

## Music to Live By

by Ray C. Stedman

To begin this message, let's review what we have covered so far in this survey of the Scriptures. What is the purpose of revelation? Why has God given us the tremendous fund of facts and knowledge contained in his Word? To bring us to maturity in Jesus Christ – that is what it is all for. If the Word of God doesn't do that, then all this information is wasted, so far as we are concerned. The giving of the Word of God during the course of the ages, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit working in men of old to record it; the miracle of its preservation to bring us the book we have today; the entire ministry of the Holy Spirit in interpreting, illuminating and teaching it – all this is wasted if we do not begin to grow into mature human beings, if we do not begin to discover the possibilities that God has for us in his great plan. This is what the Scriptures are for.

To this purpose, as we have seen, both the Old Testament and the New Testament make their contributions. The Old Testament contributes preparation; the New Testament gives fulfillment, or realization. We have been concentrating on the Old Testament and its function of preparing us to receive truth. If you aren't prepared, then when the truth is given, you won't receive it. So there is very little reason to read the New Testament – beyond a certain point – if you haven't read the Old Testament, because you won't understand the New Testament; you won't grasp it, won't lay hold of it. You need to be prepared. This is why there is so much shallowness in Christian life today – because there is inadequate preparation. The plowing has been left undone.

We have seen that the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, develop the pattern of God's work with men. Each of them expresses a part of the program of God. This is in some ways the most important part of the Bible, because it shows us the way God works over and over again

in human life. It is the way he is working in my life. This is the way he has been working in human life for centuries. He won't vary. He is going to work this way, and each of these five books reveals one of the steps:

- Genesis is the book which reveals the need of man;
- Exodus reveals the grace of God, the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit;
- Leviticus is the book of worship, of approach, of access to God – the book which teaches people how to live with God in their midst;
- Numbers is the book of wandering, of the desert experience – the ups and downs so familiar to many of us in our Christian lives;
- Deuteronomy is the book of helplessness and of obedience in depending upon God – the book which corresponds to the sixth chapter of Romans, where we have the preparation of the heart to enter into the promised land of rest in the work of Another.

Thus these five books reveal the pattern God takes in bringing us to a genuine experience of what he has for us.

Then, in the twelve historical books the perils of life are revealed. If you approach them in this light, it will make these books come alive to you – will make reading your Bible a whole new experience. We encounter various perils; we face them every day. Often we don't know how to meet them. Sometimes we don't even know how to analyze them. Well, how are we going to find out? One of these twelve books tells us. Look your peril up in

the book where it is illustrated. There you will have the whole story given – how to analyze the peril, how to approach it, how to defeat it – all beautifully dramatized for you in the Word of God. There is the peril of premature contentment in the book of Joshua; the peril of consecrated blundering is in Judges; the perils of a forgotten calling, of divided allegiance and of false faith are revealed in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles; finally, the peril of the discouraged heart is dealt with in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

Do you suffer from any of these perils? These books are given us in order that we might see how to overcome such perils and have victory.

We are ready now to review the third section of the Old Testament – the five poetical books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

Have you read all of them?

The poetical books are a reflection of the rejoicing and the protests of man in response to life. Here you find the sigh, the exultation, the anger, the contentment, the tears, and the laughter in life. Although we call these books “poetical,” it doesn't mean they rhyme. It means they have a structure of repeated ideas, for this is the form of poetry the Hebrews employed. These books reflect all the changing, colorful passions of life; all the feelings of the heart, of the soul; the deep-seated, almost inexpressible yearnings and desires of men and women; the fleeting, changing, ephemeral, passing fancies that flit across our minds. All are found in these books. They are marvelous books of expression. Because man is a threefold being, and these five books are bound to man, they reflect what man is – what we are. They fall into three divisions which correspond to the makeup of man – the spirit, the soul and the body.

We begin with the book of **Job**, which addresses the needs of the spirit of man – the song of the spirit. Job is the oldest of the books of the Bible and, in many ways, the most profound, because it is the deep protest of the spirit of man in the face of apparently senseless suffering.

Recently we heard of an instance in which the children of four families were left fatherless, the men taken out of a church suddenly and tragically – a pastor and three laymen from one church – killed without warning in what seems to have been a

senseless tragedy. Why? Do we not feel some protest against this kind of thing? Deep in our spirit is there not a surging almost of anger at this kind of tragedy? Why does life confront us with these situations?

