

Wisdom of the Bible



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REFERENCES

Bibles

(KJV) **The King James Version Of The Bible**, published in 1611, was commissioned by James I of England to settle matters being disputed within the Church of England. Its style and rhythm won it a secure and enduring popularity in the English-speaking world. Its archaic language, though, can obscure the true meaning for the modern reader.

(ASV) **The American Standard Version Of The Bible**, a 1901 publication updating the KJV, was based on new and more accurate translations of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Yet, it does retain much of the archaic language of the KJV.

(TLB) **The Living Bible**, published in 1971, is a popular paraphrased version written by Kenneth N. Taylor, who began this version to help his own children understand the New Testament Letters of Paul. As a result, the language is exceptionally clear and direct, making this Bible suitable for all ages. By nature, though, the accuracy of any paraphrased version is subject to debate.

(NAS) **The New American Standard Bible**, published in 1971, is a scholarly update of the 1901 ASV. Sponsored by the Lockman Foundation, the translators used the best available Greek and Hebrew texts as a guide.

(NIV) **The New International Version Of The Bible**, a completely new translation of ancient Greek and Hebrew texts sponsored by the New York International Bible Society, was published in 1978. Its clear, direct modern English makes it easy to read and understand.

(NRSV) **The New Revised Standard Version Bible**, published by The National Council of Churches in 1989, is an update of the highly regarded Revised Standard Version of 1952. The language is very modern, but the style is more traditional than the NIV.

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Kaari Ward, ed., **Jesus and His Times**, The Reader's Digest Association, 1987. History and geography of the times and places of New Testament events.

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INTRODUCTION. WHAT IS WISDOM AND WHY FOLLOW ITS PATH?

Wisdom Defined

In the Biblical sense, wisdom is the "ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding" (Lockyer p. 1103). The Wisdom teachings of the Bible follow from the two great themes of the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandments of Jesus: reverence to God, our Creator, and respect for all persons, everywhere.

Customs are not Wisdom

Biblical-era life for the Jews and early Christians was harsh (Ward, pp. 37-118). Slavery was commonplace. Tyrannical rule by outside powers was the norm. Women's status in society was distinctly second class. Children were disciplined with beatings.

These conditions were often accepted in the Bible as customary for society during those times, but they were **not** taught as being virtuous or wise. True wisdom is always consistent with the two great wisdom themes of the Bible: reverence to God, our Creator, and respect for all persons, everywhere.

Wisdom is More than Following the Rules

A set of commandments or rules can give us important examples of wisdom, but they are only examples. No set of rules can cover all situations, and it is up to us to generalize the commandments to all cases. Many times, as in this passage from Matthew, Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of those religious leaders who observed the law in its strict, literal sense, but violated its spirit:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (NAS, Matthew 23:23)

Wisdom means always acting according to the spirit of the Commandments and not looking for an ambiguity or omission which we can use to evade their true intent. Wisdom means understanding the consequences of our actions and words before we act or speak. Wisdom means having the knowledge and understanding to recognize the right course of action and having the will and courage to follow it.

Why Follow Wisdom's Path?

Following the ways of Wisdom helps bring us in harmony with God because these ways are in accordance with His will, as revealed in the Bible, and are pleasing to Him.

The ways of Wisdom also bring us in harmony with other persons because respect for others is the very essence of the Commandments. The wisdom teachings of the Bible are much more than an arbitrarily dictated moral code; they form a prescription for living in peace with the people we interact with daily.

Finally, acting with Wisdom brings us in harmony with ourselves, giving us a sense of self-worth and inner peace. This inner peace is achieved because we are acting in accordance with our consciences and avoiding the shame and guilt of following our baser instincts.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast. (NAS, Proverbs 3:13-18)

We often fail in our daily struggle to act with wisdom -- it does not come easily or naturally. Although it is easier to follow our less-than-wise impulses, the reward for acting with wisdom is great. When we give it our best effort, the payoff in self-esteem and inner peace will compensate us many times over.

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THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

Jesus engaged in much public debate with the Pharisees and Sadducees -- two Jewish factions that opposed Him and his teachings. It was during one of these debates that Jesus stated the Greatest Commandments:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (NIV, Mark 12:28-31).

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made it clear that "Love your neighbor" means to love all persons, everywhere -- not just our friends, allies, countrymen, etc.:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (NIV, Luke 10:25-37)

The Jews and Samaritans were enemies of a sort. The Jews of Jesus' society considered the Samaritans to be ceremonially unclean, socially outcast, religious heretics (Harper's p. 1029). The fact that Jesus picked a Samaritan as the unselfish hero of this parable makes the point that we should love all persons, everywhere, as our neighbors. We should not exclude anyone or any group because of social status, a supposed character fault, religious difference, racial difference, ethnic difference, citizenship difference, etc.

