

True Wisdom

Devotional Book

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A Word from the Author

Thank you for deciding to use this devotional book to help guide your thoughts as you read God's Word in your time of daily devotion. It is my hope that you will always read the entire Bible passage I have included and ask God to speak a word to your heart from it before you read my reflections. And I recommend that you read only one of these devotions a day. In this way, you will keep the Word of God in its prominent place and will use my stories as a supplement to your own thoughts about the passage.

I also recommend that you journal when you read the Bible passage and these stories, especially answering the reflection questions that are included. This will help you see a pattern of truths that God may be speaking to you, which can be of help in the future when you look back at what He has said to you.

I dedicate this book in honor of the many teachers of God who shared truth with me, either in person or in their writings.

-Alice Cullinan

A Word About this book

Without realizing we are doing so, many of us neglect some of the rich treasure houses of blessings found in the Old Testament. One such source of treasure is Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, also the author of Proverbs. Perhaps our oversight is because there seems to be much in the book that sounds depressing, such as 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' But the book is filled with great truths for us, written by a man who was given great wisdom from God. The book includes warnings, of course, since this man of wisdom made choices that drew him away from God, his true source of wisdom. Perhaps this month as we study this book, we can find truth that will help us stay on the right path!

I have also included verses from the New Testament and some other Old Testament books in order to get a more comprehensive look at this important topic.

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The Request

Bible Passage: I Kings 3:5-15

Focus: “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.”

Most of us are familiar with the story of Aladdin and his magic lamp. He rubbed and a genie appeared to grant his wishes. Most every child who is familiar with the story imagines having his own lamp and private genie. But as we grow into adulthood, we realize that such lamps are not available! Unfortunately, however, some of us keep wishing for things that seem to be constantly out of reach. “Just a little more money, and we will be happy.” Or we think if we can just find the right person to marry, have a child, find a good job, own our home, buy a new car or electronic device, we will find the happiness we so much desire. And some spend a lifetime searching for the elusive dream, never to find it. How very sad. How these frantic, empty searches must break the heart of God, as He watches His unfulfilled children looking in all of the wrong places for the satisfaction that a relationship with Him would provide.

Solomon himself, considered to be the wisest man who ever lived, lost his focus for a time. Although he knew better, he still let his heart be led away from complete devotion to the God who had given him the wisdom he enjoyed. Some of his struggles and the lessons he learned are in the book of Ecclesiastes. We will be wiser because of the study this month if we allow the Lord to teach us true wisdom.

Reflection: How satisfied are you with your own life these days? Have you been unwise in any of your decisions? Have you been searching for satisfaction in anything but your relationship with God?

Prayer: Dear Father, I desire to learn what You want me to learn as I look at the traits of true wisdom. Please teach me true wisdom and what life is really all about.

Stink Bug

Bible Passage: I Kings 3:1-5

Focus: Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statutes of his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

For some reason, stink-bugs are invading my sunroom. Not in large numbers or swarms, thankfully, but just one here and there when I least expect it. I first noticed them when my pups were pawing at something on the floor that I saw was moving. Little Bear ate it, so I did not know it was a bug until another one appeared a day or two later. Apparently she likes to eat them! I have never known why they are called stink-bugs, but assume it is because they have a bad odor when smashed. But they must not taste all that bad, at least to a dog! But since I really don't know whether they can be harmful to a pet, when I see one, I use a tissue to pick it up and I flush it! Word must have gotten out in stink-bug land, however, to be on the alert for a little old lady with a tissue in hand, because they have been more difficult to find lately. Unfortunately, however, just last night, I reached for the glass of water I have sitting beside my chair and lifted it to my mouth to take a sip. Thankfully, I just happened to glance in the glass to find a stink-bug floating there! A one-word description: YUCK! Although it was small and not taking up much room, it is totally out of place in my water glass!

Look at the verse for today's devotion. Does it seem to you that Solomon had a bit of 'stink-bug religion?'

Reflection: Are there things in your life as a Christian that should not be there? Are there actions, attitudes or beliefs that may have God saying "YUCK" as He views them? Are you willing to ask Him to help you 'flush' them into oblivion?

Prayer: Dear Father, I confess that I need Your help in getting rid of the things in my life that are offensive to You and others and are detrimental to me. Help me, God. I will cooperate.

A Foreign Object

Bible Passage: I Kings 11:1-10

Focus: As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

“It is just thread; nothing all that unusual. And it is doing what it was designed to do. But enough is enough. It is time to get rid of it. It has served its purpose and now it is causing more harm than good.” To what am I referring? The thread used as sutures for holding the skin on my eyelids that were cut by the physician as he attempted to correct a problem that was affecting my vision. But it has been a week now, and my eyelids are screaming out to be delivered from the thread. Blood cells are rushing to the site of the invader, causing pink markings. Pain comes and goes, robbing me of sleep. The body knows there is something foreign in its world. It will not heal until the intruder is gone.

Solomon did so well for many of his years as ruler of Israel. He was not perfect, of course, but the shame came when his wives turned his heart after other gods. I imagine it started in a small and subtle way, perhaps with just one request for him to allow a small idol to be placed in the temple. One thing out of place, however, soon mushroomed into an indictment by God that Solomon’s heart was not ‘fully devoted to the Lord.’

