

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

THREE SONGS OF WISDOM

*Reflections on the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of
Solomon*

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Three Songs of Wisdom: Reflections on the Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon

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The Introduction and the Part One, Two, and Three introductions draw on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

First Edition

ISBN: [to be assigned]

Published by Eugene Han

dailyqt.org

This book is part of *The Daily Quiet Time Reflections Series*.

Drawn from a decade of shared Quiet Time reflections at dailyqt.org, and from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It was written to be read one day at a time, the way it was first written — a chapter at a time, over the course of several weeks, alongside an open Bible rather than in place of one. The believers in Berea were commended not simply for their eagerness to hear the Word but for their habit of examining the Scriptures every day to see whether what they had been taught was true (Acts 17:11). That daily habit, sustained over years rather than compressed into a season, is the entire aim of this book and of the Quiet Time practice that produced it.

To help establish that rhythm, we have included, as an appendix at the back of this book, the same daily Bible reading plan we have used at dailyqt.org for well over a decade. It walks through the whole of Scripture in a year, a few chapters at a time, and it does not need to be started in January; you are free to begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. Each of the fifteen chapters in this book lines up with exactly one day on that plan, from Proverbs 1–3 on the first day to the whole of Song of Solomon on the last, so that this book and your own Bible can move through these three books together, side by side, one day at a time.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are traditionally grouped together as Israel's wisdom literature, and Jewish and Christian readers alike have long noticed that all three carry the name of Solomon, each apparently written from a different vantage point in his life — Song of Solomon in the ardor of youth, Proverbs in the settled judgment of middle age, and Ecclesiastes in the weary, hard-won wisdom of old age. We have kept the books in their traditional canonical order rather than this suggested chronological one, so that Part One through Part Three of this book move through Proverbs, then Ecclesiastes, then Song of Solomon in turn. Each Part opens with a short introduction to help orient you to the distinct character of the book you are about to read.

Whether you are reading on your own or working through this book with a group like one of our own Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas, we would suggest the following simple rhythm for each day, or for each session if you are meeting weekly as a group:

- 1. Begin and end in prayer.** Ask God, before you open either Bible or book, to teach you something true about Himself that day, and thank Him, when you close both, for whatever He has shown you — even if it is smaller or slower than you expected.
- 2. Read the assigned Scripture.** Using the reading plan in the appendix, read the day's chapters directly from your own Bible before turning to our reflections on them. There is no substitute for reading the text itself first, in whatever translation you trust, and letting it raise its own questions before we offer our own.
- 3. Read the corresponding chapter in this book.** Each chapter walks through that day's reading in the order Scripture presents it, drawing out its major movements and, where it seemed useful, the historical or literary background behind them. Treat it as a conversation about the text you just read, not a replacement for it.
- 4. Answer the discussion questions.** Every chapter closes with four questions sized to fill a forty-five- to sixty-minute group discussion, though they work just as well as slower journaling prompts for a reader working through the book alone. Some ask you to notice something in the text; most ask you to notice something in yourself.

If you are part of a group, we would encourage you to read both the day's Scripture and the corresponding chapter individually during the week, and then use your time together for the fourth step: praying together and working through the discussion questions as a group. This was, after all, how the material in this book first took shape — not in a study or a library, but in a room full of ordinary readers asking

each other what a passage meant and why it mattered, week after week, for years. We hope it will do the same for you.

INTRODUCTION

Solomon reigned over Israel from 971 to 931 B.C., and three very different books of the Bible carry his name: the youthful, ardent love poem we call Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs); the extended collection of practical, memorable sayings we call Proverbs; and the searching, world-weary meditation on meaning we call Ecclesiastes. Ancient Jewish tradition, followed by many Christian interpreters after them, has long suggested that these three books reflect three different seasons of one remarkable life — the Song written in the passion of youth, Proverbs compiled in the settled judgment of middle age, and Ecclesiastes composed in the disillusioned wisdom of old age, after Solomon's own well-documented failures had taught him things no amount of native intelligence could have taught him on its own. We cannot prove this theory, and Proverbs itself tells us plainly that not every proverb in the book came from Solomon's own pen — some were collected by “the wise” (22:17), some copied out generations later by King Hezekiah's men (25:1), and the book's final two chapters attributed outright to two otherwise unknown sages named Agur and Lemuel (30:1; 31:1). But whether or not the three-stages theory is literally true, it captures something true about how these three books feel when read together: one confident in wisdom's power to order a life well, one honest about wisdom's limits when that same life is nearly over, and one convinced that the deepest wisdom of all might simply be to love, and be loved, without reservation.

All three books belong to a genre the ancient Near East called wisdom literature, and Israel's wisdom writers were part of a much larger conversation than we sometimes realize — Egypt alone has left us more than two dozen surviving “instruction” texts, and Mesopotamia and Canaan have left us proverb collections of their own. Israel's sages were not shy about observing wisdom wherever it appeared in the created order; but they parted ways with their neighbors at one crucial point, a point Proverbs states as bluntly as Scripture ever states anything: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge”

(1:7). Wisdom, for Israel, was never merely clever observation about how life tends to work. It began — necessarily, non-negotiably — with a right relationship to the God who made the world work that way in the first place. Everything else in all three of these books, however different their moods, is worked out from that single starting point.

It helps, before reading any of the three, to understand what kind of literature each one actually is, because Christians have gotten into more difficulty over this than almost any other point of Bible reading. Proverbs are not promises. A proverb like “the blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it” (10:22) is not a divine guarantee that every faithful person will grow wealthy; it is a snapshot of how life usually and characteristically unfolds, the way a photograph of a waterfall accurately shows what a typical waterfall looks like without claiming that every waterfall everywhere looks exactly the same. Proverbs are true the way a well-aimed generalization is true — reliable, tested by long observation, but not mechanically guaranteed in every single case, and Scripture itself supplies the needed corrective in the two books that flank Proverbs on either side. Job and Ecclesiastes both quietly resist the temptation to turn Proverbs’ wisdom into an ironclad formula, insisting that the righteous sometimes suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper in ways no simple cause-and-effect reading of wisdom literature can fully explain. Held together, all three books teach us something no one of them could teach alone: that wisdom is real, and worth pursuing with everything we have, and still not the same thing as a guarantee.

Song of Solomon presents its own, quite different kind of challenge. Because it never once mentions God by name and speaks with unusual frankness about romantic and physical love between a husband and wife, interpreters across the centuries have often felt the need to explain the book away as an allegory — of God’s love for Israel, or of Christ’s love for the church — rather than simply reading it as what its own words present: a celebration of married love as one of God’s best gifts to humanity (cf. Genesis 2:24–25). We believe both things can be true without competing with each other. Song of

Solomon means, on its plainest reading, exactly what it says about the goodness of love between a husband and wife; and because Scripture elsewhere describes God's own covenant love in the very same marital terms (Hosea 3:1; Ephesians 5:32), the book also has something real to teach us about loving God, once we have first let it teach us about loving one another.

Taken together, these three very different books, unified chiefly by their shared conviction that wisdom begins in the fear of the Lord, still speak with remarkable relevance into ordinary, everyday life — how to raise a child, manage money, choose friends, handle power, face death honestly, and love a spouse well. None of the three claims to be systematic theology, and none of them needs to. What they offer instead is something we have found no less valuable across a decade of reading them together: the accumulated, tested, sometimes uncomfortable wisdom of people who took seriously the same fear of the Lord we are trying to take seriously today.

