

# Living to Win

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Personal from. . .

Ronald L. Dart

## The Love of Your Life

In the past few weeks, I have been reminded again of the importance of *teaching the Bible*. At the risk of stating the obvious, I am talking about much more than the communication of knowledge from one generation to another. What is not so obvious is that the *process* of teaching actually develops and enhances knowledge.

I didn't realize this when I embarked on my first teaching assignment, but the teacher is, if anything, more affected by the process than the student. I can sit down for a personal Bible study and learn a great deal through research and study. But when I do this with a view to teaching the material to real students, something entirely different happens. Even that is not the end of it. When you stand in class and actually teach, with an awareness that students are going to ask questions, something still more different happens.

For nearly seven years, I taught Bible (Survey of the Old Testament and the Epistles of Paul) at a small college in England. It was perhaps the most enriching period of my life and laid the groundwork for much that has happened since.

The process of teaching makes knowledge available that otherwise might be left undiscovered. What reminded me of this has been the process of reading the Wisdom Books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, often called Song

of Solomon, onto tape for distribution to the public.

I have no idea how many times I have read these books, but I can tell you definitively that the process of preparing to teach them and the actual process of teaching them, has once again opened up things in those books that had not presented themselves in previous readings.

Topical sermons are useful, even necessary for the development of God's people. Sometimes you pull together related scriptures to develop an idea or a truth. Paul, in the Book of Romans, cites the Old Testament directly no less than 46 times. But it is important also to teach the Bible in context. Paul urged Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13 NIV).

I might have dismissed this as only an issue of that time, a time when people did not have their own Bibles and might not have been able to read them if they had them. Having now read Psalms, Isaiah,

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon onto tape and CD media, I feel less inclined now than I might have at one time. Knowing that I read them to people like you to help you get a better grasp of the books, has helped me to see them in an entirely new light.

One striking thing that came to me by the time I finished was that the Wisdom Books, perhaps more than any others, are dedicated to youth, in particular to teens and 20s. Things taught in these books can and should be taught to children and preteens, but they need some adaptation. In fact, the issues raised are important at any time of life, but they are singularly important to unmarried young people – people who have not yet started a family. If understood and applied early in life, they can make all the difference in the world. And sometimes, a change in one's life can change the course of history.

Once I concluded that the Wisdom Books could be dedicated to young people, I noticed a linkage between the beginning and the end. What seems to dominate Solomon's thinking early in Proverbs is the danger, the folly, the idiocy, the rank stupidity of recreational sex. What he ends the three books with is the

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beauty of romantic love that is only possible for someone who has avoided the temptations of recreational sex. This really did not dawn on me until I was doing Song of Songs, right after Proverbs.

Proverbs begins with the obvious concerns of a father for a son. He is concerned about youthful foolishness and later will observe that “foolishness is bound up in the heart of child.” There is no surprise there, because that is just the way kids come. Unfortunately, too many parents don’t take steps to correct the problem.

The purpose of Proverbs is set out right at the beginning: “To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.” There is nothing hard in this and, oddly enough, they are values that are more important to young people than a lot of adults think they are. Young people are very sensitive to violations of justice and fairness.

These are the big four: *wisdom, justice, judgment and equity*. And in keeping with Solomon’s concerns, he reminds us that wisdom is found everywhere and cries out, “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?” I had never noticed before that the Hebrew word commonly translated “simple,” means “seducible.” It refers to young people who are beyond naive. I searched for a word in the vernacular, and the English word “sucker” seemed to fit.

Solomon is deeply concerned about the vulnerability of the young to the ways of the one he calls, “the strange woman.” Discretion is the key, he said, to avoiding the way of the strange woman, “which flattereth with her words; Who forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto

death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.” But it is more than that. Much more. In chapter 5, he sets out the problem in stark terms:

“For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.”

One thing she doesn’t want you to do is to think about what you are doing. Silence your conscience. Don’t think about where this could lead. Hear me, said Solomon, change the route you walk to work or school and don’t go near the door of her house (v. 8), “Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel.” He’s talking about jail in terms of our day. “Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger,” (v. 10), nowadays, we call that a lawsuit.