Reflection: Have you allowed anything to come between you and your Lord? Is there something you need to get rid of that is keeping you from being fully devoted to God?

Prayer: Dear Father, I pray that You will reveal to me anything that is hindering my commitment to You, large and small. By Your grace and with Your help, I will eliminate it from my life. All ‘foreign invaders’ are unwelcome in my heart and life.

A Make-Over

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 1:1-10

Focus: What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new?” It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.

It was dusk when the front doorbell rang. The pups started barking, of course, as I headed toward the door. I looked through the glass first to make sure it was safe to open the door, and held back the pups as I opened the door to address the woman who was standing there on my front porch. Since Carolyn was home, I felt OK about asking the visitor to step inside since it was so cold outside. She immediately identified herself as a cosmetic salesperson and asked if I was familiar with her product. I told her that I used to use what she was selling some years ago, but was not presently doing so. We talked for a few minutes, she gave me her card and left. But before she stepped out on the porch, she remarked that she would be happy to come by and give me and Carolyn a make-over. I thanked her, as I chuckled inside, knowing full-well that she might cover up some wrinkles and add some color to my face, but a make-over? Nope. Not that easy, unfortunately! Covering up blemishes and making the face brand new are two different things, to be sure.

In today's focal verse, Solomon shares an important truth. He is dealing with the fact that life can seem discouraging at times, but he reminds us later in the book that there is Someone who can make all things new! No, makeup won't do it, nor can we accomplish this by our own efforts. But God is in the business of making us new....if we let Him.

Reflection: Are you allowing God to make You into what He wants to and how He wants to?

Prayer: Dear God, I yield my life into Your hands. I am the clay....You are the potter.

Self-Effort

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Focus: I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

As a professor, I often observed some students who dove headlong into study, as if life would be under their control if they could just become smart enough. The tragedy I also observed was when Christian students fell into the trap of thinking that study alone could make them as smart as God. Sounds a bit like the Garden of Eden temptation, doesn't it? Even the well-meaning, conscientious person can fall into a trap of searching for true wisdom in the wrong place and in the wrong way. Notice some of the ways Solomon said he did this futile search: "I devoted myself to study;" "I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom;" "I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly;" "I undertook great projects;" "I bought....I owned....I amassed....I acquired...I denied myself nothing." What did it get him? "When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless." He went on to write that he hated his life and his heart began to despair.

Just this week, a teen idol was arrested again for DWI and for resisting arrest. This handsome, baby-faced star has demonstrated again the same thing Solomon wrote about hundreds of years ago. Happiness is never found in things, fame or accomplishment. Wonder why we humans cannot grasp this truth?

Reflection: Will you take a serious look at your own life and what you are doing to try to be happy or fulfilled? Are you searching in the right place? What do you need to stop or start doing to live life as God intends you to live it?

Prayer: Dear Father, I know it is Your will that my life consist of purpose, peace and fulfillment. And I know that I forget that You are the source of all that will satisfy. Truly, Lord, thank You for not letting me experience happiness apart from You.

Retirement

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

Focus: A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.

Being a part of the Facebook phenomenon is an education in itself. I resisted for a long while, not really feeling I had the time to read when others ate their peanut-butter sandwiches or cheered for their favorite ball team. But when I realized that I might be able to make contact with former students, I succumbed. I have enjoyed reconnecting with people I had lost touch with and learning what my distant relatives are doing, but the main thing that has been a blessing to me is seeing how the Lord can use this medium to minister to His children.

Something else I have noticed, however, about being a part of Facebook is how many people are unhappy with their jobs. It seems as if some people's lives consist of hating Mondays, longing for Fridays, and planning their schedules around the next holiday. I have been so blessed in my work experiences, even in my work and ministry while 'retired.' I know of others who planned and looked forward to being able to retire only to find themselves bored and feeling useless. Somehow many people have not learned what Solomon discovered: Satisfaction in our work is essential to happiness in life.

Reflection: How satisfied are you with your work life? If you are not, do you need to change jobs or ask God to change you? Do you consider your job a ministry opportunity or just a way to make a living?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know there are many who do not have a job and those who are employed who are very unhappy. Help me to be a faithful and satisfied servant where You have placed me. I want to serve and work as one who is serving You.

Thinking Too Much

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 1:1-9

**Focus: What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?
Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.**

Introverts often go inside their own heads to ponder life and its meanings or simply to have a little peace and quiet to help in making decisions. It is troublesome for an introvert to be in a group made up of extroverts who talk while they are thinking! The introvert prefers to think things through before saying anything. “You just think too much” is a comment often made by an extrovert TO an introvert. When one reads the book of Ecclesiastes, it is easy to conclude that Solomon spent a great deal of time thinking. Much of it seems as if he has given up on life, that he is depressed and feeling hopeless. But is he? Could it be that he is just ‘processing’ information that helps him come to some pretty profound conclusions?

