

### ***Motives Are Weighed by the Lord***

*All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. -Proverbs 16:2*

Proper judgment concerning someone's action is best weighed by that person's motive. Why we do something is usually the difference between guilt and innocence. The problem is that we cannot be the ultimate judge concerning our own motives. A clear conscience is good indication of innocence, but it is not foolproof. Only the Lord knows the motives of the heart.

*All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.* The word "motives" is the Hebrew word "rucha" which means "spirit." Your spirit knows your motive. *For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? (1 Co 2:11).* Only the Spirit of God can know and reveal the depth of our spirits. *For the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts (1 Ch 28:9).*

That the Lord knows the motives of the heart is easily understood and accepted. But to think that we don't entirely know the motive behind our actions is a more difficult pill to swallow. It is uncanny how the amalgamation of the mind, emotions and will can produce a sense of innocence regarding some course of action even though that action may be tainted by impure motives. How easy it becomes to justify something when we want it bad enough. An action may seem innocent but if the real motive of the heart was revealed, that thing may not be as innocent as we would like to believe. Conversely, someone may have done something that makes him look guilty but when the motive is weighed, the guilt is absolved. My brother had a friend named Barry O'Brien who was taught that every time a drop of holy water hit the church floor a soul was released from purgatory. So, young Barry, being concerned for all the souls in limbo, went into the church and dumped the basin of holy water all over the floor. The priest came running and was mighty upset—but who could blame Barry?

The conscience is important but it is not perfect. Paul said, *"My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me...He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts"* (1 Co 4:4-5). This is why Holy Spirit conviction is so important. We can't always rely on our own judgment regarding our actions. In that light, it would be good to pray as David prayed, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me ...see if there is any offensive way in me..."* (Ps 139:23-24) because only the Lord can weigh the motives of the heart.

***How easy it becomes to justify something when we want it bad enough***

### ***Parents Are the Pride of Their Children***

*Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children. -Proverbs 17:6*

If there is anyone we need to be proud of, it is our parents. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way. But when it does, it makes a world of difference for the emotional health of the son or daughter who can take pride and admire who they have for parents.

My wife and I are in relationship with the most exuberant six-year-old you will ever meet. Only, he is not so exuberant these days. Three months ago, his mother suddenly broke up the family to pursue a relationship with an old flame. While the boy was spending last weekend with his mother, she had a fight with her recycled lover and he walked out on the argument. She then farmed-off her son so that she could go out search the bars for her new drunk-in-shining-armor. My wife told me that the boy has become "very quiet" these days. I find it astounding and yet unsurprising that this heretofore permanently animated youngster would lose his vibrant spirit.

***Kids need so much to be able to admire their parents***

Besides the pain of rejection, part of what this young boy will have to deal with is the shame of who his mother has become. Even at his young age—or perhaps especially at his young age—he will feel the effect of not being able to be proud of his mom. Kids need so much to be able to admire their parents. What kid has not wanted to believe that "my dad can beat your dad, any day." Even grown kids need to be able to admire their parents. *Parents are the pride of their children.* It is the parents who, through their example, blaze the trails for their children's lives. If the admirable example is not there, children will have to blaze their own trails with the help of some not-as-naturally-significant others.

It shouldn't have to be difficult for children to be proud of their parents. They don't need much in order to look up to their moms and dads. You don't have to be a super-parent in order for your children to be proud of you—it comes naturally to them. Just some love and integrity will do. If there is something there to be proud of, they will find it—because they need to find it.

As for our little six-year-old, we don't necessarily have to despair. God is in the business of redeeming unfortunate situations. But extra-grace will need to be given to him as he surveys the landscape of his life for those he can look up to.

### ***One Who Is Slack in His Work***

*One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys. -Proverbs 18:9*

It is Edmund Burke who is credited with saying, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Moreover, if we who are called as sentries in God's kingdom neglect the work that the Lord has given us, we aid and abet the one who has come to steal, kill and destroy.

Imagine the peace officer, the paramedic or the fire fighter who chooses not to respond when the emergency call comes in. They would not only be neglecting their duty, they would be assisting the forces which work to bring harm. The *one who is slack in his work*, Proverbs 18:9 states, *is brother to the one who destroys.* It is difficult to think of yourself as kindred to the Devil but, for him, the best thing that you can do as a Christian is nothing. If you are diligent to do what Jesus calls you to do, you stop the Devil at every turn, but if you neglect those things, you are acting as an accessory to his plan. What do you think happens, for example, when the Spirit prompts you to pray for someone but you fail to do it?

***Imagine the peace officer, the paramedic or the fire fighter who chooses not to respond to the emergency call***

Jesus put it this way: "*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters*" (Lk 11:23, Mt 12:30). So, according to Jesus, as a believer, if you are not actively working for him, you are working against him. And if you are not actively gathering in his harvest field, you might as well be scattering because the harvest is not coming in. To change analogies, there is responsibility that comes with accepting the call to the army of God. If you fail to pick up your weapon and enter the battle, you have become a brother to the enemy.

Just yesterday I felt a strong prompting to visit a neighbor. I no idea that he had spent the previous four days in the hospital for tests to find out why he was coughing up blood. Because the tests were inconclusive, I found him quite discouraged when I arrived and had a chance to encourage him yesterday and again today. If I had been slack in my work and not gone to see him I would have unwittingly been a brother to the spirit of discouragement. And now the door is open for me to talk to him further about the hope that is found in Christ.

The work that the Lord has given you to do is very important. It has eternal significance. To neglect it would be tantamount to having the Devil call you "brother." And no one wants that.

### **Zeal Without Knowledge**

*It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way. -Proverbs 19:2*

Zeal without knowledge is not good. “*It is fine to be zealous,*” Paul says, “*provided the purpose is good*” (Ga 4:18), but sometimes zeal is misdirected and *without knowledge*. This was the case with some Jews, as Paul said, “*I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge*” (Ro 10:2). The kamikaze and the jihad warrior have this in common: They have zeal, but it is not based on knowledge.

The most vivid examples of persons who have zeal without knowledge are found among the cults. That they have zeal cannot be denied. They travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, they make him twice as much a son of hell as they are (see Matthew 23:15). But those who have zeal without knowledge are also in the church. I cringe at some of the notions they mindlessly promote. In the least, these persons bring embarrassment to the body but often they do damage to it. We have a responsibility to pull such persons out of left field and *explain to them the way of God more adequately* (Ac 18:26).

***Knowledge does for zeal what a transformer does for electricity. It harnesses what would otherwise be dangerous and makes it useful.***

Despite the danger of zeal without knowledge, I’m afraid that the church in North America, for the most part, is facing a different problem: Knowledge without zeal. D.L. Moody once said that he would choose zeal without knowledge over knowledge without zeal. I’m not so sure that such a course would be the wisest because *people are destroyed from lack of knowledge* (Hos 4:6), but Moody must have felt that it was better to start with zeal to gain knowledge than to forever risk the want of that which propelled him in his fervent service of the Lord. After all, the great apostle, Paul, at one time did have great zeal without knowledge.