Finally, he warns, “And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed.” Today, that’s AIDS.

There is something very important for a young person to learn here. It is not only that you have God’s chastisement to fear. You have the terrible consequences of such impetuous behavior to worry about. These next verse from the NIV are very good. They are, of course, an analogy but it is easy to follow the symbolism.

“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may

you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife?”

Why does David seem to pick on women? Because he is a man? Because he can? Or is the war between the sexes actually a one-sided war? I don’t know, but I can tell you this: If the boys I grew up with and went off to the Navy with had been exposed to the girls of this generation, we would have been mowed down like grass under a power mower. God made women the gatekeepers because they have the most to lose. And when the gatekeepers don’t keep the gates, all is lost.

Proverbs is full of a potpourri of wisdom in different shapes, colors and sizes. But let me turn my attention to Ecclesiastes. This book is a much more ordered presentation, and there is a clear objective in mind. The objective is to impress upon young people that life is short and largely an exercise in futility. It can be discouraging, but that is not the intent. The intent is that we might know what is important and what is not – that we would not waste our lives in fruitless, vain futility.

As you read, you can almost feel the pain, the frustration of this man, born to be a king, wealthy beyond imagination. But his life was empty. There was no joy. No sense of a journey with an arrival at the end. Just going around in circles. But I can’t go so far as to say Solomon was cynical. That is the way some versions of this book see him, rendering his opening words, “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

But I don’t hear cynicism. I hear despair. I hear a loss of hope. There is a basic disconnect between the Book of Proverbs and the Book of Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs, Solomon extols knowledge and one can hardly disagree with him. But

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here in Ecclesiastes is a man who gained all manner of knowledge only to find that *it wasn't enough*.

To understand this book, we have to remember that we are hearing the cry of a man who has looked for meaning in every nook and cranny, under every rock, and has not found it. All of his words are true enough in *human* terms. For without God, there is no meaning, and all is indeed vanity.

Ecclesiastes is a cry of the heart, a cry of despair, but before he is finished, Solomon will resolve the dissonance he raises here. In the meantime, he will touch on the deepest despair of the human heart, a despair that arises from lost hope. But the hope that is finally lost is hope in this world, this life.

Solomon might well have echoed the words of Paul: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

When we come to the Song of Solomon, we should not be surprised that the book has been interpreted in so many conflicted and conflicting ways. After all, men have a way of becoming abashed, even flummoxed in the face of romance, love, and especially sexual love. But with sexual love being so obviously a part of God's creation, there is no earthly reason why the Song of Songs should not be in the Bible.

This is especially so when you consider the antipathy toward sex and marriage that developed early in some Christian traditions. It was at the council of Nicea in the year 325 that the proposal was seriously put forward that all clergy should give up cohabitation with their wives. That proposal did not win the day, but the underlying idea persisted and eventually led to the doctrines of celibacy that are still found in the Catholic church, and still creating the mischief that you would expect to inevitably follow. Marriage early on came to be seen as a concession to human weakness. Since the "fall

of man," it was opined, man could not enter into marriage without lust.

In our own day, we have fallen into the opposite error where sex has been substituted for love with disastrous results. Against all this stands the Song of Songs. The Song of Songs is not about falling into the sack. It is about being in love, about being consumed with love for the beloved.

God, having apparently anticipated all our follies and hangups, included these lovely, romantic poems so we could understand. The song is about love, but especially about **young** love with all of its sweetness, all of its yearning, all of its tenderness, all of its pain.

So we should read the Song of Songs, but exactly how should we read it? How should we understand it and present it? Historically, the book has been interpreted in several ways:

Allegorically – largely rejected now.

Symbolically – Christ and the Church

Naturally – which is the most appealing. For if the natural interpretation doesn't work, neither does the symbolic.

And in truth, the structure of the book simply has no signposts that lead to anything but a natural interpretation. It is possible to draw analogies between physical marriage on the one hand and Christ and the church on the other, but the analogies will belong to the speaker and don't carry the authority of Scripture.