I can remember having similar thoughts before I came to know the Lord. I saw the futility of life, the sameness that all mankind seemed to endure. It made no sense to me how people would spend their entire life going through the same mundane routine without purpose or meaning. This thought bothered me so much that it sent me ‘over the brink.’ I was at work one day, feeling overwhelmed by the futility of life. I decided that suicide was the best way to deal with my pain. But God had other plans. He led me to the office of the plant nurse, who sensed my depression and talked with me about Jesus. And I opened wide the door of my heart and He came in! Then life made sense and it has been a journey of meaning and joy ever since!

Reflection: Do you know the Lord?

Prayer: Dear Spirit of God, empower my life today so I can get on with the work of witnessing about Jesus.

Up in Smoke

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-14

Focus: I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing can be taken away from it. God does it so that men will revere Him.

Two of my friends have lost their homes and most of their possessions when their houses caught on fire. One fire started in a fireplace; another was caused by a crock-pot. “Up in smoke.” All of their earthly possessions. But their lives were spared.

In one of my classes at the university, I asked the students to participate in an activity designed to help them reflect on what they considered important. I told them to imagine that they were at home when they discovered that it was on fire. They had 2 minutes to grab anything they could and exit the house. All of their family members and pets would make it out safely; they had to determine what else they wanted to rescue. It made for an interesting discussion, of course. I have pondered the question often. What would I be sure to grab as I exited my burning home?

Recently, I was cleaning out my garage when I discovered a box of plaques and awards I had received while a professor. They were meaningful at the time, of course, but now are deteriorating in the garage. I cannot help but wonder if I have other trophies that are lasting? Solomon reminds us in our readings for today that we DO have lasting trophies: everything we have allowed God to do in and through our lives. And there is still time to ‘collect’ them!

Reflection: What kind of treasures and trophies are you collecting? Allow God to work in you and you will have many!

Prayer: Dear Lord, how wonderful You are to use Your children to accomplish Your will and work on this earth. Thank You for the privilege of working and serving in Your kingdom. Bring honor to Your name through my life today.

The Value of Friendship

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Focus: 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 in every three adults over 65 fall each year at least once. That is an alarming statistic, of course, but as I read it, I couldn't help think of something even sadder. This past year, our newspaper reported on various needs of non-profit agencies in our county. One such agency was requesting donations to help provide Christmas gifts for the 200+ senior adults in local nursing facilities who have no family and who are under the care of social services! How very sad to me. People who were 'deposited' into the care of an organization instead of being loved and cared for by family and friends. Of course, I realize that often the health of some people make it necessary for them to be placed in such facilities, but for there to be no one to give them a Christmas gift is just unfathomable. Where are the friends and family members? Where are the churches? Where are the neighbors?

Years ago I heard a song that touched my heart: *Lonely People* was the title. I am touched by the words each time I hear it. Solomon echoes the same concern in his comments we read today: "pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

Reflection: What kind of friend are you to people? Do you have friends you can count on to pick you up when you fall, either literally or emotionally? Will you take time to develop your friendships and to be the kind of friend to others that you would like to have?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for the friends You have placed in my life through the years. Please help me cherish my friends and to be a friend to others today. And Jesus, thank You that I can count on Your friendship, too!

Man's Best Friend

Bible Passage: Proverbs 18:14-24

Focus: A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Since I am a dog lover and since I have two little dogs who reside within my home, I find myself often quoting the focus verse when it comes to their behavior. They seem determined to 'stick' close to me, no matter where I am or what I am doing. And I have had 'lap' dogs who insisted that my lap should be available to them at all times! By the way, have you ever wondered why dogs and not cats are considered 'man's best friend?' Since I did, I thought I would surf the web and learn why. Here is what I discovered:

The earliest citation of the actual word choice - in English - is traced to a poem printed in the *The New-York Literary Journal, Volume 4, 1821*.

The faithful dog - why should I strive
To speak his merits, while they live
In every breast, and man's best friend
Does often at his heels attend.

I enjoyed learning some information about dogs, of course, but I am challenged by Solomon's writings about friendship and cannot help but examine my own life to see what kind of friend I am to others.

Reflection: Who considers you to be their friend? Would you call yourself a faithful friend? How many friends are faithful to you when you need them?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank You for the friends You have placed in my life. I ask that I may be the friend that others need. And thank You, Lord, for being my best friend. And, thanks for my pups who teach me much each day.

Listen up!

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

Focus: Guards your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifices of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

Many years ago, I had the pleasure of leading my own mother to know the Lord. Although we had been church members for many years, we did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. When I accepted Him into my heart, one of the first things I wanted to do, or course, was to share the good news with my family. I vividly remember how hurt I was when my mother said she thought I had lost my mind, because I said that we were not really Christians. Thankfully, however, not many months later, the Spirit revealed to her that she, too, had not been born again.

Something else I remember about my mother was her shock the first time she visited a Baptist church. We had been members of a Methodist church and she had been brought up attending an Episcopal church. What surprised her was all of the talk during the prelude. She felt like this should be a time we prepare our hearts to hear from God, not a time to talk with each other! I would have to agree with her that we Baptists might do well to read Ecclesiastes (and other verses) that remind us of our need to draw near to listen rather than to talk! I believe God said the same thing on the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter was so busy trying to erect tabernacles for them all: "This is my Son," God said. "Listen to Him." Good advice, I would say.

