Bittersweet Truth

Wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul (Proverbs 2:10).

Scripture: Proverbs 2:1-11
Song: “Wonderful Words of Life”

I’m convinced that fine coffee is one of God’s greatest gifts. The aroma of freshly ground beans, the steam rising out of the cup, that complex and bitter taste—it all combines to make this simple, unadorned pleasure one of my favorite things in life. But coffee was definitely an acquired taste for me. Sometime in my 20s I began deliberately drinking a small cup every morning. At first I didn’t like it; but over time I stopped merely tolerating the flavor and came to actually enjoy it.

God’s wisdom can be bitter at times too. The Bible contains many difficult teachings, sometimes reading like a laundry list of dos and don’ts. Slogging through these passages requires deliberate effort—and a real desire to imbibe the Word of God. But when we study these passages with prayerful persistence, setting them within the larger context of Scripture, we begin to sense how any bitterness only amplifies the sweetness of God’s love for us. Even God’s harshest commands reveal His jealous desire for what’s best for His children.

These days I prefer my coffee strong and black—bold and full of flavor. Likewise, I prefer Bible studies that deliberately engage the challenging parts of Scripture, confronting me with truths I prefer to ignore. It’s an acquired taste, to be sure, but one I hope never to lose.

Father, thank You for loving me enough to speak hard truths into my life. Help me to desire what You desire for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.
June 15

Simply Jesus

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:22, 23).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
Song: “Give Me Jesus”

For years I’ve been teaching home management to women at conferences, retreats, and seminars. Initially, my audiences were stay-at-home moms. Although the lifestyle of my audiences has changed over the years and my approach has broadened, my core message has never changed: Simplify everything in your home that isn’t helping you love God and love people. And use whatever you keep for His glory.

The topic is an increasingly popular one. People know that de-cluttering will help them live more peaceful lives, which explains the onslaught of best-selling books with catchy titles, like The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up. But the message of every book is simple: get rid of what you don’t love, don’t use, and the things no one else is going to want after you die. It’s that easy.

Both Jews and Greeks added complications to their lives. The Jews had a history of astonishing miracles and a pride in being the people of God; the Greeks felt secure in their philosophy and learning. They both needed to simplify to recognize a Savior with a simple, but life-changing, message that they found difficult to accept.

Father, help me to not over-complicate my spiritual and practical life. Amen.
A Habit Worth Having

Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of [his children] . . . . This was Job’s regular custom (Job 1:5).

Scripture: Job 1:1-5
Song: “When We Pray”

Over the years I’ve asked God to teach me how to use my time well, as Paul encourages us in Ephesians 5:15, 16: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” And God has faithfully answered my prayers, but for a long time I continued to struggle with how to manage my prayer time.

Finally I decided to implement the routine that works so well in other areas of my life. I tried categorizing my prayers. On Sundays I pray for my church and church leaders. Monday’s prayers are directed to my home and family. Every Tuesday I ask for wisdom and commit my job and ministry to Him. Wednesdays are set aside to pray for people who need healing. Thursday’s focus is about fresh filling and faith for believers. On Friday I intercede for my community, country, and world. And on Saturdays I praise God for missionaries who are reaching the lost and unreached people groups.

It may seem strange to plan prayers, but keeping a notebook divided into sections has proved a helpful way for me to keep track of my requests and praises. Adding appropriate Scriptures makes them powerful and keeps strong words in mind.

Father, there is no shame in planning our prayers. Thank You for teaching us how to pray and letting us bring our petitions before Your throne. Amen.
June 17

Grace Upon Grace

When he prayed for his friends . . . came there unto [Job] . . . all they that had been of his acquaintance before and did eat bread with him in his house (Job 42:10, 11, KJV).

Scripture: Job 42:10-17
Song: “Forgiveness”

My husband knows how to listen to people who are struggling. He allows a hurting person to process his or her pain in a safe and nonjudgmental environment. I, on the other hand, often try to fix people’s problems. I make suggestions or interrupt with my own stories so the suffering one knows I’ve been through something similar. Thankfully, even with my blunders, I’ve never lost a true friend because of an insensitive response.