This is a collection of love poems. It's that simple. What seems to be sorely missing in sex education today is what we find right here in the Song of Songs: A deep and passionate love.

Some silly commentator referred to what he called the frank eroticism of the Song. This is part of our problem. We can no longer tell the difference.

In spite of that, I think the natural meaning is best. Preachers

may draw their allegories and analogies from the Song of Songs, but the full, natural, and beautiful revelation of these love poems is the intense love that can exist between a man and a woman. It is not merely sexual love. It is not merely intellectual love. When you are in love, you are in love with a whole person, body, mind and spirit. That is what the Song of Songs is all about.

These two lovers ached for one another. They were *besotted* with one another. They could think of nothing else. I wish for everyone such a love, and I ache inside for the loss of love young people must endure nowadays. It is gone from our music. Gone from our entertainment. It has been replaced by sex as recreation.

***And when we lose the power to love, the power to love God goes with it.***

Poor Solomon lost it himself in the end, and that makes his story all the more sad. There was a time when he had a love like no other. But then he added more women and soon, all the love was gone. But in better days, he preserved these love poems for us, and we can thank him for that. The Song of Songs is a song of deep and passionate love.

To the young people, I say this: I can only hope that you will have a love like this in your life, and that the Song of Songs will encourage you to reject all substitutes and wait for the real thing. It is to this end that I dedicated the reading of the Song of Songs.

Reaching for the power of true love,

*Ronald L. Dart*

P.S. There is so much more to say on this subject that was covered in a sermon I gave at the Family Bible Retreat in Bel Arco. If you would like to have a *FREE* cassette tape of this presentation, *The Love of Your Life*, simply check the enclosed card and return it.

## In Memory

Christian Educational Ministries gratefully acknowledges the generous donation made in loving memory of Pat Dennis. Our deepest sympathies and prayers go out to this family during their loss and grief.

### Christian Educational Ministries

Statement of Cash Flows  
For the Three Months Ended  
April 30, 2005

Receipts:

Contributions	\$300065
CEM Bookstore	37799
Youth Ministry	615
Interest Income	3598
	<u>\$342077</u>

Expenses:

A/V Supplies	\$ 7661
Rents	9688
Computer Operations	498
Office & Adm. Expenses	3260
Insurance	1595
Mailing Expenses	4717
Postage	21550
Printing	11874
Radio Expenses	150624
Telephone & Utilities	2202
Youth Ministries	3904
Conferences	3468
CEM Bookstore	5450
Foreign Operations	2254
Website Maintenance	663
Employee Benefits	15959
Wages & Payroll Taxes	87216

Total Operating Expenses 332583

Increase in Fund Balance \$ 9494

## Calendar of Events

**CEM Summer Camp** - June 26 through July 3, 2005 at Camp Wewoka Woods, in Wewoka, Oklahoma for young people who are already 13 and have not had their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Contact Larry Watkins at 1-888-BIBLE 44 for more information.

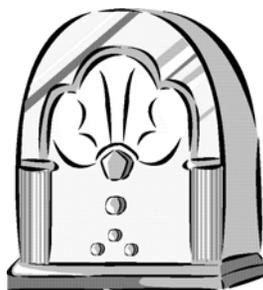


**Meet the Teacher, Columbia, South Carolina** - Join us July 30<sup>th</sup> at 2 p.m. at the Embassy Suites, Greystone Blvd. and I-20 in Columbia, SC for an inspirational and educational session with the teacher, Ronald L. Dart. For additional information contact:

Ralph or Jenny Hanahan  
803-732-7869 or Hanahan@BellSouth.net

Larry Watkins  
1-888-BIBLE 44 or lsw@cemnetwork.com.

## Radio Update



**KKHT**  
**100.7 FM**  
**Houston**  
**Sunday**  
**7:00 AM**

**WYLL**  
**1160 AM**  
**Chicago**  
**Sunday**  
**12:30 AM & 6:00 PM**

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