



INSPIRED THOUGHTS

- “I saw that many measure themselves among themselves, and compare their lives with the lives of others. This should not be. No one but Christ is given us as an example. He is our true Pattern, and each should strive to excel in imitating Him. ... I saw that some hardly know as yet what self-denial or sacrifice is, or what it is to suffer for the truth’s sake. But none will enter heaven without making a sacrifice. A spirit of self-denial and sacrifice should be cherished. Some have not sacrificed themselves, their own bodies, on the altar of God. They indulge in hasty, fitful temper, gratify their appetites, and attend to their own self-interest, regardless of the cause of God. Those who are willing to make any sacrifice for eternal life, will have it; and it will be worth suffering for, worth crucifying self for, and sacrificing every idol for. The far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory swallows up everything and eclipses every earthly pleasure.”³
Ellen G. White
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2. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
3. Is there anybody out there who’s already made big mistakes, learned from them, and written this stuff down for others to learn from?
4. What is a proverb

First, what is wisdom, and why should I care? Plainly put, wisdom is ability to live in a good, intelligent way. Now, I’m no egghead—although I really wish I was. But Mr. Webster, the dictionary guy (and definitely an egghead), defines wisdom as, “[the] ability to discern inner qualities and relationships”; “insight”; “good sense.”⁴ So basically, wisdom is the ability to have good insight, good sense or common sense (it’s not so common these days), and good judgment to make good decisions.

So now that we know what wisdom is, what is the value of wisdom and how can we get it for ourselves? I’ve talked to a lot of people in my short years, and typically people answer the question, “Can you have wisdom for yourself?” with something like this: “Well, I’m really not old enough to have a lot of wisdom yet. Maybe when I get older, I’ll have some.”

A lot of people think that getting wisdom is like getting money: When they get older, they’ll acquire more money and be able to save up for their retirement. We all tend to think that the only people who have wisdom live in nursing homes

³ Accessed on February 2, 2015 from http://www.whiteestate.org/devotional/mar/02_03.asp

⁴ Accessed on January 9, 2015 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wisdom>

or are some sort of hermit, doing nothing but reading up in some secluded mountain hideaway.

Not quite. The Bible tells us something different: It promises us that “if any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all” (James 1:5, GNT). Wisdom is knowing where or when to apply knowledge correctly.

One would think this to be extremely useful. If so, why don’t more people have wisdom? Well, the bottom line is because *it comes at a price*. That price is your pride. Getting wisdom begins with the understanding that you and I aren’t smart enough to get it ourselves. It only comes from God, and we need to go to Him to get it. The Bible tells us that if you want wisdom, you’ve got to respect and obey the Lord. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...” (NIV).

Fear? Fearing the Lord is entirely different from being fearful or afraid of God. Fearing the Lord means that you understand that there is only one God in the universe, and that you are not Him. Once you understand that simple point, you are well on your way to having wisdom.

The next logical question is, “How do you know if you fear the Lord?” Easy—respect for somebody is ultimately measured in obedience. Do you obey God even when it goes against what you want to do? When it will cost you something that is dear to you? That’s when you truly know that you fear God. When you’re willing to give all for Him and still follow Him, that’s when you know you fear Him.

In the Old Testament book of Job, God says of Job, “There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8, NIV). Now pay attention to Job’s attitude after he’s lost his earthly possessions and all his family but his wife. He said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21, NIV). Then, in Job 13:15, even after he’s lost his health, Job says of God, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (NIV).

What? Job just lost everything, and he’s praising God? Job reiterates that his focus is God and God alone. Wow! To have faith and obedience to God truly puts you in an incredibly submissive position so He can use you. That’s why understanding who God really is the key to wisdom. You can’t expect to get anything coming down the pipeline from God if you don’t even believe that He is the one who alone can give it!

RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



1. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*. (1999) Pacific Press Publishing Association
 2. Steve Case, *Connection*. (2009) Pacific Press Publishing Association
 3. Scott R. Ward, *Authentic*. (2012) Review and Herald Publishing
 4. Karl Haffner, *Destiny*. (2013) Review and Herald Publishing
 5. Mark Witas, *Just Jesus*. (2014) Review and Herald Publishing
 6. Lee Venden, *It's All About Him*. (2004). Review and Herald Publishing
 7. "Ecclesiastes," *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (Jan.–Mar., 2007) <http://ssnet.org/qtrly/eng/07a/index.html>
 8. George R. Knight, *Exploring Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon: A Devotional Commentary*. (2006) Review and Herald Publishing
 9. Andy Stanley, *The Best Question Ever*. (2004) Multnomah Books
 10. Andy Stanley, *Ask It* (DVD)
 11. Andy Stanley, *Ask It*. (2014) Multnomah Books
 12. Bill Hybels, *Wisdom: Making Life Work*. (2003) InterVarsity Press
 13. David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*. (2007) Thomas Nelson
 14. Phil Vischer, *Me, Myself & Bob*. (2006) Thomas Nelson
 15. John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*. (2003) Crossway
 16. John Piper, *Risk is Right*. (2013) Crossway
 17. David Platt, *Follow Me*. (2013) Tyndale House Publishers
 18. Andy Stanley's "Ask It," the entire sermon series <http://northpointonline.tv/messages/ask-it/question-everything>
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Let's review. If you want wisdom, whom do you have to ask? Not Socrates, not Aristotle, not Plato, not Albert Einstein, not the Dalai Lama, not Bill Gates, not Dr. Phil, not Oprah—not even Ellen White. The only being in the entire universe who has it to give away is God! Never forget that.

You may say to yourself, "I've got lots of knowledge. I mean, I know lots of stuff." But knowledge is not wisdom. Knowledge is information, or "book learning," but wisdom is effectively, happily, and successfully living life. **Wisdom is the proper application of the right knowledge.**

Now that you know the difference between the two, which one do you have: knowledge or wisdom? As we said before, if you don't have wisdom, you can ask God for it, and He promises to give it to you.

But a testimonial can help these ideas really sink in. I'm sure there have been times when you may have said, "Wow, I wish there was someone who could guide me through life and set me on the right path to live a healthy, happy, successful life." It's funny, though—a lot of the people I've seen with serious negative life issues have consistently refused to listen to other people who know more, have



OTHER VOICES

- “Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”⁵
–Augustine of Hippo
- “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”⁶
–C.S. Lewis
- “Suppose someone should offer me a plateful of crumbs after I had eaten a T-bone steak. I would say, ‘No, thank you. I am already satisfied.’ Christian, that is the secret—you can be so filled with the things of Christ, so enamored with the things of God that you do not have time for the sinful pleasures of the world.”⁷
–Billy Graham

lived longer, have made bigger mistakes, and have learned from them. The Bible calls this group of people, who refuse to listen, “fools.”

Many people tend to listen to and then do the things that people their own age tell them to, even if they’re people who have little to no real-life experience, people who are in the process of making big, serious, bad life mistakes or are already experiencing the negative consequences of those mistakes, or people who don’t seem to learn from their mistakes! This is what I like to call the “jailhouse lawyer” phenomenon. Let me explain: There are lots of “experts” on the law in jail, and if you’re in there talking with them, they’ve got a bazillion ideas and theories about how to get out of jail or stay out of jail—but they’re in jail! How about talking to people who have made bad decisions and have learned from them enough to keep them from going to jail, or people who have been in jail but have gotten out and not headed back? Those are the people you need to listen to, not your peers!