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JESUS' INTERPRETATION OF THE SABBATH

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (NIV, Mark 2:23-27)

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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Sometime around 1300 B.C., with the help of God, Moses led the Israelites out of enslavement in Egypt to begin a 40-year journey to their Promised Land. Three months after leaving Egypt, while they were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God delivered the Ten Commandments to the Israelites as guidelines for living as a free nation.

Virtually all the moral teachings and wisdom of the Bible have their roots in the Ten Commandments. Though these principles are more than 3000 years old, they still define the basis for a well-functioning society.

First Commandment: **And God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:1-3) The First Commandment requires us to worship only God and no other deities. He demands total loyalty, total devotion.

Second Commandment: **You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:4) The second Commandment follows from the first. The Israelites were fond of making and worshipping idols of various kinds that would detract from their worship of God. More generally, we must not let any of our pursuits take precedence over God and His Commandments.

Third Commandment: **You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:7) Curses, false oaths, irreverent talk, etc., are forbidden. We must not use God's name in a way that demeans or trivializes Him.

Fourth Commandment: **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.** (NIV, Exodus 20:8-10) We should reserve one day a week for rest and worship, and allow our children and employees the same privilege. Jesus modified the traditional view of the sabbath ([Mark 2:23-27](#)), saying "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," and implying that it is acceptable to do work on the Sabbath, if necessary. Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath day, but early Christians began the tradition of worshipping on Sunday, and eventually abandoned the Saturday Sabbath.

Fifth Commandment: **Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving**

you. (NRSV, Exodus 20:12) Children should respect their parents and accept their instruction with grace, not rebellion. The protection, love, instruction and discipline of the family are essential parts of a healthy society, and the parents' authority to hold the family intact must be preserved. As our parents grow old, we must not abandon them physically or emotionally.

Sixth Commandment: **You shall not murder.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:13) Murder is the ultimate crime against another person and is forbidden.

Seventh Commandment: **You shall not commit adultery** (NRSV, Exodus 20:14). Adultery destroys marriages and injures innocent spouses and children. We must be faithful to our marriage vows.

Eighth Commandment: **You shall not steal.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:15) Theft violates the peace and security of another person. We must attain all our possessions through legal, ethical means.

Ninth Commandment: **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** (NRSV, Exodus 20:16) False testimony, lies, false rumors, gossip and innuendo can ruin reputations. We must not use deception for revenge or selfish gain.

Tenth Commandment: **You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.** (NIV, Exodus 20:17) We must not set our desires on anything or anyone that is not rightfully ours. Desire leads to temptation and the temptation may become too strong to resist.

The grouping of Exodus 20:1-17 into ten commandments is somewhat arbitrary. The tradition of the Catholic Church is to group Exodus 20:1-6 into a single first commandment and divide Exodus 20:17 into a ninth and tenth commandment.

Related verses: Exodus 19:16-25, Exodus 34:28-29, Deuteronomy 5:6-21, Matthew 19:16-22

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FAMILY LIFE

Throughout human history, the family has been the foundation of society. Within a strong, well-functioning family we can fulfill our physical and emotional needs. Strong family ties provide us the love and security we need for a happy life. Children grow into well-adjusted adults through example, instruction and discipline. Chores and responsibilities are shared for the good of all.

Marriage and Divorce

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (KJV, Mark 10:6-9)

The family of biblical times had the husband as "lord" of the household and the wife as his helper. The husband worked diligently to provide material needs and protection while the wife worked diligently at domestic chores (Ward, pp. 92-94). In these New Testament passages, the need for a strong, healthy marriage is expressed in terms of the idealized family of the ancient world:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (NIV, 1 Peter 3:1-4, 7)

Contemporary marriages may follow the biblical model or may be quite different. Regardless of how we divide the roles and responsibilities in our marriages, though, we must be sure the marriage fulfills its essential family functions and provides a loving environment for children to grow into responsible adults.

Unselfish love is the "glue" that holds families together. In marriage we must subdue our own egos and selfish pride for the sake of the family. The Apostle Paul states it eloquently in this passage from First Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (NAS, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Divorce is a genuine tragedy. It often leaves the marriage partners embittered and disillusioned. It robs the children of the love and security of a healthy family and denies them a good role model for their own future marriages. The expense of divorce may consume the family savings. The work and expense of maintaining separate households means more work and less time for ourselves and our children.

We need to make an effort each and every day to keep our marriages strong and not let them drift toward divorce. We must put aside our anger, forgive our spouse a million times over, always be faithful, subdue our own pride and ego, and always let love guide our actions.

