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v92

Ecclesiastes

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Ecclesiastes

1 The following is the written lesson of Qoheleth, who was a descendant of David and who ruled as king in Jerusalem.
[2] Qoheleth said:

All of human life is as temporary
as the mist of my breath!
Everything is emptiness!

[3] I want to know whether the never-ending labor
of being alive in this world
ever produces any sense of satisfaction or joy in this life
that makes the labor of life worthwhile.

[4] One generation of people dies, and another
generation is born.
Nonetheless, nothing seems to change.
[5] The sun rises every morning and sets each evening.
Then, it hurries back to the eastern horizon,
from which it will rise again.
[6] The wind blows southward.
Then, it changes direction and blows northward.
It seems to go around and around,
and yet, it always seems to go where it
is supposed to go.
[7] All rivers and streams flow into the ocean,
but the ocean is never full.
Instead, all that water will continue to flow
wherever it has always flowed.
[8] These natural processes
make humanity so indescribably tired.
Similarly, no matter how much people have seen,
they will always want to see more;
no matter how much people have heard,
they will always want to hear more.
[9] Whatever happened in the past will happen again.
Likewise, whatever people have done in the
past, people will do it again.
Nothing happens that is ever new.
[10] Now, someone might claim
to have discovered something novel.
But, in reality someone discovered it a long time ago,
in times long since past.
[11] No one ever remembers the people or the
events of the past.
The same will be true of the people and
events of the future,
and even of those after that!

[12] I, Qoheleth, ruled as the king of Israel in the city of Jerusalem. [13] I resolved within myself to use my intellect and my understanding of the world to study everything that people do during their lives on this earth. I discovered that God has employed every human being in the difficult job of being alive.
[14] Yes, I observed everything that people do during their lives. Now pay attention! I saw that our lives are as temporary as the mist of my breath. Humanity's labor is often as silly as trying to catch the wind.
[15] It is just like people say:

"No one can fix what appears broken,
and no one can count what is not there."

[16] So, I said to myself, "Now pay attention! You know that I, Qoheleth, have become wiser than any other king who has ever reigned in Jerusalem. I have experienced first-hand what it means to be exceptionally wise and intelligent." [17] Having said this, I resolved to learn more about what it means to be wise, as well as what it means to be stupid and insane, by personal experience. I discovered that even these pursuits were as silly as trying to catch the wind.
[18] It is like people also say:

"The wiser one gets, the angrier and more
depressed they feel;
knowing more about life only makes life hurt more."

2 Then I said to myself, "Let me experiment. I will try to make myself as happy and satisfied as possible by doing everything that I enjoy." Now pay attention! I concluded that even the joy and satisfaction I experienced from these pleasures were as temporary as the mist of my breath. [2] So I thought deeply and concluded that giddy laughter is the behavior of crazy people. Likewise, I reasoned that merely pursuing what I enjoyed did me no good. [3] So I thought deeply about the effect that indulging myself with wine or letting myself behave stupidly might have on me. All the while, I remained sober and alert. I thought about this until I could discern through my experiences the best use of people's short lives on this earth.
[4] So I did as many memorable and impressive things as I could. I ordered slaves to build palaces for my leisure and to till and plant vineyards for my pleasure. [5] I commissioned royal groves of fruit trees in my honor and gardens with flowing streams. Into those groves, I ordered that slaves should plant many kinds of fruit-bearing trees. [6] Furthermore, I ordered the construction of irrigation pools and canals that provided water for entire forests of lush growth to honor me. [7] I purchased male and female slaves, and they bore children who were also my slaves in my palace. I also owned more livestock of herd and flock animals than any other previous king in Jerusalem's history before me. [8] Moreover, I accumulated large amounts of silver and gold that I obtained from the tributary gifts of kings and the rulers of foreign territories. I owned slaves, both men and women, who sang for me, and I married wives and concubines, who provided me with sexual pleasure.
[9] After all my efforts, I had attained more honor, power, and wealth than any king who had ever reigned before me in Jerusalem. Yet I continued to think soberly so that I could evaluate all of my work properly. [10] In all my efforts, I allowed myself to indulge in every desire that I had. Whatever I wanted, I permitted myself to enjoy it. I did this because my difficult projects made part of me happy, and that experience felt like a

reward for all my hard work. 11 Then I stopped to think about
everything I had accomplished, and all the difficult work that
I had done to accomplish it. Pay attention! I concluded that
both my effort and everything I achieved were as fleeting and
insubstantial as the mist of my breath. My labors had been as
silly as trying to catch the wind. Nothing I did provided me
with any joy that made life worthwhile.
12 This led me to start thinking about the potential benefits
of being wise alongside those of being crazy or stupid. I did this
because, being king, I had more opportunity to investigate these
issues than any other human being. 13 And then I recognized
that being wise is far more helpful in life than being stupid,
just like it is easier to live well when one has a source of light
by which to see than when there is only darkness.
14 It is like people say:

A wise person is able to live well,
just like someone who walks in the daylight can see.
A foolish person, however, endangers themselves
with their poor decisions,
just like someone who walks about in
the dark cannot see.