PART ONE

Proverbs: Wisdom for Everyday Life

Proverbs 1–31

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is simply “The Proverbs of Solomon, the Son of David, King in Israel” (cf. 1:1), and while Solomon supplied or collected most of what follows, the book itself openly names other contributors: unnamed sages (22:17—24:34), the scribes of King Hezekiah who copied out additional Solomonic proverbs more than two centuries later (chs. 25—29), and two otherwise unknown figures, Agur and Lemuel, who close the book with their own distinct material (chs. 30—31). This composite authorship is worth noting at the outset, because it tells us something about what kind of book we are reading: not a single treatise defended from start to finish, but a curated, working collection — pearls strung together on the single thread of a shared reverence for wisdom, rather than a logically ordered argument marching from a premise to a conclusion.

The Hebrew word behind our English title, *masal*, means something closer to “comparison” than to our English sense of a quaint saying; through long usage it came to cover everything from a two-line couplet to an extended discourse, united only by the fact that each one paints a small, memorable word-picture of what life is, or should be, like. The book’s first nine chapters do not actually contain proverbs in this compact sense at all — they are longer discourses, most cast as a father instructing a son, warning him in advance about the specific temptations he will face: bad companions who will try to entice him (1:10–19), sexual temptation of the most seductive and calculated kind (ch. 5, ch. 7), the false promise of quick and unearned wealth. Only with chapter 10 does the book shift into the terse, two-line couplets most readers picture when they think of “Proverbs” — over five hundred of them, arranged with little obvious order, on subjects ranging from diligence and laziness to speech, friendship, money, anger, and the raising of children.

Solomon's own descendants, and Israel's other sages after him, believed that wisdom of this kind was worth writing down precisely because it worked — because a life ordered by the fear of the Lord genuinely tended, on the whole and over time, toward flourishing, while a life organized around folly genuinely tended toward ruin. That confidence gives this first part of our volume its distinctive, practical, almost hands-on character. Where Ecclesiastes will spend its pages testing wisdom's limits and Song of Solomon will spend its pages celebrating one particular gift wisdom helps us receive rightly, Proverbs simply gets on with the work of daily living — raising children, managing a household, choosing friends, handling money, guarding one's speech — confident that a life built on the fear of the Lord really is, in the main, a life built well.

CHAPTER ONE

Proverbs 1–3

The book opens by telling us plainly what it is for: “for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight... for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young” (1:2–4). And then, before a single specific proverb is offered, it states its foundation: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7). Everything that follows in this book — all thirty-one chapters of it — is really commentary on that single verse. Wisdom is not, in the first instance, a matter of raw intelligence or accumulated information. It is a posture toward God, a settled reverence that reorders everything else a person thinks and does.

Much of what follows in these opening chapters is framed as a father’s urgent instruction to his son, and it is worth noticing how the father teaches. He does not offer vague, general warnings; he describes, with almost uncomfortable specificity, exactly what his son will face: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, ‘Come along with us... throw in your lot with us’” (1:10–11, 14). This is a parent who understands his child’s actual world well enough to name the very words the tempters will use. That specificity matters. A child who hears his parents accurately predict a temptation before it arrives has every reason to trust their warning about where that temptation leads (1:16–19). Chapter 2 then presents wisdom as something to be earnestly and diligently sought — “if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding... and search for it as for hidden treasure” (2:3–4) — not a passive inheritance but an active pursuit, promised to those willing to give it their full attention.

Chapter 3 contains what may be the single most quoted passage in the entire book: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (3:5–6). Notice what these verses actually ask of us — not merely intellectual assent that God exists, but

a genuine relinquishing of our own understanding as the final court of appeal. We are exceptionally good at praying for God's blessing on plans we have already fully decided; these verses ask something harder, a willingness to let God's wisdom actually reroute the plan itself. The chapter closes with wisdom personified as a source of blessing "more precious than rubies" (3:15), setting up the extended meditation on Wisdom herself that will occupy much of what follows.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The father in Proverbs 1 warns his son with specific, concrete language rather than vague generalities. Where in your own relationships — with children, mentees, or friends — could a more specific, less abstract kind of counsel serve someone better?
2. Proverbs 2 describes wisdom as something actively sought, "as for hidden treasure," rather than passively received. Does your own pursuit of wisdom from Scripture feel more active or more passive right now?
3. Proverbs 3:5–6 asks us to trust God rather than lean on our own understanding. Is there a decision in front of you right now where you have already decided the outcome and are only asking God to bless it, rather than genuinely seeking His direction?
4. Wisdom is described in chapter 3 as "more precious than rubies." What do you actually treat as more precious than wisdom in the way you spend your time and attention?

CHAPTER TWO

Proverbs 4–6

Chapter 4 continues the father's appeal, but adds an important autobiographical note: "When I was a boy in my father's house... he taught me and said, 'Lay hold of my words with all your heart'" (4:3–4). The instruction being passed down is not abstract theory; it is wisdom the father himself first received as a son, now handed forward to another generation. This is how wisdom literature was always meant to work — not invented fresh in every generation, but received, tested, and passed on, "for I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching" (4:2). The chapter's central image is a choice between two paths, "the path of the righteous" that "shines brighter and brighter until the full light of day," and "the way of the wicked," which is "like deep darkness" to those walking it, so dark that "they do not know what makes them stumble" (4:18–19). Wisdom, in other words, is not merely about avoiding a handful of bad decisions; it is about the cumulative trajectory of an entire life, growing either clearer or darker with every step.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to warnings against sexual temptation with unusual directness. The adulterous woman is described as having lips that "drip honey" and speech "smoother than oil," but the father insists his son see past the honeyed opening to the bitter end: "in the end she is bitter as gallwood, sharp as a double-edged sword" (5:3–4). Rather than leaving the warning purely negative, the chapter turns immediately to a positive alternative: "may you rejoice in the wife of your youth... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love" (5:18–19). This pairing is instructive. Proverbs does not simply forbid; it redirects desire toward its rightful object, trusting that a well-loved marriage is a far stronger defense against temptation than willpower alone.

Chapter 6 broadens the warnings to include laziness — "how long will you lie there, you sluggard?" (6:9) — before returning, at greater length, to adultery, closing with a warning as vivid as any in the book:

“Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife” (6:27–29). The imagery is deliberately visceral. Some sins, the father insists, are not worth even a moment’s flirtation with the fire, because the burn is not hypothetical.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 4 describes wisdom the father himself received from his own father, now passed to his son. What wisdom have you received from someone before you that you are now responsible to pass on?
2. The path of the righteous is described as growing brighter over time, while the way of the wicked grows darker without the person even realizing it. Has your own life, recently, felt like it is trending toward more light or more darkness — even in small, cumulative ways?
3. Proverbs 5 counters the warning against adultery with a positive vision of rejoicing in one’s spouse, rather than a purely negative prohibition. Where in your life would redirecting desire toward something good serve you better than simply trying to resist temptation through willpower alone?
4. The warning in chapter 6 pictures certain sins as being like scooping fire into your lap — something with no safe amount of exposure. Is there a temptation in your own life you have been treating as manageable in small doses that this image would call you to simply avoid entirely?

CHAPTER THREE

Proverbs 7–9

Chapter 7 tells what amounts to a short story rather than a series of couplets — a father watching, “at the window of my house,” a “young man who lacked judgment” walk directly into a seduction he never saw coming (7:6–7). The woman’s approach is calculated: she is “dressed like a prostitute,” speaks with practiced boldness, and closes with an appeal to sensory pleasure — “let’s drink deep of love till morning” — that the narrator immediately punctures: “he was like an ox going to the slaughter... little knowing it will cost him his life” (7:10, 18, 22–23). The scene functions as an extended, deliberately uncomfortable case study in how seduction actually works: not through some obviously evil invitation, but through flattery, opportunity, and a young man’s own lack of discernment meeting each other at exactly the wrong moment.