Well, thank God that there was someone who was a bigger fool than you or me or any of your friends or family. His name was Solomon, and he was a king. I know, I know—just because you’re a king doesn’t mean you won’t make stupid life decisions. In the book of Ecclesiastes he lists all the stupid stuff he did trying

⁵ Accessed on February 1, 2015 from <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/incontext/article/augustine/>

⁶ Accessed on February 1, 2015 from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/363092-if-i-find-in-myself-desires-which-nothing-in-this>

⁷ Accessed on February 1, 2015 from <http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/keys.htm>

to find fulfillment in everything else but God. Then in the book of Proverbs, Solomon gives the “cheat sheet,” or short version, of the most important things he learned about living a godly life and having happiness, joy, impact, peace, purpose, and power. (That’s not the focus of our time together, but trust me, you need to take the time to read it!)

King Solomon was known as the wisest man in the world. The Bible states that there has never been—nor will there ever be—anyone wiser than Solomon. Solomon composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs; however, only about 800 of his 3,000 proverbs are included in the book of Proverbs. He wrote the Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—three of the four “wisdom” books in the Bible. That fact alone should send up a flag that we should be listening to him!

So what is a proverb? It’s a short, concise sentence that conveys moral truth. The word “proverb” comes from the Hebrew word that can mean “to rule or to govern,” and these sayings, reminders, and warnings provide profound advice for governing our lives.

So what are the purposes of proverbs? Well, Solomon, being the brainiac he was, actually included an introduction to explain why he thought this specific medium was so effective and powerful for teaching wisdom. It’s found in ... well, Proverbs 1:1-7:

These are the proverbs of King Solomon of Israel, the son of David. Proverbs will teach you wisdom and self-control and how to understand sayings with deep meanings. You will learn what is right and honest and fair. From these, an ordinary person can learn to be smart, and young people can gain knowledge and good sense. If you are already wise, you will become even wiser. And if you are smart, you will learn to understand proverbs and sayings, as well as words of wisdom and all kinds of riddles. Respect and obey the Lord! This is the beginning of knowledge. Only a fool rejects wisdom and good advice (CEV).

Solomon tells us that there are four kinds of fools, ranging from those who are naive and uncommitted to scoffers who arrogantly despise the way of God. Basically, a scoffer is someone who makes fun of somebody else. The fool is not someone who is mentally deficient, stupid, or cognitively impaired; instead, the Bible’s definition of a fool is someone who consistently chooses, *as a pattern of*

their character, to remain ignorant or doesn't accept wise advice about their life. Fools live as though there is no God.

Fools think they know more than everybody else, and they don't listen to constructive criticism. They think they won't get into trouble, or that bad things won't happen to them. They seem to assume that all those consequences will happen to somebody else, and even when they do get into trouble or suffer consequences, they refuse to listen and learn from their mistakes. Fools typically like to play the blame game, shift responsibility, make excuses, or just plain lie.

I've got a question for you: Are you a fool? Do you know somebody in your family who's a fool? Are you friends with a fool? If you're a fool, stop it. Speaking from life experience, I can tell you it won't get anywhere. If you know somebody who's a fool, warn them lovingly and strongly that bad, difficult things are coming down the road for them—and they won't be able to avoid them.

Now that we've learned that somebody has indeed lived before us, made stupid mistakes and has shown us the way in a clear, direct manner, let's learn about the true benefits of wisdom and how those benefits directly affect our lives.

Keep in mind that this is just an overview. As we dig deeply into the entire book of Ecclesiastes, we'll uncover a treasure trove of additional blessings that come from choosing to live a life of Godly wisdom. As you read about these benefits, think about yourself and the people you know and love. Do any of the characteristics of a fool describe you or someone you know? I hope not. But if so, you can begin today to make appropriate changes in your life. Remember what God says about our behavior: Your choices affect your consequences. Smart choices = good consequences; stupid choices = bad consequences. It's all up to you.

If you read, study, and take to heart the information that Solomon, the wisest man in the world, gives you in Ecclesiastes and surround yourself with wise people rather than foolish people, you'll make smart choices.

So what are the general benefits of wisdom?

1. Long life and good health
 - a. Proverbs 8:35, 36 tells us, "By finding me [wisdom], you find life, and the Lord will be pleased with you. But if you don't find me, you hurt only yourself, and if you hate me, you are in love with death" (CEV).