In the Old Testament Law, a man was allowed to divorce his wife at will. (Wives did not have the same privilege.) Jesus saw the injustice and pain of divorce, though, and said that neither husband nor wife should separate from the other:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."
(NIV, Matthew 19:3-9)

The Apostle Paul echoed Jesus' sentiment:

Now, for those who are married I have a command, not just a suggestion. And it is not a command from me, for this is what the Lord himself has said: A wife must not leave her husband. But if she is separated from him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not divorce his wife. (TLB, 1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Adultery destroys marriages. The adulterer shows total disregard for the marriage vows and for his or her spouse. In this passage, Jesus reminds us that not only should we always be faithful, we should also avoid any actions or situations that might eventually tempt us into adultery:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. (NAS, Matthew 5:27-28)

Unfortunately, some marriages cannot and should not be saved. A viable marriage is a contract of mutual love and respect, as reiterated in Ephesians 5:33:

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (NIV, Ephesians 5:33)

When one partner seriously violates the marriage contract, as by emotional, physical or sexual abuse, the marriage cannot endure. None of us should feel obligated to endure an abusive relationship.

Parents and Children

The single most important function of the family is the raising of children. The family provides for the physical needs of children and teaches them how to grow into well-adjusted, responsible adults.

Schools can teach the knowledge and skills needed to earn a livelihood, but children learn their values primarily from the example and teaching of their parents. As parents we must both practice and preach our values. The author of this proverb speaks as a father would instruct his own son or daughter:

Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. (NAS,

Proverbs 4:1-5, 14-18)

Of course, the parents' instruction does no good if the child rejects it. Our parents may not be perfect, but they have loved and cared for us, and they deserve our respect. The Bible advises children to honor and obey their parents:

Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you. Honor your father and mother. This is the first of God's Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. And this is the promise: that if you honor your father and mother, yours will be a long life, full of blessing. (TLB, Ephesians 6:1-3)

Listen to your father's advice and don't despise an old mother's experience. Get the facts at any price, and hold on tightly to all the good sense you can get. The father of a godly man has cause for joy-- what pleasure a wise son is! So give your parents joy! (TLB, Proverbs 23:22-24)

In addition to instruction and a good example, children need discipline to grow into responsible adults. Through discipline, children learn the consequences of their actions and learn to control their behavior:

Discipline your son and he will give you happiness and peace of mind. (TLB, Proverbs 29:17)

Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older, he will remain upon it. (TLB, Proverbs 22:6)

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. (KJV, Proverbs 23:13-14)

The verse above, and a few similar ones, are sometimes used to justify a harsh parenting style based on corporal punishment. However, the dominant theme of the Bible is **not** to beat one's children, but rather to "teach a child to choose the right path" through instruction and discipline. Beating with a rod is an example of how discipline may have been practiced in Old Testament times. Unfortunately, beating and spanking embitter the child and teach him or her to control others by physical force. The child may change his or her behavior out of fear but does not learn self-control.

Fortunately, modern parenting methods offer us a better alternative. The methods of natural and logical consequences teach self-control and values without causing bitterness between parent and child (Dreikurs, Kober). In New Testament times, the harsh Old Testament teachings about discipline

are replaced with verses such as these:

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (NIV, Colossians 3:21)

And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice. (TLB, Ephesians 6:4)

Jesus greatly valued children and the innocence of youth, saying we should humble ourselves before God the way a child does before an adult. He also placed anyone who would corrupt a child among the most despicable of sinners:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (NIV, Matthew 18:1-7)

The enthusiasm and idealism of youth can be a potent force. Young adults are often able to see the simple truth of a complicated matter and are able to work tirelessly for a good cause. Paul gives this advice to Timothy, his young friend and associate:

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. (NIV, 1 Timothy 4:12)

On the other hand, the temptations of youth may be a trap for those who have not yet developed a strong sense of right and wrong. Even children must take responsibility for their own actions. Wrong is wrong and evil is evil. It cannot be not justified because "Everybody does it," or "I won't get caught," or "I won't get punished," or "I was mad," or "I just felt like it," or "I wanted it," or "I did it to get back at _____." (Fill in the blank: my parents, teacher, brother, sister; that bigot, bully, cheater, grouch, show-off, hypocrite, etc.:)

Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts. (TLB, 2 Timothy 2:22)

Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right. (NIV, Proverbs 20:11)

A strong and supportive family bonds husband and wife in a union of love and mutual respect. It is our refuge from the pressures and disappointments of the world and is the instrument for giving our children the things they need most: protection, love, training and discipline. The more we cultivate strong family ties, the more fulfilling our lives will be.

Related verses: Psalms 133:1-3, Proverbs 3:1-35, Proverbs 15:5, Proverbs 18:22, Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 18:21-22, 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, 1 Timothy 5:8.

