commitment that won't share the beloved with a rival. The Bible often calls God jealous in this sense: He loves His people so much that He won't accept them giving their hearts to idols. And then the poem says love's flashes are a very flame of the LORD. This is the only place in the whole Song where God's name appears. The deepest love is like a fire that comes from God Himself.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Flame of the LORD**

The Hebrew phrase in 8:6 ends with a short form of God's name, Yah, the same short form found in the word hallelujah, which means praise Yah. Some translations render it as a mighty flame or the very flame of God. Many readers see it as the key to the whole Song: true love isn't just a human feeling. It's a spark of God's own love. When people love each other faithfully, they're reflecting the fiery, unquenchable love of the One who made them.

Many waters can't quench love. In the ancient world, the sea and floods were symbols of chaos and destruction. But even all the water in the world can't put out the fire of real love. And it can't be bought. If someone offered all his wealth for love, people would laugh at him. Love isn't for sale. It can only be given.

> **REAL TALK** **Love That Lasts**
>
> Our culture often shows love as a feeling that comes and goes. When the excitement fades, people move on. The Song paints a different picture: love as a lifelong commitment, a seal on the heart, a fire no flood can put out. Feelings are part of love, but they're not all of it. Real love is a choice to stay faithful, to keep showing up, and to keep honoring someone, even when it's hard. You can see that kind of love in couples who have been married for fifty years, in parents who sacrifice for their kids, and in friends who stick with you through everything. Look for it. Learn from it. And someday, if God leads you to marriage, practice it.

Then the Song closes with a few short scenes. The young woman's brothers, remembering when she was a little sister, talk about protecting her until she was ready for marriage. If she is a wall, they say, they'll build silver towers on her. If she's a door, they'll protect her with cedar. She answers proudly that she has been a wall, someone who kept her boundaries and was strong. And in her beloved's eyes, she found peace.

> **REAL TALK** **A Wall, Not a Door**
>
> The brothers' words are a picture of protecting someone young. A wall stands firm. A door swings open to anyone. When the young woman says, I am a wall, she's saying she kept her boundaries and wasn't pushed around. That's a strength, not a weakness. Being a wall means knowing who you are, keeping your values, and not letting others pressure you. It's true for guys and girls alike. And the result in the Song isn't loneliness. It's peace.

Finally, the Song mentions Solomon's huge vineyard, which he rented out for a fortune. The young woman says, in effect, Solomon can keep his thousand pieces of silver. My own vineyard, my love, is mine to give. Love can't be bought, even by a king.

Notice too that the Song's greatest line about love comes right after a picture of trust. She leans on her beloved, and then she asks him to set her as a seal on his heart. Lasting love isn't built on fireworks alone. It's built on trust, the kind that grows when two people keep their promises over and over. Every promise kept is like another strand in a rope that holds them together.

The idea that love is stronger than death has comforted many people who have lost someone they love. When a grandparent dies after decades of marriage, or a friend loses a parent, it can feel like death has won. The Song doesn't pretend death isn't real. It names it as the strongest enemy. But it insists that love is just as strong. Christians believe that's more than poetry. As we'll see in the next section, there is a love that actually defeated death.

The very last line has the young woman calling her beloved to come quickly, like a gazelle on the mountains of spices. The Song doesn't end with a neat conclusion. It ends with longing, an invitation to come. That's a fitting ending for a book that, many believe, points beyond itself to a greater love still to come.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Reading the Song at Passover**
>
> In Jewish tradition, the Song of Songs is read each year during Passover, the springtime festival that remembers how God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. That might seem like a surprising choice. Why read a love song at a festival about rescue? Because many Jewish readers see the Song as a picture of God's love for Israel, the love that led Him to rescue His people and bring them to Himself, like a bridegroom bringing home his bride. The Song's

> springtime images, with flowers blooming and winter gone, also fit the season of Passover perfectly.

As the Song ends, it's worth stepping back to look at the whole thing. It started with a young woman unsure of herself, worried about being stared at. It ends with her confident, secure, and at peace, leaning on her beloved. Along the way, there was longing, waiting, celebration, misunderstanding, and reconciliation. That's what real love looks like. It's not a perfect fairy tale. It's a story of two people growing in faithfulness over time.

And the refrain stays with us. Don't stir up or awaken love until it so desires. Love is beautiful, powerful, and worth protecting. Whether you're single, dating, or someday married, the Song invites you to treat love as the precious gift it is: with patience, honor, faithfulness, and joy.

KEY VERSE

Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD. Many waters can't quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned.

Song of Songs 8:6–7 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What do you think it means that love is as strong as death?
2. Why do you think love can't be bought?
3. What examples of lasting, faithful love have you seen in real life?
4. What does it mean to be a wall rather than a door?

TRY THIS *Ask a married couple you respect, like grandparents, parents, or a couple from church, what has helped their love last. Write down their answer and keep it somewhere you'll see it.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

The Song ends with one of the most powerful descriptions of love ever written: love is strong as death, and many waters can't quench it. Human love at its best gives us a glimpse of that. But even the best human love has limits. People let each other down. Hearts change. And eventually, death separates even the most faithful couples.

Jewish readers treasure the Song as a picture of God's covenant love for Israel and read it every year at Passover, the festival of rescue. Throughout the Old Testament, God describes His relationship with His people as a marriage. Isaiah wrote, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you." The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw that picture fulfilled in Jesus. John the Baptist called Jesus the bridegroom. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly and gave himself up for her." Jesus' love really is stronger than death. He laid down His life for His people, and then He rose again. Paul wrote that nothing, "neither death, nor life," nor anything else in all creation "will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the Bible ends with a wedding. In Revelation, a great crowd shouts with a sound "like the voice of many waters," saying, "For the wedding of the Lamb has come." Whether or not you ever marry, you are invited to the greatest love story of all.

Here's what the Bible says about that love, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than anyone ever could. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

We've all turned away from that love to go our own way. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the Bridegroom who gave Himself.

Jesus loved His people so much that He laid down His life for them on the cross and rose again, so that His love is stronger than death.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

You can't make God love you by being good enough. Salvation isn't a reward. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Say yes to His love.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, thank You for loving me before I ever loved You. I've gone my own way and sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus loved me so much that He laid down His life for me and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me believe that nothing can separate me from Your love. Teach me to treat others with honor, to wait for Your timing, and to love the way You love. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Song of Songs 8, then Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13, two chapters about love that never quits.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Love someone well. Do one kind, honoring thing this week for someone in your family, without being asked.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking questions. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if the Song is right, the love you're longing for is real, and it's stronger than death. And it's already looking for you.

nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:39 (WEB)