- b. More examples are found in Proverbs 1:32-33; 3:1-3; 3:15-18; 2:21-22; 4:10; and 4:22.
- 2. Choosing friends wisely
 - a. Proverbs 1:8-19 states, “My child, obey the teachings of your parents, and wear their teachings as you would a lovely hat or a pretty necklace. Don’t be tempted by sinners or listen when they say, ‘Come on! Let’s gang up and kill somebody, just for the fun of it! They’re well and healthy now, but we’ll finish them off once and for all. We’ll take their valuables and fill our homes with stolen goods. If you join our gang, you’ll get your share.’ Don’t follow anyone like that or do what they do. They are in a big hurry to commit some crime, perhaps even murder. They are like a bird that sees the bait, but ignores the trap. They gang up to murder someone, but they are the victims. The wealth you get from crime robs you of your life” (CEV).
 - b. More examples are found in Proverbs 2:12-15.
- 3. Safety from ungodly sexuality
 - a. Proverbs 2:16-19 states, “Wisdom will protect you from the smooth talk of a sinful woman, who breaks her wedding vows and leaves the man she married when she was young. The road to her house leads down to the dark world of the dead. Visit her, and you will never find the road to life again” (CEV).
 - b. More examples are found in Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27.

Wise Guy!

Who was Solomon and why was he so important? And more importantly, what can we learn and apply to our own lives about how Solomon answered God’s “most important question”?

Ask yourself what would you do if someone handed you a blank check and said you can buy whatever you want—the sky’s the limit! You can have anything your heart desires, with no restrictions. Well, we’re going to look at a story of someone who got just that—from God! It’s found in the Old Testament book of 1 Kings. Open that book and read chapter 3, verses 1 to 15, on your own in whatever version you like. After you’re done reading, I’d like to discuss eight important lessons we need to learn from Solomon on the importance of wisdom and how to get it from God:

1. **Solomon showed his love for the Lord by recognizing God as the Creator and sustainer of all things.** Solomon also kept God's laws and commandments (see verse 3). How about you? Do you recognize that God is the boss? If you do, are you living a life that reflects that fact?
2. **Solomon worshipped God without end (see verses 3, 4).** He offered 1,000 burnt offerings to God. Can you imagine the blood—and the smell? What about you? What are you giving to God for your worship? How are you sacrificing to God? What gifts of your life, time, money, and talents are you giving to Him?
3. **Solomon had the right viewpoint of who he was in front of God (see verses 6-8).** Solomon would become the richest, smartest, most powerful person in the whole world, but when he spoke to God he called himself, “servant” and a “little child” (NKJV).
It's uncomfortable for us to humble ourselves. But I'd rather do it willingly than have God do it for me—how about you? For more on this, see the story of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4. Interesting stuff, but definitely not a lesson you would want to learn the hard way.
Solomon admitted that he could do nothing by himself. Again, Solomon humbled himself and remembered that God was God. He admitted his weaknesses by telling God the truth. He was feeling incredibly overwhelmed, but the key was that he admitted it. He told God that he didn't know how to carry out his duties and that the people he was going to rule were too many to count (1 Kings 3:7, 8). You see, the key is humility and a teachable spirit. As you'll learn, the Bible takes a dim view of people who are prideful, who always think they're right, and who can't or won't take guidance from others. The Bible calls them fools! Just so we're clear, that's bad—and the opposite of someone who is wise.
4. **Solomon prioritized his life properly.** He asked God for a discerning heart so he could help his people (verse 9). Solomon's motivations were right and unselfish. I would probably have asked for a discerning heart so I could make better decisions on how to trade my money in the stock market, you know what I mean? It would have all been for me!
5. **God was pleased and gave Solomon his request (verses 10-12).** We've already read in the book of James that God will grant our request for wisdom if we just ask and believe that He will grant it. But the key is

that we need to have the right attitude and motivation. God's not going to give you wisdom just so you can be selfish with it.