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GENEROSITY

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.
(NIV, Romans 12:6-10)

Each of us has something to offer to someone in need. We can give our money and our time to charity, be a friend to someone who is sick or lonely, do volunteer work, or be a peacemaker. We may give unselfishly of our time to our spouse, children or parents. We may choose a service-oriented occupation, or we may just do our everyday jobs with integrity and respect for others.

It would seem that the more we give to others, the poorer we become, but just the opposite is true! Service to others brings meaning and fulfillment to our lives in a way that wealth, power, possessions and self-centered pursuits can never match. As Jesus said,

For if you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give -- large or small -- will be used to measure what is given back to you." (TLB, Luke 6:38)

Helping those in need is one of the major themes of the Bible and of Jesus' ministry. As far back as the thirteenth century B.C., the Hebrews' law institutionalized assistance to the poor:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God. (NRSV, Leviticus 19:9-10)

Through service, we give others the things they lack, and we find meaning and fulfillment to our own lives. Both the Old and New Testament writings give many examples of the importance of service and charity:

He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor. (NAS, Proverbs 14:21)

"Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will

shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy you with all good things, and keep you healthy too; and you will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. (TLB, Isaiah 58:10-11)

But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (NAS, 1 John 3:17)

The Bible tells us to share generously with those in need, and good things will come to us in turn. We are not meant to live hard-hearted or self-centered lives. This is never made clearer than in Matthew 25:31-46. A greedy, miserly life leaves us devoid of anything but an empty craving for more possessions, more power or more status.

He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses. (NAS, Proverbs 28:27)

It is not necessary to be a wealthy philanthropist or a full-time volunteer to make a meaningful contribution. Rather, we should give generously of whatever wealth and abilities we have, no matter how small the amount.

And [Jesus] looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on." (NAS, Luke 21:1-4)

Finally, our good deeds should be motivated by a sincere desire to help others. Public recognition should not be the goal.

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (NIV, Matthew 6:1-2)

Each of us has something to give. Some have wealth, some have talents, some have time. Whatever gifts we have been given -- large or small -- we should share generously. When we do, we make the world better for someone else and find true meaning and satisfaction in our own lives.

Related verses: Leviticus 25:35-36, Deuteronomy 15:7-8, Psalms 41:1, Proverbs 11:25, Proverbs 22:9, Isaiah 58:6-7, Isaiah 58:10-11, Matthew 5:42, Matthew 19:21, Mark 12:41-44, Luke 3:10-11, Luke 6:30, Luke 12:33-34, Acts 20:35, 2 Corinthians 9:5-9, Hebrews 13:16, James 1:27, James 2:14-17

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THE JUDGEMENT OF THE NATIONS

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' "Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (NAS, Matthew 25:31-46)

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PREFACE

I originally started this project as a way to teach some of the Bible's wisdom to my two sons, Stephen and Andrew. Along the way, I decided to expand it into a form that could be shared, hoping that others may find it useful, too.

In reading the Bible, I have found a lot of good practical advice in addition to the important spiritual messages. Throughout the Bible, we are taught to love God, to respect other people and to have compassion for the oppressed and needy. Many of the Bible's wisdom teachings, written two or three thousand years ago, are just as relevant today as they were then.

Some people, including some religious leaders, dismiss the Bible's wisdom teachings as hyperbole, unrealistically difficult, or irrelevant to the modern world. However, in so doing, I think they are missing the opportunity to make the world a little better and to receive a great deal of personal enrichment in the process.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my wife, Helen, who edited this work and made many needed improvements.

I would like to hear your comments about **Wisdom of the Bible**. Please send them via Internet E-mail to:

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USA

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GOVERNMENT

The Hebrews of early Old Testament times were governed by leaders of their twelve tribes, with a central leader over all the tribes. Later, kings such as David and Solomon ruled the Hebrews. In 587 B.C., Babylonian forces devastated Jerusalem and subjugated the Hebrews. Later, the Jews were ruled by Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. In Jesus' time Palestine was ruled by the Herods, who were governors under the Roman Empire.

Despite centuries of often oppressive foreign domination, both the Old and New Testaments stress the importance of government for protection and for maintaining order. We should support our government, pay its taxes, and obey its laws, even though they may be imperfect:

Fear the LORD and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring? (NIV, Proverbs 24:21-22)

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (NAS, Romans 13:1)

Jesus also said we should obey the demands of both God and government. He was asked if one should pay taxes to the Roman Empire and this was his reply:

"Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (NAS, Luke 20:24-25)

The people were expected to respect their governments, and, the same time, the kings or other rulers were expected to rule with wisdom and justice. The Old Testament contains story after story of wicked, greedy and oppressive rulers who brought disaster on themselves and their people. Many of the Old Testament prophets, such as Elijah, Elisha and Daniel, delivered their messages of reform to Israel's kings.