Chapter 8 shifts registers entirely, personifying Wisdom herself as a woman who “cries aloud” in the very same public places — “on the heights along the way... beside the gate leading into the city” — where folly had staged her seduction (8:1–3). Wisdom’s self-description here is extraordinary: she claims to have existed “before the world began,” present “when he marked out the foundations of the earth,” God’s own “constant delight” during creation itself (8:23, 29–30). Christian readers have long heard echoes of Christ in this passage — the eternal Wisdom of God, present at creation, now offered freely to anyone who will listen (cf. John 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 1:24). Chapter 9 closes Part One’s opening discourses with a final contrast: Wisdom has built her house, prepared her feast, and sent out her servants with an open invitation, “let all who are simple come in” (9:1–4); Folly, sitting at the door of her own house, offers the same invitation using nearly identical language, promising that “stolen water is sweet” (9:13–17) — the same appeal, the same audience, two utterly different destinations.

The juxtaposition that closes this chapter is the entire argument of Proverbs 1—9 in miniature. Both wisdom and folly issue an open, public invitation. Both promise satisfaction. The difference is not in how loudly or attractively each calls, but in where each one actually leads — one to life, and one, as the chapter’s final verse puts it starkly, to “the depths of the grave” (9:18).

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The young man in Proverbs 7 is described as lacking judgment, walking into temptation without recognizing what was happening. What patterns or warning signs in your own life have you learned to recognize before temptation fully arrives?
2. Wisdom in chapter 8 is described as calling out publicly, in the same ordinary places where temptation also calls. Where in your everyday life — not in a special spiritual setting, but in the ordinary places you already go — is wisdom currently calling out to you?
3. Wisdom and Folly in chapter 9 both extend an open invitation using strikingly similar language. What makes it hard, in the moment, to tell the difference between the two voices calling to you?
4. Folly’s appeal rests on the claim that “stolen water is sweet” — that what is taken wrongly is somehow more satisfying than what is received rightly. Where have you found that claim to be true in the short term, and false in the long run?

CHAPTER FOUR

Proverbs 10–12

With chapter 10, the book shifts decisively into the terse, two-line couplets most readers picture when they think of “Proverbs,” and one of the first things this new form does is take up the theme of diligence and laziness, returning to it so often across the coming chapters that it functions almost as a refrain: “Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth” (10:4). It is worth pausing over the placement of these sayings. They sit between a promise that “the LORD does not let the righteous go hungry” (10:3) and a warning about the wicked, and their placement teaches an important lesson: righteousness in Proverbs is never divorced from ordinary diligence. A righteous person who neglects real responsibilities is not somehow exempt from the natural consequences of that neglect. Prosperity in this life, Proverbs insists, tends to follow diligence — for believer and unbeliever alike — even while Scripture elsewhere reminds us that eternal life follows something else entirely: faith in Christ, not merely hard work (cf. Mark 8:36).

Chapter 11 turns to the theme of generosity with a genuinely paradoxical promise: “One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (11:24–25). The logic here cuts directly against instinct. Our default assumption is that holding tightly to what we have is the surest path to security; Proverbs insists the opposite is often true, that generosity — far from depleting us — tends to be met with its own increase, while hoarding tends, mysteriously, toward loss. Chapter 12 broadens the field further, taking up honest speech (“truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment,” 12:19), the value of correction (“whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray,” 12:26 in some translations), and the dignity of hard work: “The one who is unfaithful in a very little thing... the hand of the diligent will rule” (12:24).

Running underneath all three of these chapters is a single, unifying conviction, easy to miss amid the sheer variety of individual sayings: character shapes destiny. Not perfectly, not mechanically — Proverbs is not a promise that hard work guarantees wealth or that generosity guarantees prosperity in every single case — but characteristically, over the long run of an ordinary life. The wise reader takes these sayings not as ironclad formulas to be claimed but as tested patterns to be trusted, the accumulated observation of generations who watched diligence and laziness, generosity and greed, honesty and deceit play out again and again in real lives, and wrote down what they saw.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 10 places diligence right alongside righteousness, suggesting the two are not unrelated. Is there an area of practical responsibility in your life where you have been more spiritually confident than practically diligent?
2. Proverbs 11:24–25 promises that generosity tends toward increase and hoarding tends toward loss — a genuinely counterintuitive claim. Have you experienced this pattern to be true in your own life, with money, time, or something else?
3. Chapter 12 values both honest speech and the willingness to receive correction. Which of these two — speaking truthfully to others, or receiving correction from others — comes more naturally to you, and which is harder?
4. These chapters describe character shaping destiny over the long run, even while acknowledging Proverbs is not a mechanical guarantee. How do you personally hold together confidence in these general patterns with the reality that they don't always play out exactly as expected?

CHAPTER FIVE

Proverbs 13–15

Chapter 13 opens by returning to the theme of parental instruction, “a wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebuke” (13:1), before turning to money with a distinction worth sitting with: “Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears, but wealth from hard work grows over time” (13:11). The proverb is not opposed to wealth itself; it is opposed to a particular relationship with wealth, one that seeks shortcuts rather than sustained, patient labor. Chapter 14 pivots to something weightier, closing with one of the book’s most quietly profound observations about human dignity: “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (14:31). This is a striking theological claim buried inside a practical proverb — how we treat the economically vulnerable is not merely a social question but a direct statement about how we regard the God who made them.

Chapter 15 takes up the power of speech to de-escalate or inflame conflict: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1). This is one of the most immediately testable proverbs in the entire book — nearly everyone reading it can recall a moment where a gentle response defused a tense exchange, and a moment where a sharp one made everything worse. The chapter closes by returning once more to the fear of the Lord as the organizing center of all this practical counsel: “The fear of the LORD teaches wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (15:33). Across these three chapters, a pattern becomes clear: Proverbs moves fluidly between the most mundane, everyday matters — patience in speech, patience in building wealth — and the weightiest theological claims, refusing to separate the two. For the wise person, there is no truly secular corner of life exempt from the fear of the Lord.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 13:11 distinguishes wealth gained quickly from wealth built through sustained hard work. Where in your own financial life have you been tempted by a shortcut rather than the slower, more durable path?
2. Proverbs 14:31 says that oppressing the poor shows contempt for God Himself, since He made them. Does this theological weight change how you think about your own treatment of people with less power or resources than you?
3. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (15:1). Think of a recent conflict in your life — did your own words tend to de-escalate it or inflame it?
4. These chapters weave together mundane, practical matters and weighty theological claims without separating them. Is there an area of your life you have unconsciously treated as “secular” or exempt from the fear of the Lord?

CHAPTER SIX

Proverbs 16–18

Chapter 16 opens with a theme that runs through much of what follows: God’s sovereignty over human plans. “To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue... In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps” (16:1, 9). This is not a discouragement from planning; it is a needed corrective to the illusion that planning alone determines outcomes. We propose; God, in the end, disposes — a truth meant to produce humility rather than passivity. The chapter’s most quoted line follows soon after: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18), a warning as relevant to nations and corporations as to individuals.

Chapter 17 turns to friendship and family, offering one of Scripture’s most tender definitions of loyal love: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (17:17). Real friendship, this verse suggests, is tested and proven precisely in the seasons when loving someone is hardest, not easiest. Chapter 18 continues the theme with a warning about isolation — “Whoever isolates themselves pursues selfish desires; they rebel against all sound judgment” (18:1) — before closing with a proverb about the tongue’s outsized power: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (18:21). Read together, these three chapters describe wisdom as fundamentally relational. A wise life is not merely privately virtuous; it is lived in genuine, humble community, with plans held loosely before God and friendships held tightly through hardship.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 16:9 says that while humans plan their course, the LORD establishes their steps. How do you personally hold together careful planning with genuine trust in God’s sovereignty over the outcome?