6. **Furthermore, because Solomon's motives were right, God blessed him with everything else (verse 13).** He blessed Solomon with all the stuff he had not asked for. Specifically, the Bible tells us that he was blessed with riches and honor.

Now, I want to be careful here. I'm not saying that if you choose to worship and fear God, He will make you rich and important—not at all! Sometimes God chooses to give incredibly great material things as a consequence of someone's faith, but many times He does not. But God will always give us what we need in this life—and more important, in the life to come.

“I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth more than birds? ... Don't worry and ask yourselves, 'Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?' Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these. But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well” (Matthew 6:25-26, 31-33, CEV).

7. **If you stay on God's side, He will give you a long and happy life (1 Kings 3:14).** God wants you to live a long, happy, and prosperous life, and the only way you can do that is to be on His side.
8. **Even in his success, Solomon didn't forget where he came from, and praised and thanked God for His goodness and blessings (verse 15).** It would have been easy for Solomon to take credit for his wisdom and forget God. And Solomon does just that for a long time—and the Bible honestly records Solomon's mistakes as a warning to us. But thank God that near the end of Solomon's life he recognizes his serious mistakes and comes running back to God!

I hope it won't take you almost your entire life to come back to God. Turn to Him today. You will indeed be turning from death to life.

Solomon knew that life is difficult for many, but he also knew that the key to getting through is to praise God for everything and anything (a key point echoed much later by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. See Philippians 4:11-13).

In light of the information you've just learned, I challenge you to closely examine your life, your habits, your choices, your relationships with your friends, and your "special" friends. Take the truths expressed to heart and make changes in your life where you need to, so you don't get caught up in something you can't get out of. You can be free to fully give your physical, emotional, and spiritual strength and focus to serving God, wholeheartedly, and speed His return to take us all home!

Bird's Eye View

Solomon was the third king of the united monarchy of ancient Israel, which would break apart into the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah shortly after his death.

Much like writing a letter to your own children or to people you know and love, Solomon wrote the entire book of Ecclesiastes with the sole purpose of sparing his children, the people whom he ruled, and future generations the bitterness of learning through their own experience that life is meaningless apart from God.

The book was likely written around 935 B.C., late in Solomon's life. He was looking back on his life, much of which he had unfortunately lived apart from God. Interestingly enough, though Solomon is the wisest person in the world, he exhibits in his writing a lot of what I like to call "A.D.D.-ness." In other words, there are sections that are very logical and well-thought-out. And from a prose point of view, the narrative reads smoothly and effortlessly. Then there are entire chapters that are similar to the book of Proverbs and are filled with tons of short, pithy but wise sayings—and they have nothing in common with one another. This shifting in subject matter may frustrate you, but hang in there because it's crucial information you need to live your life wisely.

This book is only 12 short chapters, but—and this is no understatement—you could literally spend the rest of your life unpacking what Solomon in all his Solomon-y-ness, wrote. However, knowing that you don't have all that time, we're going to boil the larger themes down into five:

1. Searching
2. Emptiness

3. Work
4. Death
5. Wisdom

Then we'll spend the rest of the five chapters digging into the richness of the wisdom he found.

Search and Search...

The molded bunny lies in the basket, surrounded by pretty green paper “grass.” With Easter morning eyes wide with anticipation, the little boy carefully lifts the chocolate figure and bites into one of the long ears. But the sweet taste fades quickly and the child is left with a sour aftertaste in his mouth. The child looks again at the candy in his hand ... it's hollow! Empty, futile, hollow, nothing. The words ring of disappointment and disillusionment. Yet this is the life experience of many. Grasping for sweet things—possessions, experience, power, work, knowledge, education, relationships, pleasure— they find nothing inside. Life is empty and meaningless...and they despair. Many people feel restless and dissatisfied with the outcomes of their efforts. They wonder:

- If I am in God's will, why am I so tired and unfulfilled?
- What is the real meaning of life?
- Is this really all the world has to offer me?
- Where do I place my identity?
- When I look back on it all, will I be happy with my accomplishments?
- Why do I feel burned out, disillusioned, and dry?
- What is to become of me?