Those of us who live under democracy elect our own "rulers." Our votes decide whether our government will be benevolent and just or harsh and oppressive. The Bible's advice and reproaches to the ancient rulers provide us wisdom to help us make wise choices in our own times.

Both the Old and New Testament writers were deeply concerned with the rights of the poor and oppressed. A recurring theme in the Bible is that we should provide equal justice for all, not favoring the rich or powerful. Also, because all the peoples of the world are God's creation, we should not discriminate against foreigners:

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. (NAS, Proverbs 14:31)

"Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous. "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. (NIV, Exodus 23:6-9)

Woe to those who enact evil statutes, and to those who constantly record unjust decisions, So as to deprive the needy of justice, and rob the poor of My people of their rights, in order that widows may be their spoil, and that they may plunder the orphans. Now what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? (NAS, Isaiah 10:1-3)

The Bible often speaks of almsgiving or charity as an individual-to-individual act of generosity. The law of Moses and the Hebrews, though, provided an institutional way of providing for the poor that did not depend on the good will of any individual. Not only was individual generosity encouraged, but, as a matter of law, part of everyone's produce or income was to be set aside to aid the poor:

"And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. (NAS, Exodus 23:10-11)

"When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied. (NAS, Deuteronomy 26:12)

See also [Matthew 25:31-46.](#)

The ancient Hebrews lived in extended families or clans and could generally take care of their own. In modern industrial societies, though, families are often fragmented and many of the truly needy have nowhere to turn except to public assistance programs.

Everyone, both rich and poor, benefits when a government respects the rights of all and provides for the needy. Crime and drug abuse breed in areas

of poverty and unemployment, where people may feel they have nothing to lose. Likewise, apathy and violence breed where people perceive injustice and feel excluded from the benefits of society. To the extent every individual feels empowered as a valuable, productive member of society, then society becomes healthier and more secure for everyone.

Related verses: Leviticus 19:9-10, Leviticus 19:15, Leviticus 24:22, Leviticus 25:35-36, Deuteronomy 27:19, Psalms 9:9, Psalms 72:1-2, Proverbs 17:7, Proverbs 22:22 Proverbs 28:3, Proverbs 29:2, Proverbs 29:4, Proverbs 29:12, Proverbs 29:14, Jeremiah 21:12, Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 58:10, Ezekiel 45:9, Matthew 23:2-4, Mark 12:14-17

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GOOD VS. EVIL

We often hear conflicting moral teachings from our religious and secular leaders. Many claim to have the true message of God or the true message of Christianity. We hear about "Christian values," or "God's will," or "The Bible says..." or "Jesus says...", etc. How can we tell who is interpreting the Bible with true understanding and who is, consciously or unconsciously, merely using it to serve their own ends?

Jesus gives us the answer in the parable of the good and bad fruits. He tells us to judge a teacher or minister by his or her deeds, not by his or her claims. Just as a fig tree produces only figs, a good teacher will advocate only good deeds and will live a life of good deeds. Just as a tree that produces poison fruit, a false teacher will advocate evil deeds and practice evil deeds, even while claiming to give godly advice.

"Beware of false teachers who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are wolves and will tear you apart. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You need never confuse grapevines with thorn bushes or figs with thistles. Different kinds of fruit trees can quickly be identified by examining their fruit. A variety that produces delicious fruit never produces an inedible kind. And a tree producing an inedible kind can't produce what is good. So the trees having the inedible fruit are chopped down and thrown on the fire. Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit produced. "Not all who sound religious are really godly people. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but still won't get to heaven. For the decisive question is whether they obey my Father in heaven. At the Judgment many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we told others about you and used your name to cast out demons and to do many other great miracles.' But I will reply, 'You have never been mine. Go away, for your deeds are evil.' (TLB, Matthew 7:15-23)

The true teachings of the Bible will be consistent with the two great themes of the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandments of Jesus: reverence to God, our Creator, and respect for all persons, everywhere.

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (NIV, Luke 6:45)

False teachers will preach a doctrine filled with prejudice, hate, greed and covetous desire which is distorted to sound as if these things were virtuous.

False teachers will take Bible verses out of context and convolute their meanings to serve their own ends. The Apostle Paul warned the people of his churches to be wary of those who teach a false gospel.

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. (NAS, Romans 16:17-18)

The prophet Isaiah and Jesus both warned against misleading others into sin.

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight! (NAS, Isaiah 5:20-21)

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! (NIV, Matthew 18:6-7)

Learning the wisdom of the Bible helps us discern good from evil and good teachings from evil teachings. Even when evil teachings are disguised as good, and argued shrewdly, we will not be easily fooled. There is no better application for the wisdom of the Bible than to be able to distinguish good from evil, and to practice good in our own lives.