2. “Pride goes before destruction” (16:18). Where have you seen this pattern play out, either in your own life or in someone else’s?
3. Proverbs 17:17 defines a friend as someone who loves “at all times,” proven especially in adversity. Who has been that kind of friend to you, and to whom have you been that kind of friend?
4. Proverbs 18:21 says the tongue has the power of life and death. Think back over your words from the past week — have they tended, on balance, to give life or take it away?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Proverbs 19–21

Chapter 19 returns to the theme of diligent planning tempered by trust in God: “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails” (19:21) — nearly a restatement of 16:9, and its repetition this early in the book signals how central the theme is to the whole collection. The chapter also takes up parental discipline directly: “Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death” (19:18), a hard saying softened somewhat by its own internal logic — discipline is presented here not as harshness for its own sake but as an act of hope, refusing to abandon a child to consequences discipline could have prevented.

Chapter 20 warns repeatedly against dishonest business practices — “Differing weights and differing measures... the LORD detests them both” (20:10) — reflecting the ancient Near Eastern practice of using rigged scales to cheat customers, a warning that translates directly into any modern context where honesty in commerce can be quietly compromised for gain. Chapter 21 closes this section with a proverb that reframes the entire question of security: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD” (21:31). Even the most careful, disciplined preparation — training a warhorse for combat, the ancient equivalent of maximal readiness — cannot itself guarantee the outcome. Preparation matters; ultimate trust belongs somewhere else entirely.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 19:18 presents parental discipline as an act of hope rather than mere harshness. How do you think about discipline — whether as a parent, a leader, or someone under someone else’s authority — in light of this framing?
2. Chapter 20’s warnings about dishonest weights and measures translate directly into modern commerce. Where in your own

work or business dealings might you be tempted toward a “rigged scale,” however small?

3. Proverbs 21:31 says that even a horse prepared for battle cannot itself guarantee victory. Where have you confused thorough preparation with actual control over an outcome?
4. These chapters repeat, almost word for word, the idea that human plans exist alongside God’s ultimate purpose. Why do you think Proverbs returns to this same truth so many times rather than stating it once?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Proverbs 22–23

Chapter 22 opens with a proverb prizing character over wealth: “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (22:1), before turning, at verse 17, to what Proverbs itself calls “the sayings of the wise” — a distinct section, running through 24:22, that many scholars believe shows the influence of, or at least a shared conversation with, similar Egyptian wisdom instruction texts from the same era. Among its most enduring lines is 22:6: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” — a verse often treated as an ironclad promise but better read, in keeping with the whole book’s genre as tested general truth rather than mechanical guarantee, as a statement about the powerful, lasting influence of early formation, not a divine contract exempting faithfully raised children from ever straying.

Chapter 23 continues this section with vivid, practical warnings — against envying the wealth of the wicked (“do not eat the food of a begrudging host,” 23:6), against overindulgence in wine, described with startling physical honesty as leaving a person seeing “strange sights” and speaking “confused things” (23:33) — before landing on one of the book’s most piercing lines about the human heart’s need for genuine, not merely external, transformation: “My son, give me your heart” (23:26). Wisdom, this verse insists, is never merely a matter of correct behavior copied from an external rulebook. It requires the heart’s actual affection and allegiance, offered freely rather than extracted by force.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 22:1 values a good name above great riches. If you had to choose today between your reputation for integrity and a significant financial gain, which would genuinely win, in practice rather than just in theory?

2. Proverbs 22:6 is often treated as an ironclad promise about child-rearing rather than a general truth about the power of early formation. How does reframing it this way change the weight it carries for you, whether as a parent or as someone who was raised a certain way?
3. Chapter 23's warnings about overindulgence describe its effects with unusual physical honesty. Is there an appetite in your own life — food, drink, entertainment, or something else — where honesty about its actual effects would serve you better than the story you currently tell yourself?
4. “My son, give me your heart” (23:26) insists that wisdom requires more than correct external behavior. Where in your own faith has obedience become more external than heartfelt lately?

CHAPTER NINE

Proverbs 24–26

Chapter 24 closes the “sayings of the wise” begun in 22:17 and adds a short additional collection (24:23–34), including a memorable warning against laziness framed as a personal anecdote: “I went past the field of a sluggard... thorns had come up everywhere... though the walls were in ruins” (24:30–31). The image is deliberately unhurried and visual — not a single dramatic failure, but the slow, cumulative decay of neglect, thorns and ruin creeping in gradually enough that the sluggard himself likely never noticed the moment his field passed the point of easy repair.

Chapter 25 opens a new section explicitly attributed to Hezekiah’s scribes, “which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied” (25:1) — proverbs of Solomon’s own composition, preserved orally or in scattered form for roughly two and a half centuries before being formally collected during Hezekiah’s reign. This section favors vivid, extended similes: “Like a north wind is a sly tongue” (25:23), “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control” (25:28). Chapter 26 turns its attention almost entirely to fools, offering an extended, almost comic catalogue of foolish behavior — “as a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly” (26:11) — before turning, in its closing verses, to the gossip and the quarrelsome person: “Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down” (26:20).

Read together, these three chapters model something Proverbs does throughout its middle section: taking one recognizable human type — the sluggard, the fool, the gossip — and examining it from several angles across several verses, letting the reader build up a composite, almost novelistic portrait rather than receiving a single flat definition. The cumulative effect is recognition. Most readers, honestly examining themselves against these portraits, will find at least a little of the sluggard, the fool, or the gossip somewhere in their own recent behavior — which is, of course, exactly the point.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The sluggard's field in Proverbs 24 falls into ruin gradually, through accumulated small neglect rather than one dramatic failure. What is currently falling into quiet disrepair in your own life through small, accumulated neglect?
2. Proverbs 25 favors vivid similes over flat statements — comparing a sly tongue to a north wind, a person without self-control to a city with broken walls. Which of these images strikes you as most true to your own experience?
3. Chapter 26 paints an extended, almost comic portrait of the fool. Reading honestly, which specific trait of “the fool” in this chapter do you recognize most clearly in yourself?
4. Proverbs 26:20 says that without a gossip, a quarrel dies down. Have you ever been the “wood” that kept a conflict burning longer than it needed to?

CHAPTER TEN

Proverbs 27–29

Chapter 27 returns to the theme of friendship with one of the book’s most memorable images: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (27:17). The image is instructive precisely because sharpening is not a gentle process — it involves friction, resistance, even a kind of controlled abrasion, and the proverb suggests that real friendship, the kind that actually makes us wiser and stronger, will sometimes feel exactly like that. Chapter 28 turns its attention to leadership and justice, warning bluntly that “a ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops” (28:3) — a striking image linking bad governance directly to the failure of an entire community to flourish, and closing with the well-known observation that “the wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (28:1), naming the particular, gnawing fearfulness that guilt produces even in the absence of any actual threat.

Chapter 29 closes this section with a proverb whose King James phrasing has entered common English usage far beyond its original context: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (29:18) — a statement, in its original setting, less about prophecy in the modern sense and more about the necessity of God’s revealed word for any community’s moral coherence. Without a shared, received sense of what is true and right, restraint has nothing left to anchor it, and a society drifts. The chapter, and with it this whole middle collection of proverbs, closes with a verse that ties the entire section back to its opening thesis: “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe” (29:25).

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Proverbs 27:17 compares real friendship to iron sharpening iron — a process involving genuine friction, not just comfort. Do the closest relationships in your life currently sharpen you, or have they settled into something more comfortable and less honest?