Knowledge of the truth will turn fanaticism to dynamism. It will be the difference between one who destroys life and one who imparts it. Knowledge does for zeal what a transformer does for electricity. It harnesses what would otherwise be dangerous and makes it useful. Knowledge is never meant to dampen zeal but to enhance and direct it.

It is not good to have zeal without knowledge. It will cause us *to be hasty and miss the way*. Neither is it good to have knowledge without zeal. If so, we might know the way well and yet miss it for lack of spiritual fervor. Zeal and knowledge were meant to work in combination. We need both.

### **The Spirit of a Man Is the Lord’s Lamp**

*The spirit of a man is the Lord’s lamp; it searches out his inmost being. -Proverbs 20:27 (NASB)*

There is a fair bit of confusion in the body of Christ regarding the distinction between the spirit and the soul of a person and how God relates and communicates to and through each. Part of the reason for this is that the biblical concepts of spirit and soul overlap and are, at times, used interchangeably. But this short but meaty statement here in Proverbs will help bring clarity to this important question.

Through Holy Spirit revelation, Solomon says, “*The spirit of a man is the Lord’s lamp; it searches out his inmost being*” (NASB). Notice the distinction between the *spirit of a man* and *his inmost being*. The spirit is that which makes up the eternal essence of a person and which relates to the spiritual world—that part of us which is made in the image of God and is meant to commune with him. On the other hand, the *inmost being* can be equated with what we commonly know as the soul. The increasingly orthodox understanding of the “soul” (the Greek word is “*psyche*,” from which is derived the word “*psychology*”) is that which functions and relates to life in this world by way of the mind, emotions and will. It follows then that it is the spirit of a person which searches out his or her soul.

***It is the spirit of a person which searches out his or her soul***

*The spirit of a man* is what the Lord uses to search out what is going on in our soul. It is his *lamp*. It is our spirit which will search out and testify whether or not we have *truth in the innermost being* (Ps 51:6). Paul asks, “*Who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him?*” (1 Co 2:11). So we see that a man’s spirit *searches out his inmost being*. The spirit is on a higher plane than the soul. God will communicate to us Spirit to soul—but most often, and far more naturally, he will communicate to us Spirit to spirit. Our spirits were made to commune with God. That’s why Paul says, “*If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful*” (1 Co 14:14).

When you are born again, it is your spirit which is rejuvenated and imbued with the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. At that point, your spirit has access to and communion with *the Spirit* which *searches all things, even the deep things of God* (1 Co 2:10). It is then that your spirit, which was created to be the Lord’s lamp to search out your inmost being, can function as it was intended when he made us in his image.

### A Quarrelsome Wife

*Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife. -Proverbs 21:9*

This Proverb nearly always brings a round of snickers when quoted in a public setting. People like to make jokes about living *on the corner of the roof* and the proverbial contentious wife. But it is really no laughing matter. To have a contentious or quarrelsome wife is a serious problem.

It is probably out of a sense of discomfort that people chortle at this portion of the Word. Men may do so because it is/was perhaps all too true of their own wife or mother, and the issues surrounding the contention in the home have never been resolved or even addressed. Women may fidget at what seems like an unfair negative spotlight on women (what about a quarrelsome husband?), or perhaps they want to laugh off the intimation that they may fit the bill of a quarrelsome wife.

*If the husband is the head, what then does it mean when his wife quarrels with him?*

Western society is messed up when it comes to understanding and correctly practicing proper role relationships between husbands and wives. Even mentioning the term “role relationships” would create frenzy in some of the more enlightened among us. But what is that to the truth? The fact is that as husbands and wives, we are naturally wired to relate to each other in certain ways. Men are created to be servant-leaders in relationships with their wives. Women are created to be insightful-responders in relationship with their husbands. And herein lies the trouble with having a quarrelsome wife. If the husband is the head of the home what then does it mean when his wife quarrels with him? It often means that she is unwilling or unable to submit to the leadership of her husband.

Certainly, this opens a can of worms because there are a myriad of reasons why a wife will be contentious with her husband. He may be unreasonable and harsh, “lording over” her instead of serving her. Her trust for men and authority figures may have been pulverized by past experiences so she “contends” for a place of protection. And the list goes on.

Disagreements between husbands and wives are bound to happen. They actually need to happen in order for true collaboration to take place. “Women’s intuition” is not an illusion. I trust my wife’s insight implicitly. She sees things that I do not see. But she is not quarrelsome and does not attempt to take the reins from me as we try to get to where we need to go.

Better to live on the corner of a roof than in a nice house with a quarrelsome wife. Better yet to find God’s peaceful order for the home.

### Train a Child in the Way He Should Go

*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6*

If you notice the NIV footnote for Proverbs 22:6, you will see that it gives an alternate rendering for the word “train.” It is the word, “start,” which would render the translation: *Start a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.* Not only is there a strong expository evidence to support this translation, but such a rendering would give new and different light on the meaning of this familiar Proverb.

The Hebrew for the word in question is “hanak.” The “Expository Dictionary of Bible Words” says, “Hanak (and *hanukah*) means ‘to dedicate or consecrate.’ But the underlying idea seems to be one of initiation. The OT lays special stress on those ceremonies of dedication that inaugurated the use of something for God’s service... We might paraphrase Pr 22:6 in this way: ‘Get a child started [*train*] in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.’”

*It may not be as much about training up your child as it is about dedicating him or her*

Everywhere else in most English bibles where the word “hanak” is used it is translated “dedicate” or “dedicated.” In the Old Testament, when houses, altars, the Temple, and the wall of Jerusalem were built, they were initiated by being “dedicated” to the Lord (see Deuteronomy 20:5; Numbers 7:10ff, 2 Chronicles 7:9; 1 Kings 8:63; Ezra 6:16-17; Nehemiah 12:27). When these things came into being and before they were used they were dedicated.

It is plausible then, since the word “hanak” is used regarding child rearing, that the idea of Proverbs 22:6 may not be as much about training up your child as it is about dedicating him or her to the Lord. This is how we are to start in the important task of raising our children. You may say, “Well if you have dedicated your child to the Lord, then certainly you are going to train them up the way they should go.” Exactly. It is the continuous dedication of our children to the Lord that will start and guide them in the way they should go—and when they are old they will not depart from it. Hannah promised the Lord that if he gave her a son she would *give him to the Lord for all the days of his life* (1 Sam 1:11) and, sure enough, Samuel became a great man of God.

All this certainly has implications for the theology and practice of a formal service of child dedication. Of course, the dedication of our children cannot just be a formal service when they are babies. We must continually dedicate them to the Lord until they are “old” enough to be on their own—and by that time they will know the way and not turn from it.

**Do Not Speak to a Fool**

*Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words. - Proverbs 23:9*

Maybe sometimes we're too polite. Maybe sometimes we shouldn't bother talking to some people. Maybe there are those who don't deserve the time of day. Maybe we should take Solomon's advice when he says, "*Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.*"

What is a fool? A fool is not necessarily one devoid of intelligence. A lot of "fools" have high IQ's. In the Hebrew context, a fool is someone who is "morally deficient" (NIV Footnotes). Fools *despise wisdom and discipline* (Pr 1:7), *hate knowledge* (Pr 1:22), show their *annoyance at once* (Pr 12:16), *mock at making amends for sin* (Pr 14:9), and are *quick to quarrel* (Pr 20:3). Understandably, dialogue with such a person could hardly be considered productive.