Yet even so, I also recognize that the same outcome awaits
both wise people and foolish people: Both will die.
15 This made me say to myself, "I am going to die just as
inevitably as stupid people! In this way, all my hard work to
become a wise person appears to have made no difference!
What was the point?" I reminded myself that even my attempts
to become wise and live a fulfilled life were as fleeting as the
mist of my breath. 16 After all, no one remembers anyone who
dies, whether they lived wisely or stupidly, for very long. After
a while, people will forget about both of them. How sad! No
matter whether we live wisely or act like an idiot, everyone
will eventually forget about us!
17 Because the job of being a human in this life includes
enduring these realities that are burdensome, I began to despise
being alive. Everything seemed to be as insubstantial as the
mist of my breath and as silly as trying to catch the wind.
18 Then I began to despise all the difficult work that I had
labored to do during my life, especially because after I die,
someone else will inherit everything that I have acquired in
my life. 19 And no one can predict whether my successor will
be a wise or a stupid person. Either way, he will have the
ability to enjoy all the things that I labored so hard and so
wisely for in my life. Regardless, even his enjoyment of the
results of my hard work will be as fleeting as the mist of my
breath.
20 As I thought further about all my life's work, I began to
feel hopeless and depressed. 21 Partly I felt this way because it
is possible that someone might labor at his work wisely and
expertly, even skillfully. But when he dies, his successor will
inherit everything, even though he did not do any of the hard
work that produced his inheritance! Yet even these painful
realities are as fleeting as the mist of my breath. 22 After all,
the emotionally and physically difficult labor that people do
throughout their lives does not seem to produce anything that
is both good and enduring for them. 23 This is because every
day only seems to cause one pain. Furthermore, the work
people do only produces grief. It is so grievous that, when
they ought to be asleep, people's minds are so anxious that
they cannot rest. Yet even so, all of this is as insubstantial as
the mist.
24 So, the best way that people can live is to enjoy whatever
they have to eat and drink and to allow themselves to find
something enjoyable about their work. I have personally
experienced that this joy only comes when God gives it to
someone. 25 After all, there is not a single human being who
can enjoy the things he has if God does not first give those
things to him. 26 God does this by making the people of whom
he approves wise, intelligent, and happy. Yet God has decided
that whoever disobeys him will work hard only so that they
gain wealth that God will give to those of whom he approves.
Even their wealth and hard work are as fleeting as the mist of
my breath, and as silly as trying to catch the wind.

3 There is a fixed moment at which everything in this life
happens, and a determined period for every kind of event
that happens during a person's life:

2 People will give birth, and people will die,
people will plant their crops, and people will reap
and harvest those crops.
3 People will kill people and people will heal people,
people will tear structures down, and people
will build structures.
4 People will cry and people will laugh,
people will grieve and people will celebrate.
5 People will throw rocks, and people will gather rocks;
people will hug, and people will refuse to hug.
6 People will look for lost things, and people
will lose found things;
people will store things, and people will
throw things away.
7 People will rip their clothing *in grief*, and people
will sew clothing back together;
people will stay quiet, and people will talk.
8 People will love one another, and people will
hate one another;
people will go to war, and people will mediate peace.

9 Again, I want to know whether the difficult labor of human
life ever produces any satisfaction or joy for hard-working
people.
10 I have observed the job of living in which God has
employed every human being to bustle about doing. 11 God
makes everything that happens beautifully fitted for the moment
that God has determined. And at the same time, God enables
humanity to perceive that he is at work in their lives. Even
so, God does not allow humanity to understand everything
that God does—from the time that he created this world to
the point at which he brings all things to an end. 12 In light
of this, I confess that the best way for humanity to live is to
gratefully celebrate life and to live ethically while one is alive.
13 And, furthermore, whenever a person is able to enjoy what
they have to eat and drink, and to find something gratifying
in the work that they do, this is a priceless thing that God has
enabled.
14 I also confess that all of God's decisions are unchanging.
It is like people say:

No one can improve what God does,
either by addition or subtraction.

God does this so that they submit to God in trusting faith.

15 Current events are not new.
Things like them have already happened.
Likewise, future events will not be new.
Things like them are already happening now.
God is the one who understands what every
person is trying to understand.

16 However, here is something else that I observed: The places in society from which people expect rulers to make just and fair decisions are frequently places in which rulers make unjust and oppressive decisions! 17 I confessed to myself, "God will hold accountable people who make just decisions and those who make unjust decisions. He will do this because there is a moment for everything that happens, including God's judgment of rulers in those places."

