

Poetry

*Music has charms to soothe the savage breast;
To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.
... What then am I? Am I more senseless grown
Than trees or flint? O force of constant woe!
... Why am I not at peace?*

The Mourning Bride, Act 1, scene 1
William Congreve, 17th-18th c. English playwright

When emotion overwhelms, as it did the mourning bride in Congreve's play, people often turn to music or poetry for expression. We use such artistic expressions to convey happiness, joy, celebration; sorrow, anguish and loss.

The lyrics of song or poetry may not be enough on their own to soothe the raw savage feelings deep in our hearts, but when they are coupled with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit those lyrics have the power to transform all things to his glory. This week we will look at the poetic books of the Bible – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon – as well as poetry from the New Testament. We will see that God values artistic expression, and that these books have much to tell us about expressing ourselves to him.

Monday – Psalms: songbook for the ages

"Music has charms to soothe the savage breast." William Congreve

1. Please read Psalm 1:1-6. Who is blessed? Why? What happens to the wicked? Why?
2. In Psalm 2:1-12, what are the relative positions of royalty mentioned in verse 2 and that in verse 4? How can they be brought into harmony according to verses 10-12?
3. Now look at Psalm 150:1-6. Why is this psalm a fitting close to the Book of Psalms?

Digging Deeper: Read Luke 1:46-55. How is Mary's song similar to Psalms 1, 2 and 150?

Tuesday – Proverbs: wisdom for the ages

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Proverbs 1:7

1. Please read Proverbs 31:1-9. Who is receiving this advice? How will the warnings of verses 1-7 help in the duties mentioned in verses 8-9?

Text Insight: King Lemuel was not one of the listed kings of Israel or Judah. He was probably the ruler of a foreign land who feared God and was blessed with wisdom inspired by the Holy Spirit.

2. King Lemuel apparently enjoyed a balance of humor and responsibility, if verses 6-7 are taken as sarcasm and 8-9 as the right course of action. How do you feel about Proverbs employing both humor and wisdom?
3. Now look at verses 10-31. What good advice do you find in this section? Is it limited only to married women? Why, or why not?

Digging Deeper: Read Zechariah's song in Luke 1:67-75. What similarities do you see with Proverbs 31:1-9?

Wednesday – Ecclesiastes: lessons for the ages

"Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning." William Arthur Ward, 20th c. American writer

1. Please read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. What wisdom in this song of balance can you apply to your own life?
2. The writer added his own commentary to this song in verses 9-14. What do you think it means to have eternity in your heart (verse 11) and to revere God (verse 14)?
3. How can the conclusion reached in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 help you honor God?

Digging Deeper: Compare Paul's song in Romans 11:33-36 with Ecclesiastes 3:9-14.

Thursday – Song of Songs: love for the ages

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." Revelation 19:7

1. Please read Song of Songs 1:2-4 & 1:15-16 and describe the love between these two people. How is this instructive for people who seek to honor God in their marriages?
2. In 8:8-9, the chorus takes on the role of older brothers to the bride. If she is chaste (a wall) they will honor her, but if she is not chaste (a door) they will protect her with confinement if necessary. Why would these be important concerns for a family whose daughter is promised to the king?
3. How does the bride assure her family of her honorable character in verses 8:10-12? What does this tell you about the proper relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church?

Digging Deeper: What insight does Philippians 2:5-11 give in how Christ shows his love for his bride?

Friday – Job: comfort for the ages

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." Isaiah 40:1

1. Please read Job 3:1-26 and describe Job's condition (for background look at chapters 1 and 2).
2. How did God respond in 38:1-7 & 40:1-2 to Job's complaint of God's decision to allow him long life?
3. What is Job's response in 40:3-5 and 42:1-6? When have you needed to repent of your attitude toward God (42:6b)? Be assured that God will bless you with his forgiveness.

Digging Deeper: How does Revelation 15:3-4 correspond to the passages from Job?

For the Weekend: One of the earliest songs from Israel's history is recorded in Exodus 15:1-18. What is the attitude of God's enemies in verse 9 and his people in verse 2? How does this encourage you in your attitude toward God? What else does this song say that brings you encouragement?