2. Proverbs 28:1 says the wicked flee though no one pursues them. Have you experienced this kind of fearfulness produced by unresolved guilt, even when no actual threat was present?
3. Proverbs 29:18 speaks to a community's need for shared, received truth to anchor its restraint. Where do you see this playing out, for better or worse, in a community or institution you belong to?
4. The final verse of this section warns that fear of man is a snare, while trust in the LORD keeps us safe. Where in your own life is the fear of what other people think currently exercising more control over your decisions than trust in God?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Proverbs 30–31

The book's final two chapters step outside the Solomonic collection entirely, closing with the words of two otherwise unknown figures. Agur opens chapter 30 with an unusual note of humility rare in wisdom literature of any era: "Surely I am only a brute, not a man; I do not have human understanding" (30:2), before asking a question that anticipates the New Testament's own language about Christ: "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind?... What is his name, and what is the name of his son?" (30:4). Agur's section is also famous for its distinctive numerical sayings — "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand" (30:18) — a stylized literary form found elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern wisdom writing, used here to catalogue everything from the mysterious ways of an eagle in flight to the unbearable weight of an unloved woman who finally marries.

Chapter 31 opens with the otherwise unknown King Lemuel recounting his mother's counsel to him about the dangers of wine and the responsibilities of just rule (31:1–9), before the book closes with its most famous extended portrait: the wife of noble character, examined across twenty-two verses arranged, in the Hebrew original, as a complete acrostic poem running from aleph to tav — every letter of the Hebrew alphabet employed, in order, to describe her. She is industrious, shrewd in business, generous to the poor, physically strong, wise in speech, and unafraid of the future (31:10–31). The book's very last line locates the true source of her excellence in the same place its first chapter located the beginning of all wisdom: "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (31:30). Proverbs began by telling us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1:7); it ends, thirty-one chapters later, by showing us exactly what a life built on that fear looks like when fully and faithfully lived out.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Agur begins chapter 30 with unusual humility about his own limited understanding. How comfortable are you admitting the limits of your own understanding, especially on matters of faith?
2. The woman of noble character in Proverbs 31 is praised chiefly for fearing the LORD, with her other admirable qualities flowing out from that root. In your own life, or in someone you admire, do good qualities seem to flow from a genuine fear of the Lord, or do they stand somewhat apart from it?
3. Proverbs opened with “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7) and closes with “a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (31:30), bracketing the entire book with the same theme. Having read through all thirty-one chapters, how has your own understanding of what it means to “fear the LORD” developed or changed?
4. Looking back across this entire first part of our reading — the parental instruction of chapters 1–9, the terse couplets of chapters 10–29, and Agur and Lemuel’s closing words — which single proverb from all of Proverbs do you think you are most likely to actually carry with you and return to?

PART TWO

Ecclesiastes: Wisdom Tested by Time

Ecclesiastes 1–12

The Hebrew title of this book, Qohelet, is best translated “the one who gathers or addresses an assembly” — a preacher or teacher speaking to a congregation — and the book that follows reads exactly like a sermon delivered by someone who has tried everything a life of wealth, power, and intellect could offer and found all of it, in the end, wanting. Internal references point to Solomon as the speaker (1:1, 12; 2:4–9), and Jewish and Christian interpreters held to Solomonic authorship without serious challenge until the modern era. If the traditional three-stages reading of Solomon’s writings holds any truth, this is the book of his old age — composed, many have suggested, after his own well-documented apostasy and its bitter consequences, looking back over a lifetime of pleasure, building projects, wealth, and wisdom with the clear-eyed, sometimes unsettling honesty that only genuine disillusionment can produce.

Ecclesiastes has earned, over the centuries, a reputation as the Bible’s most difficult book to interpret, sometimes called “the black sheep” of Scripture for its apparently pessimistic tone. Its refrain, “meaningless, meaningless... everything is meaningless” (1:2), sets the register for nearly everything that follows, and readers who expect Scripture to speak with unbroken confidence and cheer can find the book genuinely disorienting on first read. But Ecclesiastes serves the rest of the Bible’s wisdom literature an essential corrective function. Where Proverbs teaches, largely and rightly, that wisdom leads characteristically to flourishing, Ecclesiastes insists on the exceptions — the wise die exactly like fools (2:16), the righteous sometimes suffer while the wicked prosper (7:15), and no accumulation of wealth, pleasure, or achievement can, on its own, outrun the certainty of death or supply ultimate meaning to a single day of ordinary life.

And yet the book is not, in its final analysis, a document of despair. Its repeated refrain of futility exists to clear away every false source of

ultimate meaning — pleasure, achievement, wisdom itself, wealth — so that its actual conclusion can land with full force: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (12:13–14). Read in isolation, Ecclesiastes’ middle chapters can sound bleak. Read as a whole, moving from its opening despair to its closing charge, the book turns out to teach something bracingly positive: that life truly is difficult, that death truly is certain, and that within those hard, unchangeable limits, the fear of God and the enjoyment of His ordinary daily gifts — food, work, companionship — remain genuinely, durably good (cf. 2:24; 5:18–19; 9:7–9). Ecclesiastes does not resolve the tension between life’s difficulty and God’s goodness into something simpler than it actually is. It teaches us, instead, to live faithfully inside that tension, exactly where the rest of us live too.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ecclesiastes 1–4

The Preacher begins with an experiment: he set out, by his own account, to test “wisdom, madness, and folly” (1:17), to build houses, plant vineyards, accumulate silver and gold, and pursue every pleasure his position could supply, refusing his heart no desire (2:1–10). His verdict, delivered with the weary clarity of a man reporting facts rather than venting emotion, was that all of it — “everything I had worked for” — turned out to be, in the memorable Hebrew image behind the book’s key word, *hevel*: vapor, breath, a mist that seems solid until you try to hold onto it, and then simply is not there (2:11). The word occurs some three dozen times across the book, and every English translation struggles to capture it fully; “meaningless” is close, but so is “fleeting,” or “elusive,” or simply “a breath.”

Chapter 3 contains the book’s most famous passage, its poem of appointed times — “a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot” (3:1–2) — often read as a simple affirmation of divine order, but read in its actual context, the poem is doing something subtler. Solomon follows it immediately with an admission of genuine mystery: God “has set eternity in the human heart,” and yet “no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (3:11). We are given, in other words, just enough awareness of eternity to sense that our lives matter within some larger design, and not nearly enough information to actually see that design laid out before us. That is, itself, one of the book’s central burdens — an appointed time for everything, and yet no vantage point from which to see the whole appointed pattern at once. Chapter 4 turns to social observations — the isolation of relentless competitive striving (4:4), the practical wisdom of companionship over solitude, since “two are better than one” and “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (4:9, 12) — closing this opening movement with the same tempered, hard-won realism that will characterize the whole book: life under the sun is genuinely difficult, and genuinely worth living rightly anyway.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The Preacher's experiment involved pursuing every pleasure and achievement available to him and finding it all to be "vapor" in the end. Is there a pursuit in your own life you have invested heavily in, believing it would deliver more lasting satisfaction than it actually has?
2. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says God has set eternity in our hearts but withheld the full picture of His work from beginning to end. How do you personally sit with that specific combination — a sense that your life matters eternally, without full knowledge of exactly how or why?
3. Chapter 4 observes that competitive striving tends to isolate people from one another. Has ambition or competition ever cost you a relationship, or distanced you from someone, in ways you only recognized afterward?
4. "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (4:12) commends companionship over isolation. Who are the people in your life functioning as that third strand, strengthening a bond that might otherwise be more fragile?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ecclesiastes 5–8

Chapter 5 turns from personal observation to practical counsel about worship and wealth, warning against careless speech before God — “do not be quick with your mouth... God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few” (5:2) — before turning to a theme the Preacher will return to more than once: the emptiness of wealth pursued as an end in itself. “Whoever loves money never has enough... this too is meaningless” (5:10), and yet the chapter does not conclude that wealth itself is evil. It concludes, instead, with a positive counsel that will recur throughout the book: “it is good and proper for a person to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in their toil... this is a gift of God” (5:18–19). The ordinary pleasures of daily life — food, work, rest — are not distractions from ultimate meaning in Ecclesiastes; they are among the only durable goods actually available to us within life’s larger uncertainty.