18 This led me to confess further to myself: "God is governing the world this way because he wants people to clearly understand that they are really no different than animals." 19 After all, human lives and animal lives end in the same way. People die just like animals die, and they seem to possess the same capacity to die. Because of this, it appears that being human offers no benefit over being an animal. All life is as fleeting as the mist of my breath. 20 When people and animals die, people bury both in the ground. Both people and animals are as mortal as if God made them from dirt, and when each dies their dead bodies become dirt once again. 21 This causes me to wonder whether people are correct about what happens to people when they die. Perhaps humans ascend to the place in which God lives, and animals descend into the ground.

22 So, I confess once again that the best way for people to live is to allow themselves to enjoy what their work produces—even the hard work itself. This is because God has given each person their work. It is their daily allotment. After all, nobody can know what will happen tomorrow.

4 Next, as I continued to contemplate, I observed all the ways in which people suffer from oppression during their lives. Now pay attention! As I watched those people cry, I realized that no one was there to reassure them in their grief. Furthermore, those who oppressed them appeared to possess power such that no one was able to reassure them in their grief. 2 This sad reality made me feel like those people who have already died are much more fortunate than the people who remain alive. 3 Yet the people whose mothers have not yet given birth to them are even more fortunate than both people currently alive and those people who have already died. Indeed, the unborn have not yet had to experience or witness any of the evil actions that humans do during their lives.

4 Then I observed that people work as hard as they do and strive to be successful only because they are jealous of their friends' possessions. Yet even their ill-motivated labor is as insubstantial as the mist of my breath and as futile as trying to catch the wind.

5 It is just like people say:

Rather than work hard, foolish people merely relax
with their unproductive hands folded on their
laps, ready to eat their meal.
Yet as they do so, they unwittingly ruin themselves,
as if they were feasting on their own bodies!

6 People also say this:

"Despite appearances, being contented with a simple,
peaceful lifestyle is twice as good
as being rich but living a life of stressful labor—as
frustrating as trying to catch the wind."

7 I proceeded to contemplate another facet of people's lives—one that also seemed as insubstantial as the mist. 8 I saw someone who lived alone. He appeared to have no children nor any brothers or sisters living with him. And every day, the person labored without stopping. Even though he was wealthy, he never felt satisfied with his life and possessions. Then he asked himself, "Why am I allowing my hard work to deprive me of things that I enjoy?" His attempts to satisfy himself with a lavish lifestyle were as insubstantial as the mist. His joyless labor was really the most lamentable part of the difficult job of being alive in which God has employed humanity.

9 Having a friend is more advantageous than
living one's life alone.
After all, together two people can experience
better outcomes in their hard work.
10 First, if you were to fall down, a friend could
help you get up again,
but if you are alone and you fall down,
you will only experience hardship and pain,
because no one will be there to help you
stand up again.
11 Second, if you and a friend were to lie down
to sleep in the cold,
you could help one another stay warm,
but if you try to sleep in the cold alone,
of course you will be cold!
12 Third, if someone stronger than you were to attack you,
he might beat you up by yourself.
However you and your friend would be able to
ward off your attacker together!
Three people could defend themselves even more easily,
just as a rope that someone made from three strands
is harder to rip in half than a rope with
one or two strands.

13 It is preferable to be a poor young man who nonetheless acts wisely than to be a king who, despite his age, acts like a fool and refuses to pay attention to good advice, as he did when he was younger. 14 I imagine that it is possible for a young man like that to live so successfully that he becomes king—even ruling over the land in which his mother gave birth to him in poverty, so severe that it was like someone tying her up with ropes. 15 But then I imagine all of the people in this young man's kingdom who merely go about their lives. The person who will be the successor to the young king is among them. 16 Despite his current popularity with the endless crowds of

his subjects, after a few years future generations will be tired of him. So even the wise way he lived that led to his success is as fleeting as the mist of my breath and as frustrating as trying to catch the wind.

5 Be mindful of how you behave when you go to worship God at his house. Draw near to him by listening expectantly. That is far better than offering sacrifices to God in the ways that foolish people do. They are ignorant that they are behaving inappropriately in God's presence! 2 Do not be so quick to say something that you speak rashly. Neither should you allow yourself to raise an issue hastily in God's presence. You ought to remember that this God is the God who rules from heaven and that you live here on the dust of the earth. For this reason, you ought to think before you say anything in God's presence.
3 After all, it is like people say:

"When someone claims to receive secret
messages from the gods,
he tends to rush busily about his life.
And whenever foolish people talk,
they tend to speak in as many words as possible."

4 If you solemnly promise God that you will offer a sacrifice to him, you ought to do what you promised quickly. Neither God nor his people tolerate foolish people. You should be careful to do whatever you promise. 5 It is better to not promise anything to God than to promise to do something and then fail to do it! 6 You should never talk in such a way that you begin to sin. It would be shameful if you promised God that you would offer him a sacrifice only to lie and claim that you made a mistake when God's priest arrived to collect the sacrificial animal. If you were to do that, God would be so frustrated with your so-called promises that he would destroy everything you have worked to accomplish! 7 This is the point: While everyone else is chasing messages from the gods, offering the prolific prayers of foolish people, or doing whatever vain things people do in God's presence, you ought to live your life fearfully remembering that God is God!