Reflection: How different do you think our worship services would be if we sat quietly during the prelude and listened for the voice of God to speak to us?

Prayer: Dear Father, teach me to be a good listener, both when I am in worship services and as I walk throughout my day.

Keeping Your Promises

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 5:4-7

Focus: When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

I had been a Christian less than a year when my grand-mother was rushed to the hospital during a heart attack. She was en route to the hospital when I quickly drove to my spiritual mentor's house and asked that she pray for my grandmother. We knelt and prayed, and I left to drive to the hospital. I remember asking the Lord to spare my grandmother's life, especially since I was not sure she was a Christian. I had not talked with her about her spiritual condition, and now I was horrified that she might enter eternity without Christ. In my desperation, I made a vow to the Lord that I would try to reach as many people as possible with the gospel if he would spare my grandmother's life so I could witness to her. He was gracious. She lived and I did talk with her about the Lord. I believe she knew Him, but the Lord wanted this young believer to know that she did.

What about the vow? Have I been faithful in keeping it? I have asked that question of myself many times. I have tried the best I know how to be faithful to His leading, and have had the joy of reaching several for Him. I realize that His calling and gifting have led me to the role of discipling rather than evangelizing, but I still remember the vow....I still want people to know my wonderful Lord.

Reflection: Have you ever made a promise to God? Have you kept that promise? Is there something you DO need to promise Him? He keeps His promises to us. How well are you keeping yours to Him?

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for being so faithful in keeping Your promises to me. Help me to be faithful to You, dear Lord, out of my love for You.

A Smart Mouth or an Intelligent One?

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 5:7; Prov. 16:23; 17:28

Focus: Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

During a television program I was watching recently, a high ranking military official questioned someone of lower rank. The answer given was a rather foolish one, and just as the words exited his mouth, he said these words to his commanding officer: "Sir, I respectfully request permission to remove my foot from my mouth." It took me a moment to realize what he had just said, but when I 'got it,' I realized a valuable lesson for us all. We would do well to have that same attitude with God as well as toward others. It is so easy to speak before we think and even to say things to God that need to be withdrawn. Many of us are guilty of a bad case of 'foot in mouth' disease even in our prayers.

One of the verses in our readings for today goes right to the heart of the problem. "A wise man's heart guides his mouth." Jesus taught the same truth in Matthew 12:36. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Our daily request to God should be: "I respectfully request that you work on my heart, Lord." And when we find our mouths have poured out words that are not honoring or helpful, we would be wise to ask for forgiveness from the Lord and from whomever else heard us!

Reflection: Do you have trouble with your mouth, with saying things that you wish you had not said? Ask God to work on your heart as well as your mouth.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I respectfully ask that You work on my heart and my mouth today. I desire that both be under Your control.

Money Trouble

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 5:10-17

Focus: Whoever loves money never has enough money; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

Have you ever thought how much money you would have to amass before you considered yourself to be wealthy? Years ago I read an article in which the writer suggested that a wealthy person is someone who has more than you do. I have pondered that supposition for many years. The person who reaches the first million dollar mark is planning on how to reach the second million, etc. It is also interesting to me to learn of the phenomenon that is occurring in the North Carolina lottery. Unless the jackpot is worth multi-millions, not as many people will spend money to buy a ticket.

I see the same 'passion for more' with electronics, and since I admit to being one who likes to enjoy the newest invention, I have to be careful that I do not succumb to the lure of buying something just because it is newer than what I have. It seems to be a problem deep within the human heart. We are not easily satisfied. Perhaps it has to do with the 'God-shaped hole' in our hearts that was made for God alone. Perhaps we think money and things and comfort and fun can provide for us the peace and security for which we crave. But it cannot and will not. And Solomon reminds us of that truth. He was the recipient of great wisdom that God gave him, but even he went astray and tried a lot of different things. But, thankfully, his futile search and his conclusions are written down for our benefit.

Reflection: In what areas of your own life are you tempted to want more? Where are you trying to find happiness or security apart from your relationship with God?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to see where I stray from You. Please help me see the subtle temptations that are in my world that would lead me away from the peace I can only have in You.

Road Rage

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 7:1-10

Focus: Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

I am sure that road rage is not a new phenomenon, although I do not remember that particular description until recent years. But I am sure that even in horse-and-buggy days, if someone did something that upset a buggy-driver, their rage would boil over, too. But it was harder to run someone off the road with a horse and buggy!

Recently, a friend was discussing her concern about how intense her deacon husband's road rage was, that he almost changed personalities when someone cut him off or did something he thought inappropriate. Because of her concern, I began thinking about the whole phenomenon and here are a few conclusions I came up with. Could it be that the enraged person is really feeling or thinking these things? (1) I am king of the road and you have to obey my rules. (2) I don't care where you are going, it is more important that I get where I am going. (3) You are not allowed to do anything stupid or life-threatening when I am around as you might cause me harm....or at least delay my progress. (4) I never make mistakes so it irritates me when someone else does. (5) I am the most important person in the universe; have you not come to realize that yet?

When Solomon mentions that 'anger resides in the lap of fools,' I think he had something there! Remembering this truth can even change your driving habits!

Reflection: Examine the things that make you angry. How many of them are because people don't realize you are 'King or Queen of the hill?'