***Don't waste the time and energy to engage those who have no will to produce the fruit of the kingdom***

Jesus gave some advice that comes pretty close to Solomon's. He said, "*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces*" (Mt 7:6). "Dogs." "Pigs." "Fools." All sound fairly derogatory. Don't dogs, pigs and fools need to hear the gospel as much, or more, than anybody? Sure, but there is a principle found in what both Solomon and Jesus are saying. It is: Do not subject yourself and the your words to the abuse of those who would contemptuously refuse to consider truth and wisdom, not just out of ignorance, but out of a malicious disdain for moral admonition. The point is not so much making a judgment about someone who you think is a "fool," but rather not making a futile attempt to discourse with someone who has no intention of receiving what you have to say. To do so, would be...well, foolish.

Does this mean that you should shut down and walk away from a verbal wrangle with someone who *will scorn the wisdom of your words*? Yes. There is no sense in getting your knickers in a knot jostling with someone who is antagonistic and morally corrupt. Don't speak to a fool. Don't give dogs what is sacred. Don't throw your pearls to pigs. Don't waste the time and energy to engage those who refuse to receive the truth of the gospel and who have no will to produce the fruit of the kingdom. Jesus didn't do it. Why should we?

Jesus wasn't polite with everyone, you know. Don't worry about cutting off dialogue with the morally depraved. It may be the only thing that will actually communicate what they need to hear.

**After That, Build Your House**

*Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house. -Proverbs 24:27*

The proverb, *Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house* basically means do first what is necessary, not what is most desirable. If you had some land on which you would live and work, the most desirable thing to do would be to build your house. For most of us the house would be the centerpiece as we dream about the development of the land. But for the farmer or the rancher, what is most important in getting the land ready to sustain an income that will support the house. Get your land ready to produce some income, then you can think about building a house.

In some cases, you might think it wise to build your house first in order to have a base to work from. This is how I would think the homesteaders did it. But even the homesteaders would not have devoted a lot of time, money and energy into first building an expansive home before getting down to working the land. They would have built just enough of a basic living quarters to house themselves so they could establish the farm or ranch which would yield them their livelihood. After that they could think about building the type of house they really want to live in.

***Do first what is necessary, not what is most desirable***

So often we want "build the house before preparing the land." We like to go straight to the desirable parts of the project, perhaps neglecting those things that should be done initially. But if we put first things first, and prepare adequately, the house that we want to see built will come more readily. It's about priority, it's about preparation and it's about patience.

So, if you are thinking about getting married, for instance, there is some preparation that you can and should do that will make your union more successful. Sure you want to move into that house right away, but there is some outdoor work to do and some fields to get ready first. The same applies to your life's vocation. Training and preparation is often tedious but it is essential to achieve your goals. The apostles had three-and-a-half years of "field" work before the church was established. And in ministry, you may want to have a building, but what good is a building without first building the church.

So set your goals—but with them know those things which need to be done first. They may not be the most desirable, but they may be the most essential. First work your land, then you can build your house.

### ***It Is the Glory of God to Conceal a Matter***

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. -Proverbs 25:2*

The framers of the American Declaration of Independence held certain truths to be “self-evident.” They were “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Are there truths that are, in fact, self-evident? If there are, it would be only because God has made them so. God is the author and keeper of truth, and so it is his to reveal or conceal. Accordingly, no truth is purely self-evident. According to the biblical witness, some things God has chosen to make plain and others he has not.

Another question: Would the God *who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 Ti 2:4) actually “glory” in concealing a matter?

***No truth is purely self-evident***

Yes. Deuteronomy 29:29 talks about the secret things that belong to the Lord. Isaiah 45:15 describes him as a God who hides himself. When Jesus spoke to his disciples about going to the cross, they would understand only later what he was talking about because it was *hidden from them* at the time (Lk 9:45). The Epistles speak of *God’s secret wisdom...a mystery hidden for long ages past...but is now disclosed to the saints* (1Co 2:7; Ro 16:25; Co 1:26). And Jesus said, “*I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure*”(Mt 11:25-26).

Yes, the Father wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. But because it has the power to save, truth is precious and needs to be sought and received with humility. And that is why the Father will actually conceal a matter from those who are *wise in their own eyes* (Is 5:21). From those who glory in their great learning, trust in their own understanding, and claim to have great insight, God glories in concealing the truth. And we know that he delights to reveal the hidden things to “little children” because Jesus said that it was his “good pleasure” to do so.

There are indeed many truths that God has made “self-evident.” But it is still to his glory to conceal a matter—and ours to search it out, if we so desire.

### ***An Undeserved Curse Does Not Come to Rest***

*Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest. - Proverbs 26:2*

Proverbs 26:2 says, *Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.* The principle here seems to be that the more we do not deserve a curse, the more impervious we will be to it. Neither a fluttering sparrow nor a darting swallow is going to hover meticulously near a place it cannot light. If there is no place to land—off it goes just as fast as it came. This is also the case, then, with an undeserved curse.

Now, you certainly need to exercise your will regarding receiving blessings and refusing curses that come your way. Just by saying, “Thank you, I receive that,” or “No, I don’t receive that,” you make an important and positive difference in what is allowed to come to rest on you. But perhaps even more consequential in the capturing of blessing and the escaping of curses is the state of your character and your standing before the Lord. Blessings and

***Blessings and curses are such that they seek out those who are deserving***

curses are such that they seek out those who are deserving. In Deuteronomy 28, the Lord pronounced blessings and curses over Israel. Blessings would come upon them if they obeyed. If they didn’t, the “promise” was: *All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed* (v45). This is not a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow. It’s more like a heat-seeking missile.

What should your attitude be when someone curses you? If you are cursed because of your testimony of Christ then you should *rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven* (Mt 5:11). Otherwise, I appreciate David’s attitude when he was cursed and verbally abused by a countryman as he had to flee his kingship during an attempted coup. When one of David’s men offered to kill the man, David said, “*Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today*” (2 Sam 16:11-12). In a sense, David was saying, “If the curse is deserved it will stick, if it’s not, it won’t.”

Is there such a thing as a curse that is deserved? How about a blessing that is undeserved? Sure—but it is not our place to curse—only to bless (see Romans 12:14). And really, the only one who will ultimately determine whether a blessing or a curse is merited is the Lord God. If he says a curse is undeserved, it has as much chance of resting on you as fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow.

**Man Is Tested by the Praise He Receives**

*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives. -Proverbs 27:21*

When we think of the things that test our mettle we think of those things which tax our resolve—trials, tribulations, and sufferings. However, it is not only the negative experiences that need to be handled with grace and character. Some of the greatest challenges come when we are met with success and praise. How we deal with praise will say a lot about us. *Man is tested by the praise he receives.*

We know that we are to neither praise ourselves nor to solicit it from others, but what do we do when it does come? There are two mistakes that we can make when we receive praise.