8 You may witness powerful people where you live extorting money from impoverished people or corrupting legal systems to their own benefit. You should not be surprised about this. Lamentably, this is the way things are. The people who can hold these powerful people accountable watch and do nothing. And even these more powerful people are under the authority of someone even higher who likewise does nothing. 9 Also, all of these corrupt officials seize the harvests of our fields—even the king enjoys the food that his subjects collect from our farms.

10 Some people believe that only wealth can provide them
with the kind of happy life that they desire.
These people will never think that they have
enough money,
nor will any number of possessions make them happy.
In reality, money is also as insubstantial
as the mist of my breath.
11 The more wealth that an individual has,
the more people seek to benefit from that
individual's wealth.
So rich people do not really benefit from their wealth.
It only seems to others that their wealth helps them.
12 Poor hardworking people sleep soundly at night
no matter whether they have a lot of food
or only a little to eat.
Like a person who sleeps poorly because he
has eaten too much,
the wealth that rich people believe provides
them with a satisfying life
actually makes them so anxious that they
are unable to fall asleep.

13 I have observed that money is the cause of another lamentable, gut-wrenching situation that can happen to people during their lives. I have watched someone save all of his substantial income. But his wealth ultimately caused him pain. 14 When his investments unexpectedly failed, he lost his entire savings. He had planned to give this wealth to his son as an inheritance. Yet now he had nothing left to pass on. 15 And so that man died in the same condition as when his mother gave birth to him: He began his life naked, possessing no wealth, and so he died in the same way. When he died, that man's labor had never produced for him any meaningful sense of satisfaction.

16 Yes, this was the lamentable, gut-wrenching situation that I witnessed: This man brought nothing into the world when his life began, and when he died, he took nothing with him. And so, it seems that his hard work never enabled him to feel satisfied. His work was like a frustrated attempt to grab a handful of the wind. 17 Moreover, every day of his life he sat in the dark when he ate his meals—deeply depressed, fatigued from illness, and fuming.

18 Now pay attention! I have observed how beautiful life can be when people merely enjoy the food and drink that they have and allow themselves to feel some satisfying happiness in their hard work. People can do this only while they are alive during the brief span of life that God has allotted to them as his gift—no more and no less. 19 God sometimes gives people money and possessions. But only sometimes does he also give them the ability to enjoy what they have. When God does, people accept what God has given them—no more and no less—and are able to enjoy their otherwise difficult and stressful work. This joyful acceptance is something priceless, like a gift from God. 20 By enabling us to accept the good things in our lives joyfully, God focuses our attention on what we enjoy about our lives. This allows us to forget, momentarily, the reality that one day we will inevitably die.

6 Sadly, I have also observed the painful realities that happen to people during their lives. This lamentable part of life is deeply distressing and difficult to accept. 2 God sometimes makes people so wealthy and well-respected that they have everything that they could want. Yet sometimes God does not allow these people to enjoy those things that their wealth provides. Instead, someone outside their family acquires their wealth and enjoys it. Yet even still, money remains as fleeting as the mist of my breath. It is gut-wrenching and lamentable that this can happen.

3 Someone could perhaps father very many children and live a very long life. No matter how long his life might be—even

if he were to go on living forever—if he never allows himself
to enjoy the wonderful parts of his life, I will consider the life
of a baby who dies when it is still in its mother's womb to
be more desirable than this man's miserable life. 4 True, this
baby's life was as brief as the mist, and it died in its mother's
womb, never having seen the light. The baby's parents were
never able to name their child, so that the child's life will be
only a sad memory. 5 The stillborn baby did not even live to
experience life under the light of the sun. Yet neither did it
have to feel the burden of a difficult life. So, despite its brief
life, the stillborn baby found more peace than that miserable
man. 6 His life would not improve even if that man were to
go on living for two thousand years. He, like every human
being, only ever endured the painful parts of life, but he never
enjoyed the good parts of his life. Truthfully, the man's life
will come to an end just as the stillborn baby's will, and both
of them experience death—just like every human being.

7 It is like people say:

"Everyone works hard to satiate their appetites,
but no one ever satisfies their deepest cravings."

8 Consider this: Living wisely does not seem any more able
than living foolishly to keep a person from suffering and dying.
In the same way, knowing how to conduct oneself wisely does
not seem to lengthen or improve the life of someone who is
poor.

9 It is like people also say:

"It is better to enjoy the things that one already has
than to allow one's impulsive desire to
inform one's decisions."

These realities are as insubstantial as the mist, and as futile as
trying to catch the wind.