Job was a godly man, and godly people surround themselves with godly friends (Psalm 1). But in their efforts to help him through his trials, Job’s friends ended up making him feel worse. Instead of holding a grudge, Job obeyed God and prayed for them in the same way that Jesus, when hanging on the cross, asked His Father to forgive those who knew not what they did (Luke 23:34).

When we are going through hard times and our well-meaning friends try to comfort us, they may say or do everything “wrong.” If our friends aren’t being helpful when we’re going through a fire, we should simply put them on the back burner—not burn our bridges. If they were friends before, they will be friends again if we give them grace.

Dear Jesus, only You can fully understand our trials and temptations. Help us be gracious to those who, in their humanness, try their best to help us grieve. In Your name, amen.
A Truly Great Deal

Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness (Proverbs 8:6, 7).

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-7
Song: “Nothing Compares”

“Hello! Come! Come!” I looked in the direction of the voice beckoning me. A young vendor gestured, inviting me into the market stall. When I hesitated, he quickly reached behind a table piled high with pashminas and scooped up three jewel-toned patterns—in blue, red, and purple. Before I could protest, he draped the scarves around my shoulders. “Yes, so nice. For you, only 20 dollars. You are so beautiful.”

Our local guide stepped in, took the scarves from my shoulders, and thrust them at the seller. She spoke sharply in their native tongue, and he argued back. Then she whisked me away while the man raised his fist and shouted angrily at her. “Don’t be fooled,” she said. “He wasn’t offering you a good deal at all. He was trying to rip you off.”

Later my friend told me the vendors change their methods according to the customer. Jewel tones for some, pastels for others. Twenty dollars for one and 40 for another. In the same way, worldly wisdom changes its message to speak to perceived needs of body, mind, and spirit. But Scripture tells us that godly wisdom doesn’t change according to our individual whim. It always speaks the truth.

God, thank You for being a trustworthy source, one whom we can be sure is honest. Help us to discern the voices of truth and error so that we can live wisely and well. In Jesus’ name, amen.
June 19

The Wonder Maker of the World

I [wisdom] was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep. . . . I was constantly at his side (Proverbs 8:27, 30).

Scripture: Proverbs 8:22-31
Song: “The Way”

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World include magnificent man-made structures, such as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Of the original seven, only the Great Pyramid of Giza remains. During the past centuries, more “wonder” lists have been compiled by people, crediting the creative work of man. And no matter what the structures represent, there is no denying the architectural grandeur of each one.

List makers have also established inventories of natural wonders. The Grand Canyon astounds us with its depth, breadth, and colors. The Great Barrier Reef displays lively coral for divers. And Mount Everest rises over 29,000 feet, with only a few thousand brave souls reaching the summit. And although not everyone in the world agrees on how these breathtaking marvels were made, the Bible sets the record straight: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Before God began the act of creation, wisdom (typically understood to be God the Son; see Colossians 1:15) was already present as His architect. Nothing He fashioned was haphazard or random. He had oversight so the earth could work in a wonderful way for mankind and animals to not only survive but thrive.

Heavenly Father, what a glorious God You are. We worship in wonder when we consider all You have created. Amen.
Jesus, Not People

Those who find me find life . . . but those who fail to find me harm themselves (Proverbs 8:35, 36).

Scripture: Proverbs 8:32-36
Song: “He Will Carry You”

I tried to commit suicide at the age of 20. Years of compromise and weak faith had caught up with me when I left the safety net of my Christian culture by moving across the country. Growing up, I had surrounded myself with youth group friends; but when life got tough and I couldn’t share my deepest problems, I didn’t know how to find answers on my own. Even as a teenager, I sometimes cut myself in secret to numb my pain.

Like me, some of us rely on other people to sustain our faith—and the Bible does tell us to meet together and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). But our church friends, ministers, Sunday school teachers, and Bible study leaders are no substitute for God. When we lose our spiritual community or suffer struggles too personal to share, and we haven’t developed our personal relationship with Jesus, we can find our faith fragile and look for solutions in ways that fall short or are even destructive.

Times will come when only God is enough. When we turn to Him, He invites us to open the Bible and find wisdom for life’s problems. We can ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us personally. And this is something we should do daily so when we find ourselves alone, we know the right thing to do.

Jesus, thank You for being all we need. Thank You for being our faithful and true friend who offers life-giving answers. In Your powerful name we pray. Amen.