The first is to reject it. Low self-esteem and false humility can cause one to be self-effacing. When I give someone a compliment, I am hoping that they will receive it. If an undeserved

***Whether we are tested with criticism or praise, it is humility that will keep our heads on straight***

curse is like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow that does not come to rest (see Proverbs 26:2), then a deserved blessing should be like a graceful waterfowl gliding down to settle on calm waters.

The second mistake that we can make when praise comes is to fawn over it and wear it like a badge. Out of a sense of pride or insecurity, many people are looking to be praised. Like the Pharisees who were addicted to the praises of men, they crave affirmation as an opiate for their souls. Corrie ten Boom used to figuratively receive every gift of praise as a bouquet of flowers and then offer the bouquet to Jesus as the one responsible for any good that she might have done. Herod, on the other hand, would not give glory to God when praised, and, consequently, was eaten by worms and died (see Acts 12:23).

The thing we need most to handle anything in life that comes our way, whether it be negative or positive, is humility. Whether we are tested with criticism or praise, it is humility that will keep our heads on straight. When criticism comes, humility will keep us from resignation, and when praise comes, humility will keep us from boasting.

You will be tested by the praise you receive. It is a crucible that will reveal the dross of self-contempt or pride. If either of these is revealed when you are praised, take note, repent, and ask the Lord to allow you to receive praise as you ought.

**He Who Rebukes a Man Will Gain Favor**

*He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue. -Proverbs 28:23*

Our church was very close to purchasing a ten-acre property with a 30,000 square-foot main building, three other smaller buildings, and over a hundred RV sites. We celebrated as tentative deal was reached—but the deal fell through along with our plans to establish a self-supporting ministry centre in that place. Not only was I disappointed, I was angry. When I met with one of my spiritual mentors, Dennis Wiedrick, he asked me how I was doing. I told him that I was angry. He suggested that selfish ambition might be at the root of my anger. I could have been offended—but I knew he was right and, in the end, his stature rose in my eyes for his willingness to bring a caring rebuke.

***It is the one who speaks the truth, rather than the one who massages a person's ego, who will gain favor***

Most of us would sooner flatter than rebuke. But the word says, *He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.* Flattery is saying what another person wants to hear—even though it may not be true. A rebuke is saying what another person probably doesn't want to hear—even though it is true. In the end, it is the person who is willing to risk speaking the truth in love, rather than the one who massages a person's ego, who will gain favor as a true friend. *Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses (Pr 27:6).*

Why is it that most of us find it difficult to confront when the situation warrants? Timidity. We fear the consequence if the rebuke is not received. We don't want to be seen as negative, meddling or overbearing. We want to be liked. But it is a selfish act to not give a warranted rebuke. To not say anything may be more convenient and avoid some conflict, but it doesn't do the other person any good. In fact, it may do them much harm because, chances are, they can't see what you see and won't know that they have a problem unless you show them their fault. Your rebuke could move them from harm's way and save them a whole lot of trouble in the long run.

It should go without saying that our motive when bringing a rebuke must ultimately be for the sake of the other person—as was the case with Dennis when he suggested that my problem was selfish ambition. If we really care about another person, especially those who have been entrusted to our authority in some way, we cannot neglect bringing an appropriate rebuke at the proper time. If we do, in the end we will gain favor and respect because of it.

### ***A Righteous One Can Sing and Be Glad***

*An evil man is snared by his own sin, but a righteous one can sing and be glad. -Proverbs 29:6*

When the Jews were in captivity they said, *How can we sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land?* (Ps 137:4) Indeed. It is hard to sing the songs of the Lord when you're in captivity. But when the children of Israel returned to the land of Judah they said, *Our mouths were full of laughter and tongues with songs of joy* (Ps 126:2). It is those who come out of captivity of sin into *the glorious freedom of the children of God* (Rom 8:21) that can truly *sing and be glad*.

Proverbs 29:6 says, *An evil man is snared by his own sin, but a righteous one can sing and be glad*. I have found that if I am dealing with some sin in my life, it becomes a snare to me in a number of ways. The nature of a snare is that it holds you captive. It prevents your freedom. One particular area in which it will curtail your freedom is worship. It's just plain difficult (or at least it should be) to worship a holy God with sin in your life. Sin is a snare. It separates you from your God (see Isaiah 59:2) as well as your confidence to come before him (see 1 John 3:21). How can you sing and be glad when you are ensnared by sin? But the righteous are not held captive by sin and can much more readily sing the songs of the Lord.

***The ability to sing and be glad  
is a mark of the righteous***

I am not saying that everyone in the church who "enters in" to praise and worship is necessarily righteous, nor that those who don't sing with gladness necessarily have sin in their lives. But those who are walking in righteousness are more likely to sing and be glad than those who carry sin or the vestiges of it. It seems to me that those who can sing and be glad—should. And what better place to do so than in the assembly of the saints.

According to the word of God, the ability to sing and be glad is a mark of the righteous. Conversely, sin is a snare that hinders that freedom. What then are we left to conclude when our worship gatherings lack the robust vitality of those who sing and are glad? I know that there are reasons other than sin (discouragement and demonic opposition for instance) that people might not "sing and be glad" in church. But as a matter of first order, we really do need to consider a lack of robust singing in our church gatherings as a sign of the presence of sin. Because, after all, *a righteous one can sing and be glad*.

### ***An Unloved Woman Who Is Married***

*Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress. -Proverbs 30:21-23*

My grandfather was a professional musician who played the great organ at the old Chicago Stadium and who recorded a number of albums. He also gained infamy as an alcoholic and a womanizer. When I was older, I asked my mom to tell me about the relationship between grandma and grandpa. She told me about her own pain as she stood watch all day one Christmas waiting for a father who never came. But my mom said that the hardest thing of all through the years was to see the tears of her mother and to hear the desperate cry of her heart when she would say, "All I want is for your father to love me." Evidently, he never did.

There are few things in life more tragic than a married woman who is not loved by her husband. A woman was made to be loved. Why do you think the Bible gives explicit instructions to husbands to *love your wives* (Eph 5:25; Col 3:19)? It is because, even more than a man, she is wired for and thrives on love. Men are wired for and thrive on respect (see Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:1-2) but a woman feels the most security when she knows that she is valued and loved for who she is. And, of course, the person she most needs to love her is her husband. What a tragedy for a woman to be unloved as a wife. Under such personal devastation, it says here in Proverbs, *the earth trembles*.

***A woman was made  
to be loved***

I can't help think of, and sympathize with, Leah regarding the unhappy truth of this proverb. Right from the start she knew that her husband Jacob didn't love her. He didn't offer to work seven years for her and was sorely disappointed when he discovered that she had become his wife instead of the one he really loved—her sister Rachel. When Leah bore her first son she named him Reuben, which, in the Hebrew, sounds like "he has seen my misery" for when he was born she said, *"It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now"* (Gen 29:32). Her great misery was that she was, and remained, unloved by her husband.