10 Before anything happens, God has already declared what
it should be. It is evident to everyone that human beings are
merely mortal. So, it is pointless to complain to God about
the parts of life that we dislike. Humans are not all-powerful
or all-knowing like God is! 11 It sometimes seems as if our
complaints about life only produce more words that are as
insubstantial as the mist. This does not appear to benefit
anyone. 12 Certainly, I wonder whether anyone can know what
he ought to do during his limited lifetime. People live for a
short time, and their lives seem as fleeting as the mist. Indeed,
God has designed human life so that it lasts briefly, just like a
passing shadow. Moreover, God seems to want human beings
to be ignorant about what might happen to them tomorrow.

7 An honorable reputation is more advantageous
than expensive perfume.
Similarly, a person's death is a more
advantageous moment
than the moment when that person's mother
gave birth to him.
2 Attending a funeral is more useful
than attending a celebratory feast.
This is true because everyone will die.
People should take time to ponder this reality
while they are alive.
3 Feeling grief and mourning is more advantageous
than laughing.
This is true because grieving painful experiences
may help one
better understand what life is like and accept it.
4 Wise people participate in public ceremonies of mourning
so that they may ponder the fact that they also will die.
Conversely, foolish people ignore this reality
by only attending celebrations and festive parties.
5 Listening to the criticism of someone who lives
wisely is more advantageous
than listening to the song of foolish people.
6 This is true because the laughter of foolish people
is as useless as trying to heat food
over a fire that someone fuels with thorns.
Although the thorns may loudly pop,
they will only produce a little heat.
In the same way, the loud noise of foolish people
is as insubstantial as the mist.

7 Now, the power to abuse someone less powerful
can turn even wise people into foolish people.
In the same way, officials who accept dishonest payment
become unable to do what is right.

8 It is better for people for something to conclude
than for it merely to begin.
Similarly, being patient is more advantageous
than being proud.
9 You should not allow yourself to lose your
temper quickly,
because being irritable is characteristic
of foolish people.

10 Neither should you complain and wonder why
it seems that life in the past was
preferable to the present.
Surely only foolish nostalgia, not wise reflection,
causes this kind of comment.

11 Thinking and living wisely is both valuable and useful,
just like receiving an endowment of property or
money from a relative who has died.
As such, being wise can provide anyone alive
with significant benefits.
12 Their ability to think and act wisely can provide
protection for people,
just like money can sometimes provide protection
for wealthy people.
Nonetheless, knowing how to think and live well has
one more benefit than being wealthy:
This kind of wise thinking often prevents people
from doing foolish things that would cause
undesirable outcomes.

13 Think carefully about what God has done. Certainly, no
human being can change those aspects of their lives that they
dislike, since God has determined that their lives should be
that way.

14 When your life is going well for you, enjoy it!
But when your life is not going the way that you would prefer, stop to consider this:
God is the one who created life and causes both good things and less desirable things to happen.
God does this so that we do not start thinking that we can control what happens to us.

15 In my lifetime, as fleeting as the fading mist of my breath, I have witnessed two opposite scenarios.

On the one hand, many good people die young, even though they live justly.
On the other hand, many bad people live long and prosperous lives, even though they live unjustly.
16 So, you should not think that you can be so virtuous that your virtue obligates God to give you a long and prosperous life.
Neither should you think that you can become so wise that you can avoid anything painful in life.
If you were to think this way, you would only be astonished when undesirable things happen.
17 You should not live so sinfully that God becomes angry at you,
and neither should you allow yourself to live foolishly.
If you were to live this way, your foolishness could cause you to die young.
18 Your life will go best if you are diligent in remembering to live according to both parts of my advice to you.
The kind of individual who recognizes that God is governing this world and submits to him will demonstrate this by living as both parts of my advice have instructed him.

19 The ability to think and live wisely can guide an individual safely through his life. It can do this more effectively than even the ten most powerful officials who govern a city! 20 Humanity needs the protection that comes from thinking and living wisely, because no one who has ever lived has been entirely righteous. No human being has ever done only what is good and right without ever doing anything wrong.
21 Relatedly, you should not pay attention to everything that people say. If you were to do that, you might inadvertently hear people whom you trust publicly demean you. 22 After all, you yourself know very well that you have also publicly demeaned people who trusted you.
23 I used my ability to think and live wisely to analyze all of these realities of life. I resolved that I would become wise enough to understand all the realities that I have witnessed in my life. Frustratingly, I could not do it. 24 All the present realities that I observed were beyond my comprehension, as if they were too far away for me to see clearly. They were also difficult for me to understand, as if they were too deep for me to get to the bottom of them. I do not believe that any human being can understand all of this. 25 Nevertheless, I shifted my attention to a larger task. I wanted to study humanity's ability to think and live wisely so that I could comprehend the way that God governs everything and the reason that he governs the way he does. I also wanted to study humanity's tendency to live so foolishly that they openly disobey God and to live so irrationally that they become fools.
26 This is what I learned:

Foolish thinking is as painful as one's death.
It is like a seductive woman who attempts to ensnare young men.
Her desire is to trap and deceive people, as if her very heart were a cage, and her very hands were iron chains.
Foolish thinking is like such a woman.
Although foolish thinking like that will capture sinful people,
those who live well in God's presence will be able to avoid foolish living.