Well, the book of Job faces this problem squarely. It tells what the answer is, for here is the cry of a tortured man who cannot understand the ways of God. I have often heard this cry – as does anyone who works with human beings to any extent at all – this deep, almost unuttered, inexpressible protest from the very center of man's being, the spirit of man within him crying out in a tragic protest against the seemingly senseless suffering that life affords.

Most of us know the story of Job. It is a rather simple story. It begins in heaven with an encounter between God and Satan. Satan comes and challenges God, and God challenges Satan in return and calls his attention to a man named Job, a man of remarkable ability. It is difficult to place the land of Uz, where he lived, but we can logically fit the time of the book of Job between the 11th and 12th chapters of the book of Genesis – way back in the history of man. God said to Satan (Job 1:8),

**“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” {Job 1:8b RSV}**

Satan didn't challenge that statement, but he raised a question about it (Verses 9b-12a):

**“Does Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse thee to thy face.” And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand.” {Job 1:9b-12a RSV}**

You know the story – how there came one tragic event after another. As soon as the message had arrived about one terrible catastrophe it was immediately followed by another. An invading army took away all of Job's wealth. A windstorm destroyed his house; his children had been gathered

in it, and they were all killed. One by one, the tragic reports came to him – until everything was swept away in one day. What a terribly shocking experience! But Job was absolutely unmoved. He bowed in sorrow before God, but his heart was open to him. God said to Satan, “You see, Job still serves me,” {cf, Job 2:3}. And Satan made that famous statement, “All that a man has he will give for his life,” {Job 2:4b RSV}. Then he went on to argue, “The trouble is, you haven’t touched him deeply enough yet. Let me touch his body, and then you will see him turn and curse you to your face,” {cf, Job 2:5}. God said, “He is in your power; only spare his life,” {Job 4:6b RSV}.

The result was the outbreak of a terrible siege of boils on Job. The book tells us he was covered with boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet.

When I was a young man, for a time I had a series of boils that were very, very painful. On one or two occasions, over a period of some months, I had two or three boils at one time. I was like a wild man. I was reduced to a frustrated frenzy. I could hardly control myself at times, the pain was so unrelenting.

Even one boil will keep a man well occupied – and his whole family with him! But here was a man who had boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. So poor Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat on ashes. In abject misery he faced the situation in which he found himself – the cry of a tortured man who cannot understand what life has done to him.

All this was aggravated by the visit of his three friends. Job’s friends have become famous. We still meet them today – comforters who come around but don’t comfort! But perhaps we have been a little harsh on these three men. They were very comforting when they first came. They sat there for seven days and seven nights and never said a word. At least that was some help on their part. They sat in silence, suffering with Job. But then each one delivered a long, philosophical discourse, the gist of which in each case was that suffering is a result of sin – that if a man is suffering, there must therefore be personal sin in his life. Each one tried to get Job to confess the personal sin in his life. Each one tried to get Job to confess the sin – to bare the awful, hidden secret of his life which must be the reason behind this terrible suffering.

There are many folks like that today, you know. They are quite ready to insinuate, in some way or other, that you must be suffering because of some terrible sin you are not willing to reveal. Job’s comforters are still with us.

But Job replied as well as he could, and yet he got nowhere. His agony was only increased by these men. Then there came a fourth man, a young man evidently, who modestly said he had kept silent as long as he could. But, he said, he was like a man whose belly is so full it is ready to burst. We meet men like this occasionally – speakers who cannot keep silent. This young man couldn’t keep this words to himself, so he began on Job. His argument was that sickness or suffering is a form of God’s discipline, intended to bring us back into fellowship with him. In many ways he was nearer to the truth than any of the other men, but still he did not have the whole truth.

Then, in one of the most remarkable passages in all of literature – I doubt if you can find its parallel anywhere – in the 38th and 39th chapters, God himself appears and takes up the argument of Job. It is a tremendous examination. In Verses 2 and 3 of Chapter 38, God says:

**“Who is this that darkens counsel by  
words without knowledge?  
Gird up your loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall de-  
clare to me.” {Job 38:2-3 RSV}**

God asks if Job can answer any of several simple questions.

If you want a test to challenge the mightiest intellect that man has ever produced, I suggest you give anyone the 38th and 39th chapters of Job and ask him or her to take this examination.