So then, is being unloved by your husband biblical grounds for divorce? No. Should my grandmother have left my grandfather in search of love? No. She did what was right and what was best for her family. And though it is not necessarily the love she was looking for—I love her for it. And I would venture to say that the Lord does too.

### ***A Wife of Noble Character***

*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. -Proverbs 31:10*

Much has been made of the “Proverbs 31 Woman.” We don’t know if she is a specific individual or a composite of what *a wife of noble character* should look like. Many see the description of the woman here in this acrostic poem as a symbolic portrayal of wisdom itself. But since she is depicted in relationship with a husband, children and servants, what we have here is either a literal or figurative description of the epitome of the proverbial wife.

The fact that it would be a portrayal of a figurative character amplifies her role as a model. If it were a biographical sketch of a known woman one might say, “I don’t know who that woman is, but I ain’t her.” Yes, the picture is idealistic, but despite the jokes about the unattainable nature of this characterization, her example is meant to be considered:

***For many women, the expectations are both unrealistic and cumbersome***

- She has gained the unwavering confidence of her household.
- She is industrious, working *with eager hands*.
- She is also a business woman who buys, sells and makes a profit.
- She is kind to the poor and needy.
- Her husband is a respected leader in the community.
- She sees that her household is amply supplied in food and clothing.
- She is a woman of strength and dignity.
- Her children “arise and call her blessed” and her husband praises her.

Many Christian women don’t appreciate the representation of this superwoman simply for the fact that it appears that she is solely responsible for taking care of everything in the household while her husband does nothing but sit at the city gate. For many women, the expectations fostered by this ancient Hebrew poem are both unrealistic and cumbersome and feed a mentality that one needs to “perform” for approval. Resources of time, energy and money are limited and husbands who expect wives to do everything that the Proverbs 31 woman does are in for a disappointment.

But maybe husbands and wives should look at the description of this woman of noble character not as a standard to duplicate, but as a pattern to emulate. As Christians, no one realistically expects us to be able to duplicate the perfection of Jesus, but he is still the one we look to as the pattern for our lives. In the same way, “The Woman of Noble Character” can serve as a very positive example for life as a wife and mother.

### ***Everything Is Meaningless***

*The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." -Ecclesiastes 1:1-2*

I’m afraid that the book of Ecclesiastes doesn’t get the Norman Vincent Peale award for the ultimate in positive thinking. Pessimism, cynicism and disillusionment are not overly strong terms to describe much of the content of this book attributed to the pen of King Solomon. Thirty-six times the term which is translated here as “meaningless” is used to describe life and its pursuits, pleasures and purposes. What are we to make of the disillusionment contained in this book which is part of God’s word to us?

If this book is written by Solomon, it would have been at the end of a life filled with more worldly blessing than anyone on this planet could ever hope to experience. It is probable that no person in the entire history of mankind could match the splendor of Solomon. Blessed with virtually limitless wisdom, success, money, power and women, he was literally a man who had it all. And it wasn’t that he didn’t know God either. He knew the Lord personally from a young age and experienced his presence and power in a phenomenal way. There was not a single thing that is supposed to make life meaningful that Solomon did not experience—and yet at the end of his days he is obsessed with the assertion that *everything is meaningless*.

***What are we to make of the disillusionment in this book?***

To be fair, there is some positive teaching contained in the book of Ecclesiastes that is of great value. But what are we to learn from the obviously cynical theme of the book? Perhaps most apparent would be to realize that those things that are supposed to give meaning to life do not necessarily effect that desired end. Solomon didn’t have to become disillusioned about life, but he did—and if he could, then anyone can. We know that cynicism is not a healthy thing, but we all have to face some measure of it from time to time. In a way, it is comforting to know that if a guy like Solomon can become negative about life, then maybe we are not so unusual in the feelings that we deal with. The danger with the book of Ecclesiastes, of course, is that it can feed cynicism: “If a man who has it all ends up in the pits, what hope is there for me.” But remember that the message of the book of Ecclesiastes is meant to be a reflection of just one element of the experience of life, and the book itself is a just a small portion of a much greater and more positive record of the word of God.

### **Two Are Better than One**

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*

“Two are better than one,” Solomon says, and in countless more ways than not, it’s true. Life is not meant to be lived without others. The strength, synergy, help and companionship of friends will ultimately prove invaluable.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.* Here we see the law of synergy at work which says the joint action of two increase each other’s effectiveness and produces a greater outcome than the sum of the two individual parts. I worked for a few years siding houses and I can tell you for a fact that two working together can accomplish much more than two working alone.

***It is impossible for the  
proverbial log to burn alone***

*If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!* One of the rules in wilderness trekking is that you never go alone. What will happen if you do and get injured? There is a chance that you may not come out alive. Just as tragic is a person who has to trek through the wilderness of this life on his own.

*Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?* If I am away or come late to bed, my wife has to rely on her “Magic Bag” to keep warm. But the application of Solomon’s words goes beyond keeping each other physically warm. People need one another to get and stay “warm” emotionally and spiritually. It is impossible for the proverbial log to burn alone.

*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.* You can’t cover your own back in a fight. And it is not just the doubling of strength that a comrade brings to the battle, it is the multiplication of courage that comes when you know that you are not fighting alone.

Like a predator who works to isolate his intended prey, the Devil knows we are more vulnerable when alone. Together we stand, separated we fall. When Jesus sent his disciples on mission, he sent them out two by two. There is multiplied strength in having one who can encourage, sharpen and hold you accountable. And if *two are better than one*, how much stronger if you add a third strand to that cord?

### **The Dead Know Nothing**

*Anyone who is among the living has hope--even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. -Ecclesiastes 9:4-5*

Did the “Teacher” of Ecclesiastes believe in awareness after death? Did he believe in life after death? How about the resurrection of the dead or a final judgment? The answer to these questions may help to explain the pessimism that we find throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.

The Teacher says that “*a live dog is better than a dead lion.*” It is hard to argue with that, but how about his ensuing statement: “*The dead know nothing; they have no further reward?*” We have no indication from Scripture that there is a continuation or awareness for the soul of a dog or a lion once it dies (apologies to all you “doggie heaven” hopefuls). But the Teacher wasn’t sure that even humans had a hope of the hereafter: *Man's fate is like that of the animal...All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal...All go to the same place...Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?* (3:19-21).

***Philippians 1:21-23, Luke 16:19-31, Luke 23:43, Matthew 22:32, and 1 Peter 3:19 teach that the dead do indeed know something***

Obviously, the Teacher of Ecclesiastes did not have full revelation concerning life after death. Ecclesiastes actually contains some bad theology. Does this mean that this book should not have been included in the Bible? No. Providence has perfect reasons for the canon of Scripture that we have been given and there is much we can learn from this sometimes puzzling book.

The Adventist and the Jehovah’s Witness will use the words, *the dead know nothing* to support their doctrine of “soul sleep,” which says that there is no awareness for the dead until the final resurrection. I’m not sure that the Teacher even believed in a resurrection, though he did refer to a judgment in the final verse of the book. Philippians 1:21-23, Luke 16:19-31, Luke 23:43, Matthew 22:32, and 1 Peter 3:19 teach that the dead do indeed know something. And many more scriptures speak of a “further reward.”