27 So, understand—this is what I, Qoheleth, have learned from my investigations:

I carefully considered one thing after another until I could comprehend the way that God governs everything and the reason that he governs the way he does.
28 Despite all my failures, I continued searching, but I could not find what I was desperate to discover.
I was looking to become wise, as if the ability to think and live wisely was an elusive woman living among a thousand men.
I found all the men, but I never found that woman.

29 So, consider this:

After everything, I have learned only that when God created humanity,
God made them to live justly and equitably.
Despite this, humans have tried to discover innumerable ways to understand life and attempt to control what happens to them.

8 Wise people are truly unparalleled!
They have the ability to solve difficult problems.
Being wise can make people visibly happy and transform the grim look of their faces.

2 Now, here is my counsel: God supports the king who represents God and rules with his authority. Because of this divine support, you should pay attention to and comply with the king's directives. 3 Do not let this king intimidate you. If the king should ever order you to do something immoral or unjust, you should not comply. Leave immediately! After all, the king has the power to do whatever he wants—including commanding someone to kill you! 4 This is because the king possesses absolute authority, such that none of his subjects could disobey him without risking harm to himself. No one would ever dare to question the king's actions or demand an explanation for what he commands.

5 The king will not harm anyone

who pays attention to what the king commands
and complies with his directives.
In light of this, someone who is wise will need to discern
how to respond to the king's authority
with careful timing
and appropriate behavior.
6 They will need to know this because,
although human beings endure all sorts of
lamentable realities in life,
in every situation in which people find themselves,
there is always a proper way to do something
and an appropriate moment at which to do it.
7 One of the most lamentable of these realities
is that the events of the future are
hidden to human beings.
After all, no human can foresee the future well
enough to tell others about it.
8 God has not enabled anyone to control the wind;
in a similar way, no one can control when they will die,
just like soldiers cannot decide to go home while
they are fighting a battle.
This is true even for those people who disobey God.
Their attempts to control their own lives
apart from God
cannot give them mastery over what is uncontrollable.

9 As I considered the kinds of things that happen to people during their lives, I witnessed all these lamentable realities happening. I saw that sometimes people like the king possess such power over other human beings that they dominate and harm them.
10 Moreover, I observed the honor that people gave to wicked people at their funerals. I had daily witnessed these wicked people going in and out of the sacred places where people worship God, and people in the city praised them for their behavior! Yet even this is only temporary, as fleeting as a mist.

11 First, people in power sometimes administer justice
against evil actions too slowly.
For this reason, many people feel encouraged to plan
and commit evil actions without fear of
negative consequences.
12 Second, sometimes sinful people commit a hundred
crimes, and yet they live a long life.
Despite this, I am confident that the lives
of people who understand that God is
powerful and just and good—those who
fearfully submit themselves to God—will
turn out well in the end.
13 I am also confident of the opposite: The lives of
people who disobey God will not go well.
Just like shadows in the setting sun appear
to stretch on forever—in the same way,
the current prosperity of evil people is an
illusion. After all, they feel no fear when
they think of God's power and justice!

14 It is only a temporary reality of this life that the undesirable things that bad people deserve sometimes happen to good people, and the kind of lives that good people deserve seem to happen to bad people. I confess that, despite current appearances, these realities are also as temporary as a mist.
15 Living life joyfully is worth celebrating! The best that anyone can do during one's life is simply to eat and drink and be happy. For as long as this God graciously decides a person should live, this kind of simple joy will remain with him like a faithful companion, no matter what difficult labor he must do.
16 I then resolved within myself to become as wise as I could. I wanted to observe the difficult parts of people's lives so that I could understand them, even though they can make people so anxious that they cannot sleep at night or during the day. 17 When I did this, I thought about everything that God has done. Then I realized that he has made humanity so that they can never fully comprehend everything that God does in their lives. Although people will never stop trying to understand, they will never succeed. Even if wise people claim that they understand it all, they really cannot.

9 Truly, I thought deeply about all these realities so that I could study them, including this one: It is God who controls what happens to everyone and what the labor that they do produces. This is true for wise people and those who live justly. However, people never know what will happen to them in the future. Even for righteous people, both undesirable and enjoyable things may happen to them. 2 Everyone dies eventually, no matter who they are—

whether they lived righteously or wickedly,
whether they lived well and were ceremonially
clean and able to worship God, or
they were ceremonially unclean and
unable to worship God,
whether they offered sacrifices to God or refrained
from offering sacrifices.
Good people and sinful people will both die,
whether they did what they promised God that
they would do, or they were afraid
to make such promises.