It is an examination in natural history and is one of the most remarkable passages in all literature. God begins with this simple question (Verses 4-7):

**“Where were you when I laid the founda-  
tion of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding,  
Who determined its measurements –  
surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone,  
when the morning stars sang together,**

**and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" {Job 38:4-7 RSV}**

Then he moves on to more difficult questions (Verses 12a, 17a, 19, 28):

**"Have you commanded the morning since your days began, ...?" {Job 38:12 RSV}**

**"Have the gates of death been revealed to you ...?" {Job 38:17a RSV}**

**"Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness?" {Job 38:19 RSV}**

**"Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?" {Job 38:28 RSV}**

And he continues, posing the questions of who set the stars whirling in their courses and who maintains the universe. When God is through, Job is found flat on his face crying out (42:6),

**"... I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." {Job 42:6b RSV}**

When you get to that place you come to what the whole book is all about. The book of Job is nothing more nor less than Chapter 7 of the book of Romans. You will recall that the Apostle Paul ends that chapter by saying (Verse 24),

**Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? {Rom 7:24 RSV}**

This is exactly where God brings Job. Thus we learn that apparent punishment or suffering at God's hand is but the way by which he teaches us that man by himself is helpless, that he can do nothing, that man has nothing to stand upon. But God is sufficient for every circumstance of life. All man needs is God, and God only. When we come to this place in Job, or Romans 7, then we are ready to hear the great declaration of Romans 8 (Verses 1, 4b, 2): "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death." This is where Job ended up. As a result

God, in tender grace and mercy, poured out blessing upon him. He entered into what is the equivalent of a 'Romans 8 experience.' If you would like to understand the book of Job, read Romans 7 and 8. Conversely, if you want to understand Romans 7 and 8, read the book of Job.

Now we come to the second division in this 'experience section' of the Old Testament – the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Here we have the songs of the soul. The soul of man is made up of three faculties: the intelligence, the emotions and the will – or, to put them in the order in which these books address them, the emotions, the intelligence and the will. In the book of Psalms we have all that the soul ever experiences in terms of emotional responses to circumstances. In the book of Proverbs we have the intelligence at work, ferreting out through experience the best way to react to situations – all the accumulated wisdom of man, guided by divine light. In the book of Ecclesiastes we have the will of man expressed – the deliberate investigation and exploration by the will of various areas of knowledge and experience.

**Psalms** is the book where every emotional experience of life is reflected.

I once heard it said that it would be of great benefit to Christians if someone would invent a proper expression for them to use when they hit their thumb with a hammer. No language available today is quite adequate. A Christian, of course, can't resort to profanity, and "land's sake" seems rather mild in such a circumstance! But if there were such an expression it would be found in the book of Psalms.

Psalms is intended to express every possible facet of human emotion. This marvelous book is itself divided into five books. Each ends with the words "Amen and Amen" except the last, which ends with the words "Praise the Lord!" In these books you find a five-fold pattern which relates directly to the five-fold pattern found in the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. Do you remember the pattern?

Genesis is the book of human need. And in the first book of Psalms – Psalms 1 through 41 – you have the great expressions of the need of the human heart. For example, the 23rd Psalm (Verses 1-3a):

**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;  
he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul. {Psa 23:1-3a RSV}**

A great expression of the hunger of the heart for a shepherd – this is the major note struck in this first book of Psalms.

The book of Exodus is the book of grace, of redeeming love – of God's unmerited grace laying hold of a human heart in its hour of desperation and need, and ministering to it. This is the note struck in the second book of Psalms – Psalms 42 to 72 – the note of redeeming grace. You can hear it, for instance, in these wonderful words of Psalm 46:1-3:

**God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. {Psa 46:1-3 RSV}**

Leviticus is the book of worship, where man is told how to live in close fellowship with a living God. And this is the note struck in Psalms 73-89 – the third book. Here you have a note of reverence, a somber note of the majesty of God. If this is what you feel sometimes – a desire to express worship – turn to this book and read some of these mighty Psalms. Look, for instance, at the 76th Psalm and you will see how this note is struck in Verses 4 through 9:

**Glorious art thou, more majestic than the everlasting mountains.  
The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil;  
they sank into sleep;  
all the men of war were unable to use their hands.  
At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned.  
But thou, terrible art thou!  
Who can stand before thee when once thy anger is roused?  
From the heavens thou didst utter judgment;  
the earth feared and was still,  
when God arose to establish judgment**