Prayer: Dear Lord, shine the searchlight on my heart. I am guilty. Please forgive me and change my foolish heart.

Hidden Treasure

Bible Passage: Col. 2:1-10

Focus: ...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

It is Easter weekend. I am at home with an intestinal virus, not a fun way to spend this wonderful day! But being a 'shut-in' has allowed me to have more time to ponder things that might have escaped my notice had I been involved in my usual busy activities. When I was feeling too ill to write or read, I perused Facebook to see how others celebrated Easter. Of course, there were the usual egg hunts, sunrise services and family gatherings, along with the chocolate bunnies and new outfits. One posting mentioned that a grandchild had found an egg with \$1 in it, and 'you would have thought it was \$100!' I can remember when you just hunted for the egg and that was all you got, an egg. It was fun to see who could collect the most eggs, of course, but since I don't like hard-boiled eggs, finding the egg was the extent of my joy! I think today, however, I would have more fun, especially if I found an egg with chocolate candy in it!

There is something in us all that sparks intrigue when we hunt for 'a treasure,' especially if it is something we want. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Colossians that there is a wonderful treasure to be found in Christ. Of course, He really is treasure enough, but in Him we get a bonus: wisdom and knowledge. It is quite sad when we search frantically in other places for the wisdom that is readily available in Jesus! Wonder when we will get the message?

Reflection: Do you realize that you have all of the wisdom you need for navigating through life when you know Jesus?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I am so thankful that I know You as my Lord and Savior. Help me to remember, dear Lord, that You are the Source of all of the wisdom I will ever need. Thank You for that truth. Help me spend more time with You, the Source of all wisdom.

God's Perspective

Bible Passage: James 1:1-8

Focus: If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

In one of Max Lucado's books, he shared the story of a time he took his little girl with him to a high-rise building. She was about knee-cap height, and as they entered the elevator, her anxiety immediately was stirred. As she stood there beside her dad in the crowd, she lifted her arms up to her dad and asked him to pick her up. He did, and immediately she found comfort in the arms of her dad instead of among the knee-caps of strangers!

James reminds us that we can find comfort from our heavenly Father when we are in the midst of trials that bring us much anxiety. James reminds us to ask God for wisdom, but it is not just any wisdom we need at times like those. Our request is that God give us wisdom to see our trials and difficulties from *His perspective*. All too often, we have 'knee-cap' vision when it comes to the trials that engulf us. We cannot understand what is happening to us or why God allows such difficulty and uncertainty. It is during such situations that we need to ask our Father to lift us up above the trials and give us wisdom to see from His perspective.

Reflection: Are you in the midst of some trial today? Are you especially anxious because you do not understand what is happening to you or why? Lift your hands to the Father and ask Him to lift you up.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You have invited me to ask You for wisdom to see life from your perspective. That is what I am asking now. And if You think it best that I not understand, I will trust You anyway.

Finding it

Bible Passage: Proverbs 2:1-15

Focus: ...if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Easter was just a few weeks ago. Some of my former students are children's ministers in their churches. Easter egg hunts were part of their weekend celebrations. Noting their postings and pictures on Facebook, I recalled many happy memories of Easter egg hunts in which I participated, both as the one finding the eggs and the one hiding them for others to find. It has been interesting to see how these events have evolved from the time we used real eggs to the present day events where plastic eggs are filled with candy and other prizes. I also recalled an experience I had a few years ago when visiting the Outer Banks. As my friends and I walked the beach one morning, we noticed little bumps in the sand. Upon further exploration, we discovered a sand dollar in each 'bump.' What fun it was to dig up and collect the sand dollars. I felt like a kid again as I amassed quite a collection.....that is until someone told me I was doing something illegal! I did not realize that the sand dollars are alive.....so I also felt guilty for taking them out of their natural habitat. But I did not get arrested and I felt better when I threw them back into the ocean, along with a prayer that they would survive my ignorance!

God DOES want us to search earnestly for wisdom, however, and He will make sure we find it!

Reflection: Are you seeking God's wisdom with the same earnestness a child seeks to find an Easter egg?

Prayer: Dear Father, I will seek after true wisdom today. Thank You that you will help me find it.

Clever Devils

Bible Passage: Psalm 111:1-10

Focus: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.

C.S. Lewis reminds us of an important truth: “Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.” I spent most of my adult life in the world of academia, both as a student and then as a professor. I was constantly reminded of the lure of knowledge and unfortunately witnessed more than one person who shipwrecked their lives by succumbing to the temptation to embrace so called ‘knowledge’ apart from a commitment to God, the true source of wisdom. One of the ways I saw the temptation entice people was the suggestion that the Bible is not reliable unless you interpret it through the lens of the human scholar. I saw many lose their bearings and their faith as they followed the road of ‘scholarship’ and failed to keep their relationship and commitment to God in the forefront of their studies. On more than one occasion, I counseled students whose faith had been dealt a severe blow by someone they considered ‘wise.’

I am reminded almost daily of the first temptation that entered into the realm of humans: that we might be like God....

I wonder if that is really the basis for the problem I have been discussing. Some of us fall for the oldest ‘trick in the book:’ that we don’t need to value our relationship with God above all other allurements.