3 Yes, this is a lamentable part of being alive on this earth. Eventually everyone dies. But even more so, during the time that they are alive, it seems that everyone is fully intent on living like evil people. They also live like crazy people! And then after that, they die just like everyone else!

4 Yet as long as someone is alive,
one will have the opportunity to enjoy good things.
Because of this, it is better to be alive than to be dead.
Even though people think little of dogs in
comparison to lions,
the dog that is alive is better off than the
lion that is dead.
5 This is because people who are still alive are aware
that they will die someday,
but dead people know nothing!
Also, dead people have lost their opportunity to
enjoy the good things that people can
experience during their lives.

Furthermore, people will forget about them!
6 While they are alive, people love other people.
They hate people, and they envy people.
However, the things that these people felt
died long ago.
Those who have died will never again have the chance
to enjoy anything good that happens during
people's lives.

7 So, go and live your life! Allow yourself to be happy when you eat your food and to enjoy the experience of drinking wine. Remember: God wants you to do this! 8 Wear your best clothing all the time, and keep yourself groomed as if you were going to a party! 9 Enjoy the experience of living your fleeting life with your beloved wife. God has given you whatever time you continue to breathe, though it is as brief as the mist of my breath. God has apportioned this time for you to enjoy with your wife, even while you labor at your work. 10 Whatever you can do, do it with all your energy. You should do this because you will die eventually. When you die and your family buries you in the ground, you will no longer be able to accomplish anything or understand why life happens the way it does—or know or understand anything!

11 Once again, I witnessed this reality about life:

The person who runs fastest does not always win the race,
nor do the strongest soldiers always win the battle,
nor do the wisest people always have enough food to eat,
nor do the most insightful people always
become financially prosperous,
nor are the people who know the most always
the most successful.
No human being can control or predict what
will happen to them.

12 Even more so, no one can predict when he will die.

People catch fish in deadly nets,
and people catch birds in traps.
Similarly, every human being will experience
their inevitable death
just like those fish and birds,
like a deadly trap that seizes them unexpectedly.

13 I also observed this truth about wisdom in this life, and it made a lasting impact on me: 14 There was once a small town, and only a few people lived there. Then a powerful king and his army attacked that town and besieged it on all sides. The army built massive ramps against the walls so that they could climb up and conquer the town. 15 Now in that town, there was a man who was poor but wise nonetheless. Remarkably, the man thought wisely and counseled actions that rescued the town from the attack. However, in a little while nobody remembered the poor man who rescued them. 16 So I concluded that it is more beneficial for people to be wise than to be strong. Nonetheless, it is also true that no one values the wise thinking of poor people, nor will they listen to what they say.

17 People will listen to a wise person who speaks
softly more attentively
than they will to a king who shouts at a
crowd of foolish people.
18 Being wise is actually a more effective instrument
than the weapons that soldiers use to fight wars.
Even so, the actions of a single sinful person
have the potential to ruin
the good things that many other people
have accomplished.

10 If only a few flies die in a vat of perfume,
the entire batch can become rancid and stinking.
Similarly, one foolish decision can have a disastrous effect
on a lifetime of wise and honorable decisions.
2 A person's wise thinking can protect them,
like the right hand of a warrior that grips his sword.
Yet people who think foolishly are vulnerable
to the outcomes of their own poor decision-making.
3 Whenever foolish people travel on roads,
they lack any common sense.
They themselves make their stupidity obvious
to everyone who sees them.

4 Should someone powerful become enraged with you,
do not abandon your responsibilities with him.
Remember! Calm and composed responses can lessen
another's fury at serious offenses.

5 I have observed another lamentable situation in my life:
Sometimes people in authority unintentionally
make public mistakes.
6 They promote many foolish people to positions
of authority,
while they assign wealthy people to
unimportant positions.
7 I have witnessed people promote slaves so
that they ride on horses
like rich people usually do.
And yet, they force important officials to walk in the dirt
like slaves usually do.

8 If someone digs a hole in the ground, he might fall into it.
If someone tears down a wall, a snake living
inside the wall might bite him.
9 If someone quarries rocks, the loosened rocks
might fall and injure him.
If someone chops wood, the split logs
might wound him.
10 If a person's axe head is dull,
and he has not sharpened its edges,
then in order to chop something,
he will have to exert more force.
This all shows that being wise is the secret
to success in using one's tools.
11 If a snake bites someone before he can calm it,
then an ability to calm snakes is of no use to him.

12 People will honor wise people
because of the way in which they speak.
However, the things that foolish people say

will inevitably harm them,
as if their own lips were to swallow them.
13 When foolish people begin to talk,
they say stupid things,
but by the time they are finished,
they have said things that are madness and
exceedingly harmful.
14 Yet the foolish person will continue talking.
Nobody knows what might happen in the future.
After all, there is no human being who can tell someone
about what will happen to them tomorrow!