Chapter 7 offers a series of paradoxical proverbs of its own, including the striking claim that “it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting” (7:2), since the reality of death, honestly faced, tends to sober and instruct the living heart more effectively than any celebration can. Chapter 8 wrestles openly with the problem that will occupy much of the book’s second half: the observable fact that righteous people sometimes suffer the fate that should belong to the wicked, and wicked people sometimes receive the reward that should belong to the righteous (8:14). The Preacher does not resolve this tension with a tidy explanation. He simply names it honestly, refusing the comfortable fiction that life’s moral accounting always balances visibly within a single lifetime — the very tension Job wrestles with at even greater length, and the very corrective Ecclesiastes exists to supply against an overly mechanical reading of Proverbs.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Ecclesiastes 5:2 counsels letting our words be few before God, rather than quick and careless. How would your own prayer life change if you took this counsel more seriously?
2. The chapter insists that ordinary daily pleasures — food, work, companionship — are genuine gifts from God, not merely distractions from something more ultimate. Do you tend to treat ordinary daily enjoyment as spiritually significant, or as beside the point?
3. Ecclesiastes 7:2 claims a house of mourning teaches the living heart more than a house of feasting. Has a season of grief or loss in your own life taught you something that celebration never could have?
4. Chapter 8 names honestly the fact that the righteous sometimes suffer and the wicked sometimes prosper, without offering a tidy resolution. How do you personally sit with that unresolved tension in your own faith?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ecclesiastes 9–12

Chapter 9 delivers one of the book's bluntest observations: "the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong... but time and chance happen to them all" (9:11). Every source of worldly confidence — speed, strength, wisdom, skill — eventually meets the same two forces no one can fully control or predict, and the chapter's response to that hard truth is neither despair nor withdrawal but renewed engagement: "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (9:10). Chapter 11 continues in this same practical register with counsel that reads almost like financial wisdom for an uncertain world: "Ship your grain across the sea... invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight" — a call to diversified, active engagement with life rather than paralysis in the face of uncertainty, since "you do not know which will succeed" (11:1–2, 6).

The book closes, in chapter 12, with one of Scripture's most beautifully constructed extended metaphors — old age and physical decline pictured as a house falling gradually into disrepair, its keepers trembling, its grinders ceasing because they are few, its windows growing dim (12:3–5), an aging body's decline described with such poetic indirection that its full meaning only becomes clear as the images accumulate. The Preacher urges his readers, before that day arrives, to "remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (12:1) — not to wait, as he himself apparently did, until pleasure and achievement have already been tested and found wanting, but to begin with the fear of God rather than arrive there only after every other path has been exhausted. And then, after twelve chapters of testing every possible source of meaning under the sun and finding each one insufficient on its own, the book delivers its actual thesis, plainly and without hedging: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (12:13–14). Everything under the sun is

fleeting; the God above the sun, and the life lived in reverent obedience to Him, is not.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. Ecclesiastes 9:11 observes that time and chance overtake even the swiftest and strongest. Where has an experience of unpredictable circumstance humbled a confidence you once placed in your own speed, strength, or skill?
2. Chapter 11 counsels diversified, active engagement with an uncertain future rather than paralysis. Is there a decision you have been putting off, waiting for more certainty than life is likely to give you?
3. The Preacher urges his readers to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, rather than only after every other path has been tested and found wanting. If you are past your own youth, what would it look like to apply this counsel now rather than regretting a delay? If you are still young, what would it look like to take this counsel seriously today?
4. Having read all twelve chapters, does Ecclesiastes' final conclusion — “fear God and keep his commandments” — feel earned to you, given everything the book tested and found insufficient along the way? Why or why not?

PART THREE

Song of Solomon: Wisdom of the Heart

Song of Solomon 1–8

The Hebrew title of this book, Shir HaShirim, “the Song of Songs,” is a superlative construction — the same grammatical pattern behind phrases like “Holy of Holies” or “King of Kings” — meaning something closer to “the finest of songs” than simply “a song.” Numerous references throughout the book (1:4–5, 12; 3:7, 9, 11; 6:12; 7:5; 8:11–12) confirm the traditional attribution to Solomon named in its opening verse, and if the three-stages reading of his writings holds any truth, this is the book of his youth — composed, most interpreters believe, before his own tragic descent into the political polygamy that would eventually claim seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3), written instead in celebration of one particular, exclusive, ardent love.

No book of the Bible has received more varied interpretation. Because it never mentions God by name and speaks with unusual physical frankness about romantic love, generations of Jewish and Christian interpreters alike have often felt compelled to read it allegorically — as God’s love for Israel, or Christ’s love for the church — treating the actual lovers described in its pages as symbols pointing past themselves toward something else. We believe the more natural reading is also the more faithful one: Song of Solomon means what it plainly says, celebrating married love, physical intimacy included, as one of God’s best gifts to humanity, harkening back to God’s own prototypical design of one man and one woman in Eden (cf. Genesis 2:24–25). And because Scripture elsewhere describes God’s covenant love in the very same marital terms — Israel as God’s bride in Hosea, the church as Christ’s bride in Ephesians 5:32 — this book, rightly understood first as a celebration of human love, also has something real to teach every reader about loving God, once we have let it teach us about loving one another first.

That teaching matters urgently in a culture that has, in many ways, come to separate passion from covenant love and reduced both to something transactional. The Song insists otherwise. Its central refrain — “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (2:16; 6:3) — describes love that is exclusive, mutually possessed, and mutually satisfying, and the book’s closing chapter contains what may be Scripture’s single most powerful statement about love’s strength: “Love is as strong as death... many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away” (8:6–7). Whatever else this ancient poem is doing, it is doing this: showing an entire generation of readers, then and now, what it looks like to delight in a spouse without embarrassment, to pursue and be pursued, to be fully known and fully wanted.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Song of Solomon 1–8

The Song opens in the voice of the woman, traditionally called the Shulammite, whose longing sets the entire book's tone from its very first line: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth — for your love is more delightful than wine" (1:2). What follows across the book's opening movement (1:2—3:5) is a courtship conducted almost entirely through mutual admiration — the woman comparing her beloved to myrrh and henna blossoms, the man comparing her to "a lily among thorns" (2:2) among the daughters of Jerusalem, each finding language inadequate to the delight the other produces in them. The famous refrain "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" first appears here (2:16), stating in miniature the exclusive, mutual claim that will govern the whole relationship, and the section closes with an urgent warning, repeated three times across the book like a structural refrain: "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) — a caution against forcing intimacy's timing rather than letting it develop as it should.

The book's central movement (3:6—5:1) describes the wedding itself — Solomon's royal procession arriving "like a column of smoke" (3:6), and then, in the most sustained and physically direct passage in the entire book, the wedding night, described through the extended metaphor of a locked garden finally opened: "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride... Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden" (4:12, 16), the bride's own invitation met immediately by the groom's response, "I have come into my garden... I have drunk my wine and my milk" (5:1). It is worth noting how the text handles this material — vivid, sensory, and entirely unembarrassed, yet also unfailingly tasteful, communicating through extended agricultural and botanical metaphor rather than clinical description, a model of how Scripture itself treats the marriage bed: as something genuinely good, genuinely to be celebrated, and genuinely deserving of language crafted with care.

The book's longest movement (5:2—8:4) then does something unexpected for a love poem: it shows the relationship pass through a season of real distance. The woman, hesitant to rise and open the door for her beloved at night, delays just long enough that by the time she does, he is gone (5:2—6); a night of searching and heartbreak follows, before the relationship is gradually restored through renewed affection and communicated desire (5:9—7:9). This section matters enormously for how we read the whole book. Song of Solomon does not portray love as an uninterrupted state of effortless bliss; it portrays real love, tested by real seasons of apathy and withdrawal, deliberately and patiently restored. The book closes (8:5—14) with its theological center of gravity: "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned" (8:6—7). Love here is not merely a feeling but a covenant claim, sealed and worn, strong enough to outlast even the grave's own claim on us — a fitting climax to a book that has, from its opening verse, insisted that romantic love, rightly ordered, is not a distraction from the life of faith but one of its most vivid pictures.