Reflection: Have you been tempted to become so wise that you don’t need God?

Prayer: Dear Father, please protect me from the foolish desire to place human knowledge above godly wisdom.

“What do you know?”

Bible Passage: Phil. 3: 1-11

Focus: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

“What do you know” is a common greeting and has been for quite awhile. The response usually is “Not much, what do you know?” I have noticed that young men usually add the word ‘man’ at the end of the question and the question is a bit crunched together: “What cha know, man?” I also have observed that on most occasions, accompanying the greeting, is a slap on the back or one of those special fist-tapping-finger-and-hand greetings that I wonder if they practice to get it just right!

Transport yourself back to Paul’s day. I wonder if his answer to the question would be something like this: “I know Jesus, man, but I want to know Him better. That is my life goal.”

I realize that we can have that goal but refrain from saying it when we are asked ‘what do we know.’ There are times if we respond that way, it would certainly turn someone away from Jesus! But what we do need to be certain about is that our life’s goal is the same as Paul stated: we should indeed desire to become ‘more intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly.’ (Amplified version). If we will do this, we can be ‘transformed in spirit into His likeness.’ This is a worthy goal and the essence of true wisdom.

Reflection: I wonder how you would respond if the Spirit asked you ‘what do you know....?’

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, it is my heart’s desire to know You better. And I want You to be able to reveal Yourself in and through my life in any way you choose. To that I commit myself.

Study-Tired

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Focus: Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

It is exam time at the university where I taught before my retirement. I do not miss that part of being a professor at all! I do admit, however, that I would rather be grading the papers than taking the exams!

As I remembered those semesters when I was teaching survey of the Old Testament, I recalled teaching the book of Ecclesiastes. Since we were studying in overview fashion because of the lack of time to cover the entire Old Testament in one semester, I would select which portions of the text to discuss in class. When we were in the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the passages I selected was the chapter for today's readings. I did not get many 'amens' during my classes, but it seems every time we studied this verse, there were several students who could not contain their hearty word of amen! There is much speculation as to why Solomon made these comments about books and study, but one thing for sure: his conclusion about the meaning of life and study is something we should gladly embrace: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." What and why we are reading and studying has a profound impact on our lives. If we are weary, we had better closely examine why.

Reflection: Have you made the choice to study and read those things that will build your faith and not tear it down? Are your top two priorities to fear God and keep His commandments?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I realize that I, too, lose my way as Solomon did by viewing the world through the wrong lens. I know I cannot find true satisfaction and peace apart from worshipping You and obeying what You tell me to do and not to do. May my study be edifying and helpful to me, Lord.

A Good Pack Rat

Bible Passage: Prov. 10:8-17

Focus: Wise men store up knowledge...

I come from a long line of pack rats. Is that something I should be admitting, I wonder? Well, it just depends on what I am collecting, right? Of course, most pack rats think what they are storing is important, so how can I be objective in evaluating this tendency in myself? What drives my tendency to hold onto things, to save them for future use? I won't get into a psychological analysis here, although that exercise can be informative. Most of my rationalizations go like this: "I may need this one;" "I can save money in the future by reusing this;" or "I invested so much in this...or...I have such fond memories associated with this." Do you ever use those same arguments as you save something that you will probably not use again?

As I was looking at verses in a concordance on 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' in order to write these devotions, I ran across today's verse that made me feel MUCH better about being a pack rat in at least one area of my life. I am very much aware of just how much the Lord has invested in my life and I feel very responsible for sharing this information with others: hence the writing of devotional books. I have stored up information and knowledge for many years now, since I have read and studied the Bible as well as MANY books for over 50 years! Surely I have put aside some things, packed them away – if you will. I may be a pack rat in other areas of my life, but I am most surely one when it comes to saving and henceforth sharing the jewels of life God has shown to me!

Reflection: Are you storing up God's truths in your mind so you can share them with others?

Prayer: Dear Father, I am keenly aware of my responsibility to share with others the treasures You have entrusted to me. Help me to be faithful in doing that, Lord, for as long as You give me life.

Be Still

Bible Passage: Psalm 46

Focus: Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

“Be still.” Words often used by a parent to a wiggly or unruly child. But is it really fair for a parent to expect stillness in a young or hyperactive child? The age of the child and the situation at hand as well as the personality or physical make-up and personality of the child determines whether this ‘command’ is fair.

But what about this same ‘command’ given by God through the pen of the psalmist in our focal verse for today? Is it fair for God to expect us to ‘be still’ when the world around us is topsy-turvy? (Note the verses in the biblical passage that mention mountains falling into the sea, nations in uproar, kingdoms falling and the waters causing other mountains to quake.) How could God expect us to ‘be still,’ to be calm when life around us is tossing us all around?

The psalmist mentions a few reasons why God can expect such stillness in His children: (1) He is our refuge and strength, (2) He is with us in all of our troubles, (3) He has everything under control, (4) He is Almighty, fully capable of handling all that concerns us. If I really believe that God is all of this, I can ‘be still.’ Perhaps I need to see how much faith I really have placed in these truths about God.