Was the Teacher pessimistic about the hereafter because he was discouraged and cynical about life or was he discouraged and cynical about life because he was pessimistic about the hereafter? My guess is more of the latter because it is easy to see how without a hope of life after death, discouragement and cynicism will rule.

### Remember Your Creator in the Days of Your Youth

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say "I find no pleasure in them"...before... strong men stoop, when...all their songs grow faint....and desire no longer is stirred... Remember Him--before the silver cord is severed... - Ecclesiastes 12:1ff

One thing that you have to say about the book of Ecclesiastes is that much of its pessimism is actually rooted in reality. The realization of that reality can actually produce positive results. One of the main themes of the book is that people spend their existence toiling on this earth, often aimlessly, and then they die. What makes that thought even more depressing is that it is all too true. But, especially for the young person, there is something that can be done about it.

The Christian world-view is a paradox. It consists of both bright optimism and bleak pessimism. The stark reality is that we not only have a date with death, but the earth and everything in it are destined for destruction.

"It's all gonna burn" may be a negative viewpoint, but one that we get directly from the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Of course the good news is that it hasn't happened yet. What then are we going to do with this reprieve?

Verses 1-7 of Ecclesiastes chapter twelve is about the fact that the young will eventually get old and die. This inevitable fact of life is something that the young rarely think about. What happens, the Teacher asks, when days of trouble come and you no longer find pleasure in living, when you lose your strength and can no longer work, when your voice grows weak, when you no longer feel safe climbing a ladder or even walking the streets, when your desire can no longer be stirred and when your body returns to the dust from where it came? These are somber yet necessary questions for the young person to ask.

The best advice to young people in light of these eventualities is, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." While you are still young, acknowledge God. Don't wait until your best years are behind you to think about what he requires and has planned for your life. Life can seem "meaningless, meaningless." Look to the only one who can make sense of it. Do what's best for your life now, and don't wait until later.

Jesus said, "Night is coming, when no one can work" (Jn 9:4). So, let's take advantage of the opportunity that we have because it won't last forever.

**Don't wait until your best years are behind you to think about what God requires and has planned for your life**

### Arise...And Come with me

My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me." -Song of Songs 2:10

The Song of Songs is somewhat of an enigma. There is no other book like it and many wonder what function it has as Scripture. This song of Solomon is a poetic expression of sexual love between a man and a woman. "Nothing wrong with that," you say—and I agree. But some have questioned its appropriateness as Scripture. "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39), Jesus said of the Old Testament writings. What possible foreshadowing of Christ could be found in the lyrics of this song?

Throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity, there have been those who see the "greatest of all songs" (for that is how "song of songs" (1:1) can be translated) as allegorical.

They see it as a picture of God and his people, or more specifically for the Christian, of Jesus and his bride. The majority of biblical scholars reject this view. Song of Songs is only about intimacy between a man and a woman, they say. But since all scripture is *God-breathed* (2 Ti 3:16), we should consider what other potent meanings the Holy Spirit may have intended as we see the ardent love between the Lover and the Beloved of the Song of Songs.

This book embodies a universal theme that captures the imagination of writers of song, novel, stage and screen everywhere. It is the call of the lover to the one he loves. At the initiation of the lover, the invitation is given for the beloved to "Arise, and come with me." We see the lover coming to the window of the beloved, speaking sweet words of affection: "My darling, my beautiful one." It is a picture that stirs the desires of both men and women alike.

Could this not be a picture of our Heavenly Bridegroom? Doesn't the New Testament depict Jesus as a groom and the church as his bride? Does he not desire this intimacy with us? Do we not desire it with him? I, as a man, have no problem relating to the picture of the Lover of my soul coming to my place of abiding and calling, "Arise, and come with me." Even the phrases, "My darling" and "my beautiful one" do not make me uncomfortable. Paul, in speaking about a husband and a wife in Ephesians 5 says, ...*the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church* (vs 31-32).

Ah! A profound mystery. A lover and his beloved. A man and a woman. Christ and his church. And maybe there is something we can learn about all three here in the Song of Songs.

**Does he not desire this intimacy with us? Do we not desire it with him?**

### **My Sister, My Bride**

*You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine... - Song of Songs 4:9-10*

In sports, they say that having a game end in a tie, is like kissing your sister. It's a kiss, but it is not all that you would like it to be. When you think about your heart being ravished with love, you don't, and you shouldn't, think about your sister. But in order to relish and experience the fullest depth of intimacy and passion with a woman, she must indeed be your sister—in the Spirit.

Four times in the Song of Songs, Solomon refers to this woman he is madly in love with as, “My sister, my bride.” To some, the phrase would seem contradictory. How could someone be your sister and bride at the same time? Is it right or natural to be ravished with love for your sister? You wouldn't hear the expression, “My sister, my bride” very often in today's world—not even in the church of God where we are of the same spiritual family.

Even though this expression is uncommon today, it was evidently not uncommon in the poetic language of the ancient near east, and it must have had cogent meaning for the Lover as he speaks to his beloved. The fact that she is his “sister” does not take away from his desire for her. It adds to it. In a beautiful sense, she is sister to him. No, she is not his sibling, for sexual relations within your immediate family is prohibited by both ancient and modern convention. But she is a sister to him in that she, like him, is descended from Israel (some mistakenly assume that since she was dark skinned and given the title “Shulammite” she was a foreigner). It has never been God's intention for those in his family to marry outside his family. I would have never allowed myself to fall in love with and marry someone who was not my sister first.

To those men who married in Christ, remember that your wife is your sister first. And, unless she is that to you, you will never know the truest depth of intimate love. If she is your sister in the Lord, she can steal your heart with just one glance and you need never to resist or regret it. You have perfect freedom to be ravished with her love, to let your heart race and delight in everything that she has to give to you, for it all is a gift from God.

So, the next time you hear the expression, “kissing your sister,” you can smile and know that kissing your sister is a lot better than some people realize.

### **Place Me like a Seal over Your Heart**

*Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm...Many waters cannot quench love... -Song of Songs 8:6-7*

In ancient times, a seal was a mark that represented who or, sometimes, whose you were. Typically, sealing wax is hot colored wax placed on the fold of an envelope and then indented with someone's “seal.” The seal was a special three-dimensional stamp that identified its owner and represented their personal identity and any authority that might be theirs. If a king issued a decree, it would be marked with his seal, often a signet ring, as certification of his binding authority. The seal also could represent ownership (like a branded cow) or covenant relationship. Often when a man became engaged to a woman, he would give her his signet ring as a sign that what was his now belonged to her also. Interestingly, in both 2 Corinthians 1 and Ephesians 1, Paul says that we were marked in Jesus with the “seal” of the Holy Spirit as a sign of God's ownership and a deposit guaranteeing our eternal inheritance. The Holy Spirit is God's seal over our hearts.