For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, Guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; From those who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; (NAS, Proverbs 2:6-13)

Wisdom is a buffer against life's constant battering of conflicting ideas and desires. Wisdom frees us from the tyranny of popular opinion and from the

emptiness of a status-seeking existence. The wisdom of the Bible is a solid foundation on which we can base our attitudes and actions. It is the key to making the best choices throughout our lives.

Related verses: Matthew 5:17-18, Matthew 12:35, Matthew 15:13-19, Matthew 23:2-12, Matthew 24:3-5, Mark 7:20-23, Luke 21:8, John 3:20-21, Romans 2:19-23, Colossians 2:8-9

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EPILOGUE

Through wisdom we can rise above the pettiness and disappointments of everyday life. Through wisdom and faith we can find our place in the universe and our reason for being. Wisdom puts meaning into our lives and frees us from the emptiness of a life spent searching for wealth, power or status.

If everyone lived their lives with wisdom, there would be no wars, no crime, no starvation and no atrocities in the world. Unfortunately, most people will **not** choose the way of wisdom for their lives. However, each person who tries to follow wisdom's path makes the world a little bit better and finds his or her personal fulfillment along the way.

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HUMILITY

**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:
for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the
children of God.** (KJV, Matthew 5:5-9)

Humility or humbleness is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. Rather than, "Me first," humility allows us to say, "No, you first, my friend." Humility is the quality that lets us go more than halfway to meet the needs and demands of others.

Friendships and marriages are dissolved over angry words. Resentments divide families and co-workers. Prejudice separates race from race and religion from religion. Reputations are destroyed by malicious gossip. Greed puts enmity between rich and poor. Wars are fought over arrogant assertions.

Humility as a virtue is a major theme of both the Old and New Testaments. Why do qualities such as courtesy, patience and deference have such a prominent place in the Bible? It is because a demeanor of humility is exactly what is needed to live in peace and harmony with all persons. Humility dissipates anger and heals old wounds. Humility allows us to see the dignity and worth of all God's people. Humility distinguishes the wise leader from the arrogant power-seeker.

Acting with humility does not in any way deny our own self worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of all persons. Some would consider humility to be a psychological malady that interferes with "success." However, wealth, power or status gained at the expense of others brings only anxiety -- never peace and love.

Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it. (NAS, Proverbs 15:17)

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. (NIV, Proverbs 16:8)

It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. (NAS, Proverbs 16:19)

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. (NIV, Proverbs 16:32)

Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of

feasting, with strife. (NIV, Proverbs 17:1)

The Humble Demeanor

We should maintain an attitude of deference toward both God and other persons. Wisdom cannot be found or practiced through arrogance or anger. As servants of God, we must respect all of God's creation, including our fellow human beings.

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips. (NIV, Proverbs 27:1-2)

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom. The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them. (NAS, Proverbs 11:2-3)

Humility means putting God and other persons ahead of our own selfish interests. Humility comes with the knowledge that God's creation as a whole transcends our own narrow interests. As with other aspects of wisdom, humility will gain us much more than we sacrifice.

Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life. (NIV, Proverbs 22:4)

"But the greatest among you shall be your servant. "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (NAS, Matthew 23:11-12)

And [Jesus] called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (NAS, Matthew 18:2-4)

The Golden Rule

Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your

reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (NIV, Luke 6:31-35)

The Golden Rule, spoken by Jesus, is possibly the best known quote from the Bible, and contains a lot of wisdom in one short sentence. If we wish to be loved, we must first give love. If we wish to be respected, we must respect all persons, even those we despise. If we wish to be fulfilled in our lives, we must share generously with others.

Talk and Gossip

Arrogant words inflame prejudice and hatred, but humble speech soothes. Words make or break human relationships. Words can make war or make peace. The words we say or write have tremendous power for good or evil. We should be as careful with our words as we would be with any other "weapon."

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. (NIV, Proverbs 15:1-2)

"The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. "And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (NAS, Matthew 12:35-37)

Gossip is an act of hostility intended to harm someone's reputation. We must avoid the temptation to misrepresent someone's character or actions as an act of revenge or prejudice.

An evil man sows strife; gossip separates the best of friends. (TLB, Proverbs 16:28)

Judging Others

Self-righteousness is one of the hardest sins to avoid because it is so much easier to see other people's faults than to see our own faults. Rather than look for faults in others, we should look for the good in others and try to correct the faults within ourselves. Jesus' comical parable of a person with a board in his eye trying to see to remove a speck from another's eye reminds us that we probably have bigger faults within ourselves (including self-righteousness) than the faults we would criticize in others:

"Don't criticize, and then you won't be criticized. For others will treat you as you treat them. And why worry about a speck in the eye of a brother when you have a board in your own? Should you say, 'Friend, let me help you get that speck out of your eye,' when you can't even see because of the board in your own? Hypocrite! First get rid of the board. Then you can see to help your brother. (TLB, Matthew 7:1-5)

Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God's law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is not to decide whether this law is right or wrong, but to obey it. Only he who made the law can rightly judge among us. He alone decides to save us or destroy. So what right do you have to judge or criticize others? (TLB, James 4:11-12)

We should not infer that criminal activity should go unrestrained or unpunished: the laws of Moses had strong sanctions for criminal acts, and the Bible strongly supports civil governments. (See the section on Government.) However, we are reminded that judgment is reserved for God and we should concentrate on correcting our own faults rather than criticizing others for their faults.