**to save all the oppressed of the earth.  
{Psa 76:4-9 RSV}**

Numbers is the book of wandering, of the desert experience – the ups and downs of living. And the fourth book of Psalms – Psalms 90 - 106 – is the book of alternate victory and defeat in the experience of life. Psalm 97 gives you a taste of it in the expression of the Psalmist in Verse 12. He says, in a joyful mood,

**Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous,  
and give thanks to his holy name!  
{Psa 97:12 RSV}**

But then, right nearby in Psalm 102 you find the opposite (Verses 1-3):

**Hear my prayer, O Lord!  
let my cry come to thee!  
Do not hide thy face from me  
in the day of my distress! ...  
For my days pass away like smoke,  
and my bones burn like a furnace.  
{Psa 102:1-3 RSV}**

– the alternating experience of wandering in the desert – up and down!

The last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, is a book of helplessness and dependent obedience. This corresponds to the fifth book of Psalms – Psalms 107 to the end – where is struck the note of obedience and praise. Perhaps nothing gathers it up more beautifully than that well-known verse with which the 139th Psalm closes:

**Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!  
{Psa 139:23-24 RSV}**

So there are the five books of Psalms. The yearning of hope is expressed in the Messianic Psalms; the burning of anger in the Imprecatory Psalms – those Psalms which seem to call down fire from heaven on everything which opposes God. The sighing of sorrow is found in the Penitential Psalms; the glorying in grace in those Psalms which rejoice in victory. Whatever your feeling is, turn to the Psalms!

A few years ago I went into a house and stumbled upon the body of a man who had committed

suicide. The body lay in a pool of his own blood. What a shock it was! I had known him. He had been coming to me for help. I had been counseling with him, and I found his body lying there. That night, when it came time to go to bed, I found I couldn't sleep – I was *so* disturbed and troubled. In that hour of desolation, my wife and I turned to the Psalms and read some of them together. It was the only book that could quiet our hearts in that hour of trouble and anguish. This is the book where men and women of God have pillowed their heads in times of distress and heartache and sorrow. It is also the place to find the note of exaltation and rejoicing in the day of gladness and hope. All the expressions of the heart are found reflected in the Psalms.

The book of **Proverbs** follows. It is the expression of the intelligence of man guided by divine wisdom. Here you have the logical, reasonable approach to life – the discovery of the laws of heaven for life on earth. It is a very simple book and begins with a magnificent introduction explaining why it was written. I love these words (Verses 1-6):

**The proverbs of Solomon, son of David,  
king of Israel:**

**That men may know wisdom and instruction,  
understanding words of insight,  
receive instruction in wise dealing,  
righteousness, justice, and equity;  
that prudence may be given to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the youth –  
the wise man also may hear and increase  
in learning,  
and the man of understanding acquire  
skill,  
to understand a proverb and a figure,  
the words of the wise and their riddles.**  
{Prov 1:1-6 RSV}

And then the secret of it all (Verse 7):

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of  
knowledge;  
fools despise wisdom and instruction.**  
{Prov 1:7 RSV}

There follows a series of remarkable discourses on wisdom, given from a father to a son. Ten times in this section we find words to this effect: “Hear,

my son...” The discourses begin with the child in the home, and then follow the youth out into the busy streets of the city as he encounters various circumstances of life. These proverbs teach him how to choose and make friends; then they follow him as he becomes a man facing some of the perils which are at work to destroy his life; and, finally, they help him to discover some of the forces which will make him strong.

These discourses are followed by two collections of proverbs – from Chapter 10 to Chapter 24 and from Chapter 25 to Chapter 31. The latter collection is the proverbs of Solomon which were copied by the men of King Hezekiah. Some people jokingly ‘quote’ from the ‘book of Hezekiah’ without realizing it is actually in the Bible. But here it is – in the latter part of Proverbs! The last chapter of this remarkable book is one of the most magnificent descriptions of a perfect wife found anywhere in literature.

**Ecclesiastes** (the title means “The Preacher”) is the protest of man's will against the monotony and emptiness of life. It is a deliberate investigation by a man with unlimited resources and money, and wholly unhindered in the expenditure of his time. Solomon had everything it took, and he deliberately set himself to answer these questions:

- Can life be satisfying apart from God?
- Can the things found under the sun satisfy the human heart?

He set himself systematically and deliberately, by the choice of his will, to investigate these areas.