Most commentators see verses six and seven of the eighth chapter of the Song of Songs as the zenith of this poetic love drama. The Beloved says to her Lover, *Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm...Many waters cannot quench love...* Aaron, as High Priest wore two different seals, one on the turban on his head and one on his shoulder. The seal on his head read, *Holy to the Lord* and the seal on his shoulder was the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The seal on his head depicted the ownership of the Lord as he was “set apart” as priest. The seal on his shoulder depicted the enduring and strong bond between the priesthood and the people of God.

When the woman says “Place me... like a seal on your arm,” she is appealing to her Lover to become her strength and promised protector—not unlike a man who will tattoo a woman's name on his biceps. But when she asks him to, “Place me like a seal over your heart,” she is asking much more. She is asking him to acknowledge her claim on his heart—that his heart belongs to her. For, “*I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine*” (SS 6:3 KJV).

The implication for your relationship with the heavenly bridegroom is glorious. You say to the Lover your soul, “You have placed your Spirit in my heart as a “seal” that I belong to you. Now, place me as a seal over your heart as an eternal sign that you belong to me as well. For just as I am yours, you also are mine.”

***The fact that she is his “sister” does not take away from his desire for her. It adds to it.***

***She is asking him to acknowledge her claim on his heart—that his heart belongs to her***

### ***The Vision Concerning Judah and Jerusalem***

*The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken... -Isaiah 1:1-2*

Thus begins the book we know as Isaiah. This, the first of seventeen prophetic books that close out the Old Testament canon of Scripture, is more than a *vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem*—much more.

As the opening line of the book indicates, Isaiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, though he did speak the word of the Lord to the northern kingdom, Israel, as well. Isaiah's spiritual perception is just as compelling today, and in some ways perhaps even more than it was twenty-seven centuries ago when he had his first vision of the Lord, high and lifted up. The prophetic accuracy of his word is uncanny, projecting a laser beam of light that has pierced through four millenniums of history.

Take, for instance, the predictive picture of the suffering Messiah that Isaiah paints in chapter fifty-three. It is not just uncanny, it is truly remarkable.

***The book of Isaiah was for Jesus, and is for us, a rich storehouse of prophetic staple***

Isaiah is, far and away, the most quoted Old Testament "prophet" by the New Testament writers, being referenced more than all of the other sixteen prophetic books combined. Sixty-three times Isaiah is quoted in the New Testament—and he is mentioned by name twenty-two times. Jesus quotes Isaiah extensively. Whether he was rebuking the Pharisees ("*Isaiah was right about you*") or proclaiming the advent and essence of his ministry ("*The Spirit of the Lord is on me...*"), the book of Isaiah was for Jesus, and is for us, a rich storehouse of prophetic staple.

To go through the book of Isaiah for very long and not find some familiar verse is impossible for most Christians. Chapter one has these words: "*Come now, let us reason together,*" says the Lord. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*" (v18). Chapter two has these words: *They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore* (v4). And so it goes with virtually every chapter of this consistently astounding book of the Bible.

*The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw...Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken.*

### ***The Lord Almighty Will Be Exalted by His Justice***

*So man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness. - Isaiah 5:15-16*

You have probably heard the expression, "Life isn't fair, but God is good." Perhaps a more appropriate response to the statement, "Life isn't fair," would be, "But God is just." In a world that is not fair, perhaps more important than a God who is good is a God who is just.

God is exalted by many things: His power, his omniscience, his omnipresence. But it is his justice, along with his mercy, that will exalt the Lord in the end. The Lord's justice will humble the eyes of the arrogant, Isaiah proclaims. But justice not only brings low the arrogant, it exalts the one responsible for that justice. When we are watching a movie, we rejoice when the bad guy gets it and cheer for the one responsible for administering that justice. If that is the case, how much more, then, is the Lord exalted by his perfect justice?

"Justice" is a prime biblical concept. The particular Hebrew word here, "mishepat," is used four hundred nineteen times

in the Old Testament. It is used forty times in Isaiah alone, making it a major theme in this, the most influential of all Hebrew prophetic writings. To give you an idea what "mishepat" is, consider these other Old Testament scriptures: *Do not pervert justice or show partiality* (Dt 16:19). *Honest scales and balances are from the Lord* (Pr 16:11). *And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (Mi 6:8).

If it were not for the exercise of the justice of the Lord—and our hope in it, how could we cope with the many injustices of this life? God's justice can and does prevail in the here and now, but notice (as most translations render it) *the Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice*. One thing to remember about God's justice is that we haven't really seen it yet. The fullness of God's justice is yet to come, *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice...* (Ac 17:31). That is the day that God makes everything right. Justice is simply "making things right." A day is coming when God will right every wrong with perfect justice. And that is the day when he will be fully exalted in that justice.

***In a world that is not fair, perhaps more important than a God who is good is a God who is just***

### ***He Will Be a Stone That Causes Men to Stumble***

*The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. -Isaiah 8:13-14*

How can the same God be a sanctuary to one and a stumbling block to another? And how can Jesus be the cause of the rising of some and the falling of others? Well...how is it that the same medicine can heal one person and kill another? Neither the Lord nor the medicine is inconsistent. It is the response of the individual that matters.

A police officer can be either a threat or a comfort to you, depending on the circumstance in which he or she finds you. The same God who has the power to save, also has the power to judge. If you are to dread anyone, dread the one who *has power to throw you into hell* (Lk 12:5). But, those who fear the Lord have no need to be afraid of him. He not only gives sanctuary to those who fear him, he is sanctuary.

***If the Lord is not your protection, then he must be your downfall***

The Lord will be either your sanctuary or your stumbling block. You choose. Try as you might, the simple fact is that you cannot avoid God. He is the one *with whom we have to do* (He 4:13 KJV). If the Lord is not your protection, then he must be your downfall. When Jesus returns, there will be only two kinds of people: Those who stand and lift their heads to the sky in hopeful anticipation because their redemption is drawing near (see Luke 21:28), and those who will faint from terror, wishing that the mountains would fall on them (see Luke 21:26; 23:30). The same Jesus—two different reactions.

Jesus is God's litmus test to prove what is in your heart. When Jesus was eight days old, this prophecy was given to his mother about him: *This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed* (Luke 2:34-35). Some embraced him. Others spoke against him. But no one could ignore him. When the day that God has appointed to judge the world with justice comes, he will do it through Jesus.

Jesus is the one through whom your heart will be revealed. Jesus is the one through whom you will rise or fall. And Jesus is the one through whom you will experience either sanctuary or stumbling.

### ***And He Will Be Called***

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. -Isaiah 9:6*

Jesus said, "*The Scriptures testify about me*" (Jn 5:39). Some of the most obvious examples of this are found in Isaiah. Consider Isaiah 9:1-7: *Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan--The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...(vs1-2)*. The Messiah that Isaiah speaks of will come to bring joy (v3), break the rod of the oppressor (v4) and forever put an end to war (v5). Then Isaiah prophesies some of the most recognizable and hope inspiring words of Scripture: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given* (v6). Unto us this son has been given and the unending, ever-increasing kingdom of peace, justice and righteousness will placed on his shoulders (v7).