The truth is that we were all created to be perfect, and to have a perfect relationship with God. However, because of sin we have lost our perfection, and therefore our relationship. With sin comes a deep identity crisis. We each have a deep longing to identify with someone or something, to find where we fit in the “big picture.” We each have a hole in our souls, so we desperately cram our lives with stuff, hoping to fill that hole—a hole that can only be filled by and with Jesus. We can find our identity and meaning only through Him. Nothing else on this earth will do it.

You've got to love the opening words of this book: “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the

Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?’ (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, NIV).

Can you hear the mix of sheer sadness, anger, frustration, and despair in his voice? After doing counseling for more than a decade, I can’t tell you the countless times I’ve heard that tone in people’s voices or seen that look on their face—it says, “I’m DONE! Done with it all!”

Usually at the point, when someone comes to that realization, it’s out of deep searching that’s come up empty. And it’s usually accompanied by some sort of addiction(s), depression, anger, and after all that, despair and his good friend suicide aren’t far behind.

You might say, “Wow... that’s kind of dark and morbid for a Bible study, don’t you think?”

But that’s the beauty of Solomon’s opening lines: they’re as gritty and real as you can get. I mean, haven’t you ever felt this way?! I have, and I know tons of people who have told me those words as well. Solomon takes a saw to that exposed, raw nerve that is our shared human experience. He lays out the problem almost as if to say, “OK folks, there it is! In all its ugly truth. Life is useless, worthless, and really, what’s the point of it all?”

What he does so brilliantly (some might say “wisely”) is recognize that every human being must ask questions—and more importantly, come up with some real, substantive answers—that meet our deepest, darkest, and strongest needs for belonging, significance and connection. If not, well, the alternative isn’t pretty.

But praise God that there is an answer. And it’s not stuff, it’s a person—His name is Jesus Christ! He died for you (John 3:16) to give you all of that good stuff you just read about, and here’s the coolest part: You can accept it all, lock, stock and barrel, right now (2 Cor. 6:2).

How do you do it? It’s simple really—just tell God that you recognize you are an all-evil “sinner” (Romans 3:23), and He’s all good, “perfect and holy,” and that you recognize there is no way you could ever measure up to His standard of perfection (Isaiah 64:6), but that you accept the fact that Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:14) and lived the perfect life you couldn’t live. He died your death and was raised from the dead—for you! Tell God you accept it all (Romans 10:9) and you will instantly receive His perfect salvation, and He will give you a life of peace, power, purpose, freedom, and joy! (John 10:10; 8:36)

So what are you waiting for? Buckle your seat belt and prepare for the ride of your life!



Introduction to Solomon and Ecclesiastes

1. Knowing that this book is filled with such “in-your-face” information, does that make you uncomfortable or bring you reassurance? Why or why not?
2. Take minute to think of Solomon’s thesis: Life with God is infinitely more purposeful and fulfilling than life without Him. Would you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
3. Do you find yourself looking for stuff to fill that hole in your soul that only God can fill?
4. If you are, what do you need to do about it to fill it with the right thing: God?
5. Have you tried to find fulfillment in other things? Have they worked? Why or why not?



BIBLE STUDY

6. Take several minutes to think. Try to summarize your life experiences with and without God, then share them with the group.

7. Do you agree with the author that aside from the synoptic gospels, there is no book of more importance in the Bible than Ecclesiastes? Why or why not?

8. What is the difference between knowledge and information? Have you ever experienced the difficulties that arise from mistaking the two?

9. Think of some additional benefits to wisdom. What are they?

10. Based on this chapter, what changes do you need to make in your life to adjust your behaviors to more closely align with your beliefs? Take time to think, journal, meditate, pray, and even seek Godly, wise counsel regarding the next steps in your life