Reflection: What kind of turbulence is happening in your life today? Have you forgotten that your God is able to handle you and your troubles today? Have you asked Him to help you to be still and to remember Who loves you and Who is in charge of all that concerns you?

Prayer: Dear Father, Help me to be still today before You, to allow You to calm my heart with the truth that You do love me and are fully capable of handling everything in my life.

Portable Shower

Bible Passage: I John 1:5-10

Focus: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

There is nothing quite so disturbing as to be instructed by the doctor that you cannot take a bath or shower for a week due to the surgery, the cast on your arm, or whatever. Of course, this just goes for adults, as some kids and teens would be overjoyed to have an excuse to escape the bath routine! But for those who know the refreshing that comes from a nice, hot shower or bath, hearing that 'sponging' is the only thing you can do is not welcomed news.

Most adults know the pleasure and refreshing that come from showering after a long day of working in the yard or sweating at the gym or on the athletic field. And most family members of such adults also experience relief! But have you ever stopped to think about the spiritual showers that we need that many overlook or avoid? Cleansing of daily sin and worldly contamination is also essential, both to our well-being and that of those around us! But how do we do that? For sure, it takes more than an occasional 'sponge-bath,' like on Sundays or during a revival service. In John's letter, we learn that we have a 'portable shower' available for our constant cleansing: walking in the light. What does that mean? It means asking the Lord to shine the searchlight on us to see where the 'dirt' is and then asking Him to forgive and cleanse us. When I faithfully do this, I remain clean. That is what He wants for us and the only way we can walk in fellowship with Him. One evidence that we are growing wiser is knowing our need to be pure.

Reflection: How are you doing with your portable shower? Don't settle for a little sponge-bathing!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Shine your searchlight on all of my life. Show me where I am dirty and I will confess and let you cleanse me. I want to be thoroughly clean!

Looking for the Gold

Bible Passage: Job 23: 1-17

Focus: But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

A story was told of a group of Buddhist monks of many centuries ago whose village was threatened by invaders. There was a very large, gold statue of Buddha in their temple which they covered entirely in mud to make it unattractive to those who were pillaging their village. Due to repeated threats from outsiders, the monks left the mud on the statue, and after centuries, people forgot that there was even gold under the mud. One day, however, when they were moving the statue to another village, a sudden downpour occurred and some of the mud was washed away, revealing the slight glimmer of gold. When the present monks saw the gleam, they added more water until the mud was washed away and the gold statue was revealed. What had been covered in ugly mud for so long now was revealed in beauty and splendor.

Within every believer who has trusted Christ as Savior is a 'new creation,' a person made in the likeness of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit. But the 'mud' of the old life, the old nature without God, still crusts it over. But God knows what is under the old, and He knows how to work to uncover it. He sends the water of His Word to wash, the floods of His love to reveal, and even the chipping away of unpleasant circumstances to get rid of the mud. God knows there is gold there, and He is determined to reveal it!

Reflection: Have you ever thought about the fact that God engineers circumstances, both good and bad, as a way to wash away the old mud of your life in order to reveal the gold within? Don't work against Him. Cooperate with Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know that there is a lot of the 'old me' that covers up the gold that you are looking for. Help me to yield to the cleansing process and even to the breaking process. Find the gold, Lord.

Going for the Gold

Bible Passage: I Corinthians 9:24-27

Focus: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

The winter Olympics are taking place this week. Highlights are being shown on TV. It is amazing how willing these athletes are to train so diligently for four years, just to be able to compete for a medal. Perseverance, diligence, sacrifice, patience, pain...all words that would describe what they must endure just for the opportunity to compete for medals. Of course, the top prize is the coveted gold medal. Some of the contests are for individuals, while some are for teams. I was watching some of the races last night, amazed at how they skated so efficiently and what looked quite effortless to me. But then it happened. There were only 8 contestants, but one of them slipped and fell and a teammate right behind him tripped over him, and 4 others were delayed as they tried to avoid the pileup. The two ahead of the pack went on to qualify for the final race. How sad, I thought. Tripped up by a teammate. One slip by one racer, and many were affected.

How true of our life-race. Each of us should be running our spiritual race with the perseverance and determination to win the prize of the 'high calling of God in Christ,' as Paul described it in Phil. 3:14. I need to be careful not to 'slip' in my race, or I may hinder the race of another believer.

Reflection: How are you doing in your own walk of faith? Are you as determined to be good at that as you are at other endeavors in your life? Are you being careful not to be a hindrance to other believers?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I want to be the kind of Christian that You would call a winner. I want to be pleasing to You and helpful to others. Please help me as I look to You for guidance and strength.

True Brilliance

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 9:7-12

Focus: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

There are some words, in my opinion, that should be saved for special use. Using them too often causes their importance to be lessened. One such word to me is 'brilliance.' Having worked in the world of academia for so many years, I often had to give an assessment of a paper or presentation by a student in one of my classes. On a few rare occasions would I assign the grade of A+ since that was the top grade, indicating outstanding work by the one being evaluated. Recently when I heard a professor use the word 'brilliant' to describe a presentation by a former student. I remember having the student in one of my classes, and although he was a bright young man, I would never use the word 'brilliant' to describe him or his work. But, I realize that all assessments and word usages are unique to each of us. "What is the point of my discussion?" you might wonder. I believe that we should be very careful how much importance we place on various traits we or others seem to have. Why? Because we really had very little to do with the talents or abilities we were given. Our emphasis should be on the wise use of what God has entrusted to us. After all, He is the Brilliant One!