Paul draws directly on this same connection between marital love and divine love centuries later, instructing husbands to "love their wives as their own bodies," following the pattern of a Christ who "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25, 28). Read alongside that later instruction, Song of Solomon supplies something Ephesians assumes but does not itself illustrate: an extended, concrete picture of exactly what attentive, delighted, sacrificial love between husband and wife actually looks like in practice — noticing, praising, pursuing, and being pursued in turn. For readers whose own marriages have grown cold or merely functional, this book offers not a rebuke but an invitation: to rekindle, deliberately and with real effort, the same delighted attention the Shulammitte and her beloved gave each other three thousand years ago, trusting that such attention,

like every other discipline Scripture commends, yields its own peaceful fruit over time (cf. Hebrews 12:11).

Reflection & Discussion Questions

1. The Song's refrain "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (2:16) describes love as exclusive and mutually possessed. How does this ancient picture of committed, exclusive love compare with the messages about love and relationships you encounter in the culture around you?
2. The book's threefold warning not to "arouse or awaken love" before its proper time cautions against forcing intimacy ahead of its right season. Where in your own life or relationships have you seen the wisdom, or the cost, of respecting that kind of timing?
3. Song of Solomon 5 shows the relationship pass through genuine distance and hesitation before being restored. Has a significant relationship in your own life gone through a similar season of drifting apart and being deliberately drawn back together? What did the restoration actually require of you?
4. Song of Solomon 8:6–7 describes love as "strong as death" and unquenchable by many waters. If you are married, what would it look like this week to bring the same deliberate, attentive delight described in this book back into your own marriage? If you are not, how does this picture shape what you are hoping for, or waiting for?

CONCLUSION

We opened this book by noting that three quite different books of the Bible carry Solomon's name, and by tradition, three quite different seasons of one remarkable life — the ardent devotion of youth in Song of Solomon, the settled practical wisdom of middle age in Proverbs, and the tested, hard-won honesty of old age in Ecclesiastes. Whether or not that theory is literally true in every detail, we hope reading the three together, in their traditional order, has shown you something no single one of them could show alone. Proverbs taught us that wisdom, built on the fear of the Lord, genuinely and characteristically leads toward a flourishing life — in how we raise children, manage money, choose friends, and guard our speech. Ecclesiastes taught us the necessary limits of that same wisdom, refusing to let it calcify into a mechanical formula, insisting that time and chance overtake even the wise and the diligent, and that lasting meaning is found only in the fear of God, never in wealth, pleasure, or achievement pursued as ends in themselves. And Song of Solomon taught us that the deepest wisdom of all might simply be to love well — to delight in a spouse without embarrassment, to persevere through seasons of real distance, and to trust that a love sealed like a covenant is, in the end, as strong as death itself.

The thread that ties all three together, easy to lose amid their very different moods, is the single verse that opens the whole collection: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7), echoed almost exactly in Ecclesiastes' own final verdict, “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” (Ecclesiastes 12:13), and present even in Song of Solomon's own quieter way, in a love so exclusive, so covenantal, and so enduring that it becomes, almost without the text ever saying so directly, its own kind of worship. Wisdom, tested by everyday life, tested by time and mortality, and tested by the demands of loving another person faithfully, keeps circling back to the same starting point: a right, reverent relationship with the God who made wisdom, time, and love all possible in the first place.

We hope these fifteen chapters have given you not a system to master but a companion for the actual, ordinary texture of your own life — the discipline of raising children well, the patience of building wealth honestly, the humility of admitting what you cannot control, and the deliberate, sustained attention that any marriage worth having requires. Solomon, whatever his failures, left us three books instead of one, as if even he understood that no single mood, no single season of life, could ever capture the whole of what it means to walk wisely before God. We hope that wherever you find yourself today — in the confident middle of Proverbs, the honest weariness of Ecclesiastes, or the delighted devotion of Song of Solomon — you will keep returning, as we have, to the one truth that holds every season together: that the fear of the Lord really is where wisdom begins, and that a life built on it, however ordinary it may look from the outside, is a life genuinely well built.

APPENDIX

Daily Bible Reading Plan

This is the same daily Bible reading plan we use at dailyqt.org, covering the entire Bible — Old and New Testaments alike — in three hundred sixty-five daily readings. It does not begin on January 1st, and neither must you; begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. The fifteen readings that correspond to the chapters of this book — Proverbs 1–3 through the whole of Song of Solomon — fall in the middle of the full sequence, but the complete year-long plan is reprinted here, as it is in every volume of this series, so that wherever you are in your reading you always have the whole plan close at hand. Check off each day’s passage as you complete it, and feel no need to catch up if you fall behind by a day or a week. The goal was never a perfect record. It was a daily habit of opening God’s Word, kept up faithfully enough, and long enough, that it becomes less a task to complete than simply the shape of an ordinary day.

Date	Passage	Date	Passage
1/10	Gen 1-3	1/11	Gen 4-7
1/12	Gen 8-11	1/13	Gen 12-15
1/14	Gen 16-18	1/15	Gen 19-21
1/16	Gen 22-24	1/17	Gen 25-26
1/18	Gen 27-29	1/19	Gen 30-31
1/20	Gen 32-34	1/21	Gen 35-37
1/22	Gen 38-40	1/23	Gen 41-42
1/24	Gen 43-45	1/25	Gen 46-47
1/26	Gen 48-50	1/27	Ex 1-3
1/28	Ex 4-6	1/29	Ex 7-9
1/30	Ex 10-12	1/31	Ex 13-15
2/1	Ex 16-18	2/2	Ex 19-21
2/3	Ex 22-24	2/4	Ex 25-27
2/5	Ex 28-29	2/6	Ex 30-32
2/7	Ex 33-35	2/8	Ex 36-38
2/9	Ex 39-40	2/10	Lev 1-4
2/11	Lev 5-7	2/12	Lev 8-10
2/13	Lev 11-13	2/14	Lev 14-15

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2/15	Lev 16-18	2/16	Lev 19-21
2/17	Lev 22-23	2/18	Lev 24-25
2/19	Lev 26-27	2/20	Nu 1-2
2/21	Nu 3-4	2/22	Nu 5-6
2/23	Nu 7	2/24	Nu 8-10
2/25	Nu 11-13	2/26	Nu 14-15
2/27	Nu 16-17	2/28	Nu 18-20
3/1	Nu 21-22	3/2	Nu 23-25
3/3	Nu 26-27	3/4	Nu 28-30
3/5	Nu 31-32	3/6	Nu 33-34
3/7	Nu 35-36	3/8	Dt 1-2
3/9	Dt 3-4	3/10	Dt 5-7
3/11	Dt 8-10	3/12	Dt 11-13
3/13	Dt 14-16	3/14	Dt 17-20
3/15	Dt 21-23	3/16	Dt 24-27
3/17	Dt 28-29	3/18	Dt 30-31
3/19	Dt 32-34	3/20	Jos 1-4
3/21	Jos 5-8	3/22	Jos 9-11
3/23	Jos 12-15	3/24	Jos 16-18
3/25	Jos 19-21	3/26	Jos 22-24
3/27	Jdg 1-2	3/28	Jdg 3-5
3/29	Jdg 6-7	3/30	Jdg 8-9
3/31	Jdg 10-12	4/1	Jdg 13-15
4/2	Jdg 16-18	4/3	Jdg 19-21
4/4	Ruth	4/5	1 Sa 1-3
4/6	1 Sa 4-8	4/7	1 Sa 9-12
4/8	1 Sa 13-14	4/9	1 Sa 15-17
4/10	1 Sa 18-20	4/11	1 Sa 21-24
4/12	1 Sa 25-27	4/13	1 Sa 28-31
4/14	2 Sa 1-3	4/15	2 Sa 4-7
4/16	2 Sa 8-12	4/17	2 Sa 13-15
4/18	2 Sa 16-18	4/19	2 Sa 19-21
4/20	2 Sa 22-24	4/21	1 Ki 1-2
4/22	1 Ki 3-5	4/23	1 Ki 6-7
4/24	1 Ki 8-9	4/25	1 Ki 10-11
4/26	1 Ki 12-14	4/27	1 Ki 15-17
4/28	1 Ki 18-20	4/29	1 Ki 21-22
4/30	2 Ki 1-3	5/1	2 Ki 4-5
5/2	2 Ki 6-8	5/3	2 Ki 9-11