Anger and Revenge

No one **makes** us angry. Anger is our own emotional response to some action or event. More often than not, our angry feelings are based on a misinterpretation of what someone said or did. Expressing anger tends to prolong and reinforce our anger rather than purge it. Angry words and actions are much more likely to escalate hostilities and block communication than to solve a problem. Whether between parent and child, spouses, friends, or nations, expressions of anger divide us and drive us toward open hostility.

It is all too easy to react to life's annoyances and disappointments with anger. It is far more challenging, but much better, to react with understanding and empathy. In this way, we can quickly settle disputes and avoid turning minor incidents into major battles. The humble demeanor is a perfect tool for avoiding disputes and hard feelings.

A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.
(NAS, Proverbs 29:11)

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (NIV, James 1:19-20)

Holding a grudge can consume us with hatred, blocking out all enjoyment of life. A grudge clouds our judgment and may lead us to an act of revenge that can never be undone.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. (NIV, Leviticus 19:18)

An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins. (NIV, Proverbs 29:22)

Bearing a grudge and seeking revenge are **never** appropriate responses to a perceived wrong. A grudge destroys the grudge-holder with bitterness; revenge only escalates hostilities. Jesus told us we must reconcile with our adversaries, forgive their transgressions, and let go of the anger that may tempt us to commit an act of revenge:

"Under the laws of Moses the rule was, 'If you murder, you must die.' But I have added to that rule and tell you that if you are only angry, even in your own home, you are in danger of judgment! If you call your friend an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse him, you are in danger of the fires of hell. (TLB, Matthew 5:21-22)

Returning love for hatred can often cool the fires of anger. It is very difficult not to respond to anger with even more anger. However, when we respond to anger with empathy and love, we can often break the cycle of hatred and convert even our enemies into friends. Jesus gave us the unique command to love even our enemies:

"There is a saying, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies.' But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (TLB, Matthew 5:43-48)

By humility we acknowledge that God created us for his purposes and not for our self-glorification. By humility we acknowledge the dignity of all God's people. By humility we cool the angry passions of others. By humility we can turn enemies into friends.

A humble demeanor is not a denial of our worth as individuals. Rather, it is the tool that allows us, insofar as possible, to be on good terms with all persons.

Related verses: Deuteronomy 22:1-2, Psalms 37:7-13, Psalms 147:5-6, Proverbs 11:12, Proverbs 12:13-14, Proverbs 12:16, Proverbs 14:17, Proverbs 14:29, Proverbs 15:4, Proverbs 15:28, Proverbs 17:13-14, Proverbs 17:27, Proverbs 19:1, Proverbs 19:11, Proverbs 20:3, Proverbs 20:15, Proverbs 20:19, Proverbs 20:22, Proverbs 21:23-24, Proverbs 25:11-12, Proverbs 25:28, Proverbs 26:12, Matthew 5:38-42, Matthew 7:12, Matthew 20:25-28, Luke 6:20-26, Luke 6:41-42, Luke 14:8-11, Luke 22:25-27, John 13:13-15, John 13:34-35, John 15:12, Acts 20:35, Romans 2:1, Romans 12:3, Romans 12:14-21, Romans 15:1-2, 1 Corinthians 3:18-21, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Galatians 5:19-23, Galatians 5:26, Ephesians 4:29, Ephesians 4:31-32, Philippians 2:3-8, Colossians 3:5-9, Colossians 3:12-14, Hebrews 10:22-24, James 1:26-27, James 3:13-18, 1 Peter 3:8-11, 1 Peter 5:5-6.

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WEALTH

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NIV, Matthew 6:19-21)

Obsession with Wealth

It is very easy to become obsessed with wealth and possessions. Because technology has provided such an abundance of consumer goods, the quest for possessions may be a stronger temptation now than in Jesus' time. We may work long hours at stressful jobs so we can afford a luxury car, a larger house, designer clothing, or countless other items.