Reflection: Do you have a good perspective on where your gifts, talents and abilities came from? Have you offered them to God for Him to use for His glory, not your own?

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the wonderful gifts You have entrusted to me to use. Keep me humble, Lord, by reminding me that without You, I am and have nothing of any worth to anyone. I submit my life to You today to use in any way You see fit that will honor You and bless others.

Time Conscious and Conscientious

Bible Passage: Ecclesiastes 9:10-18

Focus: Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge or wisdom.

Several people this past week have posted pictures on Facebook and added accompanying comments about how fast their children are growing, how fast time has flown, etc. One of my former students put a picture of herself celebrating her 60th birthday! And she was not an older student when I taught her. Do you think when I saw that posting that it made me realize again just how fast time flies?!

We have no control over how fast life passes. So, what can we do to make the most of the years that the Lord does allow us to enjoy? Solomon says we should be sure to keep from laziness, to 'do with all our might what our hands find to do.' James, Jesus' brother, has this observation: "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes....you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'" (James 4:14-15) Perhaps his suggestions can best be summed up in two words: Conscientiousness and contemplation. We obviously should be very thoughtful about the meaning of life and Who is in charge of it, and we should be good stewards of all we are and have.

Reflection: What are you doing to be the best person you can be while you live the life God has entrusted to you?

Prayer: Dear Lord, You have blessed me in so many ways with so many abilities. Help me to be a faithful steward of these blessings today. Help me to remember how fleeting life is so I will not squander any of it. Help me never to take my blessings for granted, but to use them to serve others and to honor You.

The Source of True Wisdom

Bible Passage: Luke 21:12-19

Focus: For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

God spoke to me as I sat in worship one morning. I was the minister of music and it was the second of our two services. Since I had heard the sermon during the early service, my mind wandered during this second service, and perhaps that was a good thing. Sometimes our minds are so engaged in other things that we fail to recognize the voice of God. What did He say to me, you might wonder? He clearly said that He wanted me to teach. I had felt and responded to an earlier call into ministry and had attended college and seminary in order to prepare. But, here I was, in the middle of serving Him when another call came. And with that call came the need to return to seminary for an advanced degree. And the rest is history: 30 years of teaching at a university as well as serving bi-vocationally on staff at various churches. A call to serve is a call to prepare, in my estimation. And a call to discipleship is a call to prepare. But no preparation or education can give someone true wisdom. We can amass a lot of information, and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. God expects us to be as intelligent and conscientious as possible in whatever we do in His service. But we must never forget what true *wisdom* is: comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God. *Intelligence* is comprehension and interpretation of spiritual matters. (Amplified Version of the Bible). God is the source of both of these.

Reflection: Have you fallen for the world's perspective on what knowledge and wisdom look like and how we get them?

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to You. Help me never to get caught up in that trap. Lord, I want the real thing, not to benefit me but to benefit others and to bring honor and glory to You, the true source of both wisdom and knowledge.

Summing It All Up

Bible Passage: Psalm 112:1-10

Focus: Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.

You should have a better idea what wisdom looks like now that you have been through a month's devotions on the topic. But summaries are good to help us remember and to give us a global look at topics. And it is also helpful to include some aspects that we did not have time to cover. Here are just a few highlights to keep in mind:

1. True wisdom comes from God and our relationship with Him.
2. True wisdom keeps us humble; worldly wisdom puffs us up with pride.
3. God loves for His children to gain true wisdom so we will be successful living the kind of life that is a blessing to Him, to us and to others.
4. The company we keep influences us for good or for evil.
5. Wisdom, knowledge and intelligence are all different.
6. Just because someone has been given wisdom from God does not mean he is safe from the temptation to become foolish once again.
7. We must be teachable in order to receive God's wisdom.
8. Our motive for desiring to be wise helps determine whether God will give wisdom to us or not.

Reflection: What have you learned about wisdom this month that has made you want more of it? Do you realize that you can have all of the wisdom of God that you need?

Prayer: Dear Father, I do want to know You better. I do want to have wisdom in order to be a usable vessel in kingdom work and service. Grant me the humility to always seek Your will and wisdom above my own.

Other Devotional Books by Dr. Cullinan

Rose Petals
Gems from James
Peter Principles
The Blessed Life
Precious Promises
Prayer: The Christian's Anchor and Lifeline
Faith
John: Part 1 and Part 2
Potpourri: Part 1 and Part 2
The Anchor Holds
Touching the Heart of Jesus
God's Audio-Visuals
Puppy Theology
Learning to Praise
Throw me into the 'Let-Us' Patch
A Servant's Heart
Portrait of the Father
Peace
Mercy and Grace
The Comforter

OTHER BOOKS BY DR. CULLINAN

Time for a Checkup, Christian Literature Crusade Pub.

Sorting it Out: Understanding God's Call to Ministry, Judson Press

Killer in the Camp: an Interactive Christian Mystery, bn.com and amazon.com