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5/4	2 Ki 12-14	5/5	2 Ki 15-17
5/6	2 Ki 18-19	5/7	2 Ki 20-22
5/8	2 Ki 23-25	5/9	1 Ch 1-2
5/10	1 Ch 3-5	5/11	1 Ch 6
5/12	1 Ch 7-8	5/13	1 Ch 9-11
5/14	1 Ch 12-14	5/15	1 Ch 15-17
5/16	1 Ch 18-21	5/17	1 Ch 22-24
5/18	1 Ch 25-27	5/19	1 Ch 28-2 Ch 1
5/20	2 Ch 2-5	5/21	2 Ch 6-8
5/22	2 Ch 9-12	5/23	2 Ch 13-17
5/24	2 Ch 18-20	5/25	2 Ch 21-24
5/26	2 Ch 25-27	5/27	2 Ch 28-31
5/28	2 Ch 32-34	5/29	2 Ch 35-36
5/30	Ezr 1-3	5/31	Ezr 4-7
6/1	Ezr 8-10	6/2	Neh 1-3
6/3	Neh 4-6	6/4	Neh 7
6/5	Neh 8-9	6/6	Neh 10-11
6/7	Neh 12-13	6/8	Esth 1-5
6/9	Esth 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10
6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23
6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Ps 1-8	6/24	Ps 9-16
6/25	Ps 17-20	6/26	Ps 21-25
6/27	Ps 26-31	6/28	Ps 32-35
6/29	Ps 36-39	6/30	Ps 40-45
7/1	Ps 46-50	7/2	Ps 51-57
7/3	Ps 58-65	7/4	Ps 66-69
7/5	Ps 70-73	7/6	Ps 74-77
7/7	Ps 78-79	7/8	Ps 80-85
7/9	Ps 86-89	7/10	Ps 90-95
7/11	Ps 96-102	7/12	Ps 103-105
7/13	Ps 106-107	7/14	Ps 108-114
7/15	Ps 115-118	7/16	Ps 119:1-88
7/17	Ps 119:89-176	7/18	Ps 120-132
7/19	Ps 133-139	7/20	Ps 140-145

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7/21	Ps 146-150	7/22	Prov 1-3
7/23	Prov 4-6	7/24	Prov 7-9
7/25	Prov 10-12	7/26	Prov 13-15
7/27	Prov 16-18	7/28	Prov 19-21
7/29	Prov 22-23	7/30	Prov 24-26
7/31	Prov 27-29	8/1	Prov 30-31
8/2	Ecc 1-4	8/3	Ecc 5-8
8/4	Ecc 9-12	8/5	Ss 1-8
8/6	Isa 1-4	8/7	Isa 5-8
8/8	Isa 9-12	8/9	Isa 13-17
8/10	Isa 18-22	8/11	Isa 23-27
8/12	Isa 28-30	8/13	Isa 31-35
8/14	Isa 36-41	8/15	Isa 42-44
8/16	Isa 45-48	8/17	Isa 49-53
8/18	Isa 54-58	8/19	Isa 59-63
8/20	Isa 64-66	8/21	Jer 1-3
8/22	Jer 4-6	8/23	Jer 7-9
8/24	Jer 10-13	8/25	Jer 14-17
8/26	Jer 18-22	8/27	Jer 23-25
8/28	Jer 26-29	8/29	Jer 30-31
8/30	Jer 32-34	8/31	Jer 35-37
9/1	Jer 38-41	9/2	Jer 42-45
9/3	Jer 46-48	9/4	Jer 49-50
9/5	Jer 51-52	9/6	Lam 1:1-3:36
9/7	Lam 3:37-5:22	9/8	Eze 1-4
9/9	Eze 5-8	9/10	Eze 9-12
9/11	Eze 13-15	9/12	Eze 16-17
9/13	Eze 18-20	9/14	Eze 21-22
9/15	Eze 23-24	9/16	Eze 25-27
9/17	Eze 28-30	9/18	Eze 31-33
9/19	Eze 34-36	9/20	Eze 37-39
9/21	Eze 40-42	9/22	Eze 43-45
9/23	Eze 46-48	9/24	Dan 1-3
9/25	Dan 4-6	9/26	Dan 7-9
9/27	Dan 10-12	9/28	Hos 1-7
9/29	Hos 8-14	9/30	Joel
10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Ob-Jonah	10/4	Micah
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10/9	Zech 8-14	10/10	Mal 1-4
10/11	Mat 1-4	10/12	Mat 5-6
10/13	Mat 7-8	10/14	Mat 9-10
10/15	Mat 11-12	10/16	Mat 13-14
10/17	Mat 15-17	10/18	Mat 18-19
10/19	Mat 20-21	10/20	Mat 22-23
10/21	Mat 24-25	10/22	Mat 26
10/23	Mat 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16	11/1	Luke 1
11/2	Luke 2-3	11/3	Luke 4-5
11/4	Luke 6-7	11/5	Luke 8-9
11/6	Luke 10-11	11/7	Luke 12-13
11/8	Luke 14-16	11/9	Luke 17-18
11/10	Luke 19-20	11/11	Luke 21-22
11/12	Luke 23-24	11/13	John 1-2
11/14	John 3-4	11/15	John 5-6
11/16	John 7-8	11/17	John 9-10
11/18	John 11-12	11/19	John 13-15
11/20	John 16-18	11/21	John 19-21
11/22	Acts 1-3	11/23	Acts 4-6
11/24	Acts 7-8	11/25	Acts 9-10
11/26	Acts 11-13	11/27	Acts 14-15
11/28	Acts 16-17	11/29	Acts 18-20
11/30	Acts 21-23	12/1	Acts 24-26
12/2	Acts 27-28	12/3	Rom 1-3
12/4	Rom 4-7	12/5	Rom 8-10
12/6	Rom 11-13	12/7	Rom 14-16
12/8	1 Cor 1-4	12/9	1 Cor 5-8
12/10	1 Cor 9-11	12/11	1 Cor 12-14
12/12	1 Cor 15-16	12/13	2 Cor 1-4
12/14	2 Cor 5-9	12/15	2 Cor 10-13
12/16	Gal 1-3	12/17	Gal 4-6
12/18	Eph 1-3	12/19	Eph 4-6
12/20	Phi 1-4	12/21	Col 1-4
12/22	1 Thess 1-5	12/23	2 Thess 1-3

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12/26	Titus-Phm	12/27	Heb 1-6
12/28	Heb 7-10	12/29	Heb 11-13
12/30	James	12/31	1 Pe
1/1	2 Pe	1/2	1 John
1/3	2 John-Jude	1/4	Rev 1-3
1/5	Rev 4-8	1/6	Rev 9-12
1/7	Rev 13-16	1/8	Rev 17-19
1/9	Rev 20-22		