He first tried knowledge, and he said that the result was nothing but emptiness – vanity. Then he tried pleasure; he gave free reign to his passions – he did whatever he felt like doing.

This reminds me of that brilliant young Englishman, George Gordon, who, when he was twenty-nine years old, had so dissipated himself that he wrote these words:

My days are yellow in the leaf,  
the fruit of life is gone;  
the worm, the canker, and the grief  
are mine alone.

That was the discovery of ‘the preacher’ regarding the pursuit of pleasure. He says it was all vanity. Then he tried wealth, and he found that great amounts of money gave a man no more than poverty. It was all emptiness and vanity. Then he tried philosophy as a means of facing life with its various problems, and the mystery of death, and the inexplicable tragedies of sin. His whole conclusion was, “It is all vanity.”

Finally, he comes to the very remarkable statement addressed particularly to young people. In the 11th chapter, Verse 9, he says,

**Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. [In other words, "Live your life; don't get discouraged."] But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. {Ecc1 11:9 RSV}**

Then his final conclusion, near the end of Chapter 12 (Verse 13):

**The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole ... of man. {Ecc1 12:13 RSV}**

Most translations read “the whole duty of man.” But the word *duty* is not in the Hebrew: “This is the whole of man.”

This man has finally stumbled upon a brilliant truth! He has discovered, after years of searching, that there is nothing which makes man complete except God, and at the conclusion of the book he says so.

The last of the poetical books is the **Song of Solomon**. In many ways this is probably the least understood and most neglected of all the books of the Bible – probably because it is the expression of the ideal for the human body. It is a flagrantly sensual book in many ways, for it is a song of the perfection of bodily grace and love. Therefore it has been regarded as shameful – as even the human body itself is oftentimes thought to be shameful, though, of course, it isn't – it is only its abuse which is shameful. This book declares that the purest expression of love – if it is really pure – is bodily. There is no more beautiful sight to a man than the beautiful body of a woman, and there is no

higher expression of nobility and strength to a woman than the clean, fine body of a man. This sometimes bothers people when they read this book. It seems to them almost a reflection of the sordid, sensuous literature of our day. But as we read it through, we catch a very definite note of purity and wholesomeness about it. It puts bodily life in proper perspective.

The story of the book is a bit difficult to trace, but in general it is the story of young maiden whose family evidently rented attractive land from King Solomon in the north country of Israel. She is the Cinderella of the family. She has two brothers and two sisters, but she has been left to tend the flocks and to work in the vineyard. She spends her time out in the open sun all day, so she is sunburned. “I am very dark, but comely,” she says. She watches the beautiful ladies of the court riding in their carriages up and down the road, and envies them, but is willing to remain in her quiet, humble life. One day she looks up to see a handsome stranger, a shepherd, looking at her very intently. She is a bit disturbed by his gaze, but he says to her, “You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you.” That goes a long way to establish a friendship, and they soon draw closer to one another. Then he suddenly leaves. But before he goes he promises that he will return, and she believes him. Through the night she dreams of him and wishes for him, remembering what he looks like, and describing him to her friends. Then one day there is a great commotion in the valley. She looks out, and there is the royal carriage of the king, and all the valley is excited. To the amazement of everyone, the king sends his riders to her house with the message that he desires to see her. She comes out, shy and afraid, and is brought to the royal carriage. When she looks inside she sees that the king is none other than her shepherd lover. He carries her away to the palace, and they enter into a blissful state of wonderful communion together.

As we read the book we can see in it the wonderful old story of God's redeeming grace to man. We are that maiden, and he is the great King who has come down – in disguise, as it were – to manifest his love for us and has gone away, but he shall come again to take us away. In the meantime, there is the expectation of his coming and a yearning for his presence. There is the memory of his preciousness and the rejoicing in his nobility of manhood and the remembrance of his expression of love, as

well. When we get through we can see that it is nothing less than what the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 5, Verses 25-27:

**Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that the church might be presented before him without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. {Eph 5:25-27 RSV}**

Well, this entire section, then, makes it obvious that the Bible is the book that goes with man. It is a

description, divinely given, entering into every detail of our lives – spelled out for us – of man as God intended him to be. What a help! I urge you to read it.

### **Prayer**

Father, we thank you for this revelation of your truth. How poverty-stricken we have been as we have kept ourselves from these pages which are so rich and radiant, so fragrant with experiences which we have not yet known or understood! Teach us to enter into them, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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