15 Foolish people become very tired by the
work that they do,
with the result that they are even unable to
find the road to their town.

16 It is terrible for the people of a nation
when their ruler acts like a boy,
and when their leaders use their power
to consume large meals at inappropriate times.
17 But it is wonderful for a nation
when its ruler comes from a worthy family,
and when its leaders host large dinners
only at the appropriate moments—
eating and drinking in a dignified manner and
not in drunken revelry.

18 It is like people say:

"Lazy homeowners will neglect their roofs
to the point that they sag and collapse;
the idle lifestyle of house owners
will cause rainwater to leak into the house."

19 Eating food can make people so happy that they laugh,
and drinking wine can make one's life joyful.
However, people who have wealth can respond
to all of their problems.

20 So, you should never dishonor the king.
Do not even think about it!
Neither should you speak ill of wealthy people,
even when you are alone in your bedroom.
After all it is possible that a little winged bird
will overhear what you are saying and tell
everyone what you said.

11 Be generous with what you have,
because eventually others will also be
generous to you.
2 Give a share *of your goods* to seven or eight *people*,
because in this world you never know
what bad things might happen *to you*.

3 It will rain only when the clouds are ready to do so.
Similarly, a fallen tree will remain
in the place where it happened to topple over—
wherever that might be.
4 If someone watches for changes in the wind,
waiting for the perfect moment to plant,
they will never plant their crops.
Likewise, if someone watches the clouds,
waiting for the perfect moment to harvest,
they will never harvest their crops.

5 Now no one understands where the wind comes from or where it goes, nor does anyone understand how a life forms in a woman's womb. In this way, human beings cannot fully understand what God is doing in our lives. After all, God is in charge of everything that happens.

6 Plant your crops while it is still morning,
and do not stop planting until you are done—
even through the evening,
because you do not know which crops will grow better.
One batch of crops might grow better than the other,
or perhaps all of your crops will grow well.

7 It is a wonderful thing to be alive,

just like the warm light of the sun is good for people.
8 So should anyone live for many years,
that person should enjoy each one of them.
However he should not allow himself to forget
either the difficult moments in the past
or that he will grow old and die.
He will surely have many moments
as difficult as the dark of night.
However they will be as temporary as the mist.

9 So, you, young man—let yourself be happy while you are young. Allow yourself to enjoy being alive before you grow old. Pursue the things that you love to do but never forget that our God will judge you one day. He will discern whether you have enjoyed well your time or squandered it. 10 Moreover, do not allow yourself to feel angry about life, and do not pay attention to the pains in your body. Remember: Being a young man who lacks gray hair is as fleeting as the mist!

12 Therefore, while you are young,
live without forgetting God who gave you your life.
Do this before old age makes life difficult and painful.
At that time, you might say,
"I no longer enjoy being alive."
2 Do this before the light from the sun, moon,
and stars fades out
and the clouds disappear, having given all their rain.
3 At that time, your arms that stand guard at
your house will shake.
The men who had strength will weaken.
The grinders who mill grain will cease their task
because too few of them remain.
People looking out from their windows
will see darkness.
4 Everybody will close the doors of their houses.
The sound of people grinding grain will be
too faint to hear.
People will awaken to the crowing of birds.
People will bow down as they sing mournful songs.
5 People will even fear high places.

It will be dangerous to walk the roads.
The flowers of almond trees will become
white as they ripen.
Grasshoppers will drag themselves on the ground.
The caperberry will fail to heal.
This is because people are dying.
Their relatives bury their bodies,
and people circle the streets as they grieve.
6 Remember God before your life ends—
like a silver chain that snaps
or a golden bowl that falls and breaks;
like a jug that shatters against a well,
or the wheel of a reservoir that cracks.
7 At that time, our bodies will decay and
become dirt again,
and our spirits will return to God who gave them.

8 So, Qoheleth said: "All of life is as temporary and insubstantial as the mist of my breath! Everything is emptiness!"

9 So, not only did people recognize that Qoheleth was a wise man, but he also taught his fellow Israelites many truths. He studied and considered many things during his life and wrote down many of the proverbs that he had collected. 10 Qoheleth labored so that he would only use suitable words which were also pleasant. The words that he wrote are reliable and true.

11 Wise people teach us in a way that provokes a change in one's behavior, just like the sharp tools that people use to spur large animals to move. The written collections of the things that wise people have taught are as enduring as nails that someone drives into wood. God is the one who gives these wise insights. 12 However, my child, understand that you will discover nothing profitable by listening to the teachings of so-called wise people. People will never stop writing books, and attempting to study them all will exhaust you.

13 This is the last of Qoheleth's lectures,
now that you've heard everything:
Fearfully submit yourself to God,
so that you live your life the way he asks.
Do this because this
is the duty of every human!
14 This is because God will judge
everything that humans have done,
even things that people have done secretly—
good decisions and evil decisions alike.