***The Holy Spirit chose to give Isaiah four descriptive names for this one to come— Jesus, the Messiah***

The Holy Spirit chose to give Isaiah four descriptive names for this one to come, Jesus, the Messiah. Seven hundred years before he came on the scene, he was announced as *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. Let's look at each one of these names that reveal an aspect of the nature of the Christ.

***Wonderful Counselor***: The King James Version places a comma between Wonderful and Counselor making "Wonderful" a noun instead of an adjective, giving the Messiah five names instead of four. But the pattern in Isaiah's list is that each name has two components, so "Wonderful Counselor" should be considered as one name. A counselor is one who encourages, advises and influences with wisdom. The word "wonderful" here is most often translated "wonders" or "miracles," so more than a "really good" counselor, Jesus is a supernatural one.

***Mighty God***: The Hebrew is "El Gibor," the warrior God. Jesus is the Divine One who fights for us.

***Everlasting Father***: Jesus is Immanuel, the eternal God with us. He said, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father* (Jn 14:9). He is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his being (see Hebrews 1:3).

***Prince of Peace***: This is one of Jesus' signature names. He is the one who administrates the "shalom" of God. Because of him, all manner of war will one day cease and the Prince of Destruction will be silenced.

The child has been born and the son has been given. He is everything the prophet foretold, and more.

### ***He Will Not Judge by What He Sees with His Eyes***

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord--and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; -Isaiah 11:2-3*

Isaiah 11 gives another profound and insightful foreshadowing of the Anointed One of God. First of all, he will be a *shoot...from the stump of Jesse* (v1), that is, from the line of David, Jesse's son. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord (v2) (we don't often think of Jesus as one who delighted in the fear of the Lord, but verse three begins with that very statement). Next, Isaiah describes the Messiah as one who *will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.*

When you think about the ministry of Jesus you are struck by his ability to get past what people were acting out or saying and get to the crux. Jesus did not always give a direct answer to people's questions. He knew what was in their hearts and so he would address that which was really at issue. Jesus always knew how to respond to people at their point of need and had a way of knowing exactly what they needed. And not once was Jesus ever fooled by anyone.

Remember how Jesus dealt with the rich young ruler (Mark 10)? How about the woman at the well (John 4) or Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7)? Then there was Nicodemus (John 3), Zacchaeus (Luke 19) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8). Whether he was dealing with the multitudes, his disciples, the Pharisees or someone in need, Jesus' discernment was never less than perfect. How so? He trusted neither what his eyes saw nor what his ears heard. He did not judge according to his five senses. You might say that he had a sixth sense, though it was more than intuition. It was the Spirit of the Lord resting on him. It was wisdom, understanding, counsel, power and knowledge that came from the Spirit of God who resided perfectly within his humanness.

Why would we rely on what our eyes see and what our ears hear when the same Spirit who *searches all things* (1 Co 2:10) resides within our human frame? By continual use of our spiritual senses we can learn to distinguish good from evil (see Hebrews 5:14) and make judgments that go beyond what our eyes see and our ears hear. And in that way, we too can have the kind of discernment that will meet people at their point of true need.

### ***How You Have Fallen from Heaven, O Morning Star***

*How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! - Isaiah 14:12* (Note: Most of the cross-references for this article come from the NIV Bible Dictionary)

We have no explicit evidence in Scripture concerning the origin of Satan. The Bible places him in many venues, from the garden with Adam, to the desert with Jesus and finally into the lake of fire with his "angels." However, the best we can do concerning where he came from is to try and make some deductions from the particular scriptures that we find to be relevant to the question. One of the passages of Scripture that many, though not all, believe to be relevant to both the origin and nature of Satan is Isaiah 14:12-17.

There can be no question that because of the prophetic nature of all of the Bible, passages often have more than one meaning. We know that Isaiah is prophesying against Babylon and the king of Babylon in 13:1-14:23. The question arises as you read verses 12-17 of chapter 14, "Are these verses about Satan as well?" If they are, then we have a major piece of the puzzle regarding the genesis of the evil one.

The reason that many believe this passage to be referring to the prince of demons is that a number of its descriptive elements relate to other Bible passages that explicitly or likely refer to Satan. Verse 12 says, *How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth...* This relates to the idea in Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12:7-9 that Satan was once a resident of heaven, presumably as an angel (the name "Lucifer" comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of the term "morning star" in v12). In the Luke passage, the questions are, "Exactly when was it that 'Satan fell like lightning from heaven'" and, "Was it from the second or third heaven from which he fell?"

Isaiah 14:13-14 says, *You said in your heart...I will raise my throne above the stars of God...I will make myself like the Most High.* This agrees with the observation from Matthew 4:9 that the Devil has a penchant to be worshiped and from 1 Timothy 3:6 that he came under the judgment of God because of his conceit. Verses 15-17 refer to the judgment on the king of Babylon that could very conceivably apply to the judgment that we know is coming on the devil, the one who shakes the earth, makes the world a desert and holds people captive.

Is Satan a fallen angel of God? That may already be a foregone conclusion for you. But if it isn't, Isaiah 14 gives you something to chew on.

***Whether he was dealing with the multitudes, his disciples, the Pharisees or someone in need, Jesus' discernment was never less than perfect***

***Is Satan a fallen angel of God?***

### ***Blessed Be Egypt My People***

*In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance." -Isaiah 19:24-25*

Isaiah was way ahead of his time. He not only foresaw something that would cut against the grain of the Law and the sensibilities of the Jewish people, he predicted the unthinkable. Who could have imagined a time when the Lord would call Egypt, “*my people*” and Assyria, “*my handiwork*”?

To say that there would come a day when the Lord would call Egypt my people would be like saying there would come a time when George Bush would call Saddam Hussein, “my friend.” It wasn’t about to happen. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the people of God, and no others—especially not Egypt. When the Israelites were held in cruel bondage by the Egyptians, Yahweh heard the cry of his people and sent Moses with the message, “Let my people go!”

***This prediction by Isaiah  
was obscene***

As far as Assyria went, they hardly had a better chance than Egypt to know the grace as a possession of the Lord’s own choosing. If Egypt had been Israel’s ancient enemy, then during the days of Isaiah, Assyria had become her new one. It was during Isaiah’s ministry that the Assyrians laid brutal siege to the northern kingdom of Israel, carrying them off to a captivity that would result in the permanent displacement of the ten tribes that made up the northern kingdom.

But Isaiah talks about a day when Egypt and Assyria, together with Israel, would become a blessing on the earth. *The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."* How could this be? Well, Egypt and Assyria represent the “Gentiles,” those of “foreign nations” who were not only foreign, but antagonistic. Isaiah foresaw the day when, through the gospel of Christ, people in even these despised nations would become the people of God, included in the “inheritance” of Israel. The worship of Yahweh would no longer be limited to the land of Israel. Even in Egypt and Syria, “altars” of true worship would be found (see vs 19-20).

In the general context of the Old Testament, this prediction by Isaiah was obscene. That is why the Jews who comprised the early church found it so difficult to believe that God had accepted the Gentiles. But accept them he had, proving that no one is out of the reach of the gospel of Jesus who is *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel* (Lk 2:32).