There is nothing inherently evil about owning the things we need. However, when we strive to collect wealth or possessions beyond our need, we may neglect our duty to God, to our families, and to mankind. Jesus said that serving God and serving wealth are mutually exclusive goals:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (NIV, Matthew 6:24-25, 31-33)

Does owning a luxury car, a spacious house or designer clothing really make us happier? In reality, it may just make us more conceited and less willing to share with the needy. As soon as the excitement of one new possession begins to fade, we will want yet another possession so we can feel that excitement again.

The craving for wealth and possessions can lead us into all kinds of temptation. While we spend evenings and weekends earning extra money, we are depriving our families of our love and attention. We may cheat on our taxes. We may take unfair advantage of our customers, employers, or employees. We may even steal. We will attempt to rationalize our avarice by closing our minds and hearts to the needs and rights of others. In the process, we could become like Scrooge: stingy, bitter, and isolated.

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (NIV, Proverbs 23:4-5)

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV, Matthew 16:26)

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (NIV, 1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Responsibility of Wealth

Those of us who are blessed with wealth beyond our need have a responsibility to share generously with the less fortunate. (See the section on Generosity.) We should view our wealth as a gift from God, entrusted to us, to carry out his work on earth.

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (NIV, 1 John 3:17)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (NIV, 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Honesty

Dishonestly gained wealth can bring spiritual destruction to its possessor. The rationalization required to obtain and keep dishonest gain will turn a person cold and bitter. Dishonest gain brings only anxiety and fear of discovery -- never peace of mind.

'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.

(NAS, Leviticus 19:13)

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. (NIV, Proverbs 11:1)

He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil-- this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him. (NIV, Isaiah 33:15-16)

An obsession with wealth can easily lead to all sorts of temptation and evil. We must guard against letting the lure of wealth cloud our good judgment. We must share generously with those in need. We have a responsibility to be honest and fair in all our business dealings. As with other aspects of wisdom, a wise attitude toward wealth will help bring us true happiness and peace of mind.

Related Verses: Leviticus 19:13, Leviticus 19:35-36, 1 Samuel 2:7-8, Psalms 10:2-3, Psalms 15:5, Psalms 37:16, Psalms 37:21, Psalms 62:10, Proverbs 11:4, Proverbs 11:28, Proverbs 15:27, Proverbs 16:8, Proverbs 16:11, Proverbs 20:17, Proverbs 20:23, Proverbs 21:6, Proverbs 22:16, Proverbs 23:4, Proverbs 28:20, James 5:1-6, Proverbs 28:22, Matthew 13:18-23, Mark 4:13-20, Mark 10:17-25, Luke 12:13-15, Luke 12:33-34, Luke 16:13, Luke 18:18-25

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APPENDIX: BIBLE TRANSLATIONS (Lockyer, Mays, Senior)

The Old Testament of the Bible was originally written in the Hebrew language with a few sections written in the Aramaic language. The OT contains the sacred writings of the Hebrews and contains books of the Law, history of Israel, wisdom, and prophecy. The events of the OT occurred between roughly 1800 B.C. and 400 B.C. A Greek translation of the OT, called the Septuagint, was produced between 200 and 100 B.C. for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews in Alexandria, Egypt.

The New Testament emerged in the late second century, A.D. The early church leaders included books they believed were written by eyewitnesses to the events narrated, while rejecting many other early Christian writings. Eventually, the 27 books which form the present New Testament, along with the OT books, became the Christian Bible as we know it today.

The New Testament contains the four gospels, or "good news," of Jesus Christ, some history of the early Christian church, and a number of letters written by the Apostle Paul and other Christian leaders. All the NT books were written in Greek over the period of about 50 to 120 A.D. The earliest works in the NT are the letters of Paul to the early Christian communities. The first of the Gospels was probably Mark, written around 70 A.D., about 40 years after Jesus was crucified. Matthew, Luke and Acts were written between 80 and 90 A.D. Finally, The Gospel of John appeared in its final form around 95 A.D.

The Apocrypha, a group of 15 late OT books, was written during the period 170 B.C. to 70 A.D. These Jewish books were included in many versions of the Septuagint in circulation as the New Testament was being formed, but were excluded from the official canon of Judaism, established about 100 A.D. Today, the books of the Apocrypha are included in Catholic versions of the OT, but not in most Protestant versions.

During the first centuries A.D., Latin replaced Greek as the language of the Roman Empire. In 405 a Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments was completed. This version, known as the Vulgate, became the standard Bible of Christianity for many centuries.

The first English version of the full Bible was John Wycliffe's translation of the Vulgate in 1384. Several other English versions followed, and the beloved King James version was published in 1611.

None of the original texts of the OT or NT are known to exist; the best available sources are hand-made copies of copies. However, developments in archaeology and biblical scholarship have made possible a number of modern, more accurate English translations of the scriptures. These newer versions are translated from the best available ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, rather than from the King James version or the Latin Vulgate.

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