

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit
God Trains His People—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

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We are in the middle of our Old Testament flyover. Throughout this series we've been discovering a simple truth: you are not alone.

- God was with Moses.
- God was with Joshua.
- God was with Israel.
- God was with the kings.

Last week we saw that the Psalms not only remind us that God is near, but they also help us draw near to Him. Today we come to three books called the “wisdom books”: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Proverbs 8:35 says, “Those who find me find life.”

We are using LIFE as our framework:

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

These three books invite us into three questions:

1. Proverbs: Is it wise?
2. Ecclesiastes: Is it meaningful?
3. Song of Solomon: Am I loved?

Proverbs: Is It Wise?

LITERAL

In the fall of 2024, our family was remodeling our house in Wanamaker. As many of you know, the project became much larger than we anticipated. A couple of months into it, I found myself overwhelmed, anxious, and struggling. One day we showed up and put on our tool belts, and I started assigning projects to everyone. At that point one of my children said, “Dad, are you actually going to work on anything today or are you just going to keep walking around looking at everything that needs to be done?”

What he didn't understand was that coordinating kids and contractors was the work I was doing. But what he observed was true: I was overwhelmed. Then he said, “Dad, I think you need to stay focused on one project and not move to the next until you've finished the first one.” I remember thinking, “That's wisdom.”

One thing I've learned over 23 years of parenting is that often I learn as much from my children as they learn from me. But one of the primary responsibilities of a father is to pass along wisdom. That's exactly what Proverbs is.

Much of Proverbs is a father passing wisdom to his son. “My son, pay attention to my wisdom” (Proverbs 5:1).

My dad had a variety of proverbs that he passed down to us kids. These were not from the book of Proverbs, but they were simple truths with deep wisdom.

In moments when I wanted to play the victim card, my dad gave me agency with this proverb, one of his favorite sayings: "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond."

That's a proverb: a short statement carrying deep wisdom earned through long experience. That's the heart of Proverbs.

The primary question this book teaches us to ask is, "Is it wise?" A friend of mine gave a board with these words on it to my son when he graduated from high school. Wrestling with this question will change the trajectory of your life because most decisions are not about right versus wrong; they're about wisdom versus foolishness.

Solomon wrote, "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for gaining wisdom and instruction..." (Proverbs 1:1-2).

The invitation of Proverbs is simple:

1. Learn from those who have walked before you.
2. Receive wisdom.
3. Live wisely.

INCARNATIONAL

How does Proverbs point us to Jesus? "Christ ... the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). In fact, "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Jesus doesn't merely teach wisdom; He is wisdom.

FORMATIONAL

How do these teachings intersect with our lives today? This week we had donuts after a meeting. I found myself standing next to an apple fritter sitting beside a friend's coffee. He was in a conversation, not paying attention. I had a Goldilocks moment and I took a bite, hoping for a reaction. He wasn't watching. I took another bite.

Then I forgot two things: (1) I forgot to stick around until he noticed, and (2) I forgot that he happens to be one of our technology directors. When he found the partially eaten donut, he immediately said: "No problem. We can just check the video."

His response made this proverb come alive: "People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house" (Proverbs 6:30-31).

I was caught red-handed. Stealing a donut from a man in charge of security cameras is not wise. But here is the real sobering reality: Solomon knew the wisdom, but eventually he failed to live it out.

Friends, "Never forsake wisdom..." (Proverbs 4:6-7). With every decision, begin with the question, "Is it wise?" Do this on big decisions, naturally, but even on the everyday small choices. The big decisions are often about life direction (where to go to school, where to work, who to marry). The smaller everyday choices are about values and what kind of person you are becoming.

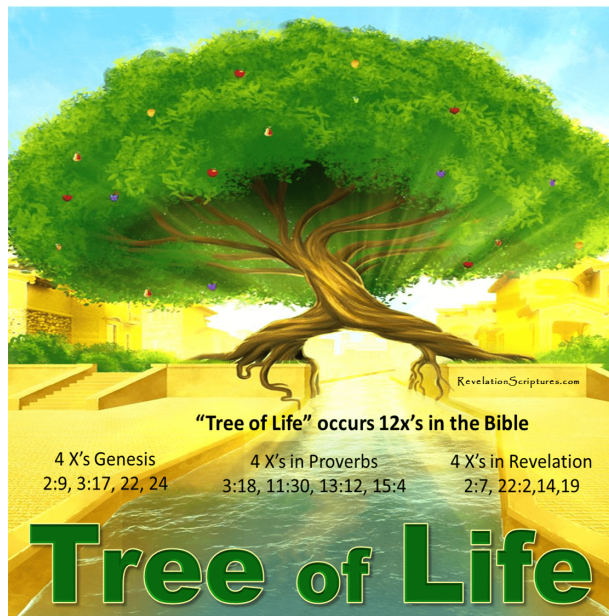
Here are a few examples of everyday small choices:

- Playing video games every night
- Watching the television during mealtime or bedtime
- Scrolling endlessly on social media or news channels
- Putting yourself in a compromising setting with the person you are dating
- Carving out time away from work to be with your family

Annie Dillard said, “How you spend your days is how you spend your life.” And how you spend your life will determine who you are, so live your life wisely.

ETERNAL

The tree of life appears twelve times in the Bible: Genesis 1&2, the book of Proverbs, and Revelation 22.



“Wisdom is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (Proverbs 3:18).

This is a beautiful image and a pointer to the day coming when we will experience eternal life and communion with God.

Then the angel showed me a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the main street of the city. On either side of the river stood a tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit and yielding a fresh crop for each month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Ecclesiastes: Is It Meaningful?

LITERAL

Solomon had everything: power, pleasure, wealth, success, influence. Yet he wrote, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired...Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done...everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11). Later he said, “So I hated life...” (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

The Hebrew word translated “meaningless” is “hevel.” It literally means vapor, smoke, mist, something you can see but cannot grasp.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is not saying life has no value; rather, he is saying life cannot be controlled. Everything we cling to eventually slips through our fingers. The author of Ecclesiastes finally learned what many of us eventually learn: we are not God.

The invitation of Ecclesiastes is surrender: stop trying to control everything, receive life as a gift, and trust God.

INCARNATIONAL

Jesus is the meaning of life. The author of Ecclesiastes searched everywhere for meaning—in achievement, pleasure, wealth, wisdom, work, relationships. But Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

The author despaired because death comes to us all. So what good is anything if all have the same end? But Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

Jesus answers the questions Ecclesiastes raises.

FORMATIONAL

One of the most important lessons in Ecclesiastes is learning to receive life as a gift. Years ago, I attended church with Tarik Glenn, a three-time Pro Bowl offensive tackle for Peyton Manning. After winning the Super Bowl he looked around and thought, “I’ve given my life for this?” Something shifted. He retired, invested in his family, and started a non-profit here in Indy to mentor teenagers.

Ecclesiastes reminds us:

- Your legacy is not wealth.
- Your legacy is people.
- Relationships matter.
- Presence matters.
- The gifts of God matter.

Richard Rohr wrote that there must come a point where “your concern is not so much to have what you love anymore, but to love what you have—right now.”

ETERNAL

“He has put eternity into man's heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Every longing for meaning is ultimately a longing for God. Every ache points beyond this world, and one day God will make all things right (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Song of Songs: Am I Loved?

LITERAL

Song of Songs is a collection of love poems between a man and a woman. It is beautiful, intimate, and vulnerable. The lovers delight in one another. They pursue one another. They celebrate one another. The book asks one of the deepest questions of the human heart: Am I loved?

Perhaps the most famous line comes near the end: “Love is as strong as death” (Song of Songs 8:6).

The book ends with longing, pursuit, and mystery, as if to remind us there is always more love to discover.

INCARNATIONAL

Jesus is the bridegroom. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

Song of Songs points us toward a greater love, a love that pursues us, a love that sacrifices for us, a love that never lets us go. At the cross, love and death meet face to face. Death appears to win, but on Easter morning, love triumphs.

FORMATIONAL

Song of Songs reminds us that love is one of God's most mysterious and beautiful gifts. Real love is not self-centered. It is self-giving. It is willing to see and be seen, to know and be known, to love and be loved.

ETERNAL

Song of Songs points us toward a greater love. One day there will be no more shame, no more hiding, no more brokenness. The Church will be united with Christ, the Bride with her bridegroom. And we will finally know, without question, that we are loved.

CONCLUSION

- Proverbs asks, “Is it wise?”
- Ecclesiastes asks, “Is it meaningful?”
- Song of Songs asks, “Am I loved?”

These are not merely the questions of the Wisdom Books; these are the questions of every human heart. And Jesus answers all three.

- He is the Wisdom of God.

- He is the Meaning of Life.
- He is the Bridegroom who loves His people.