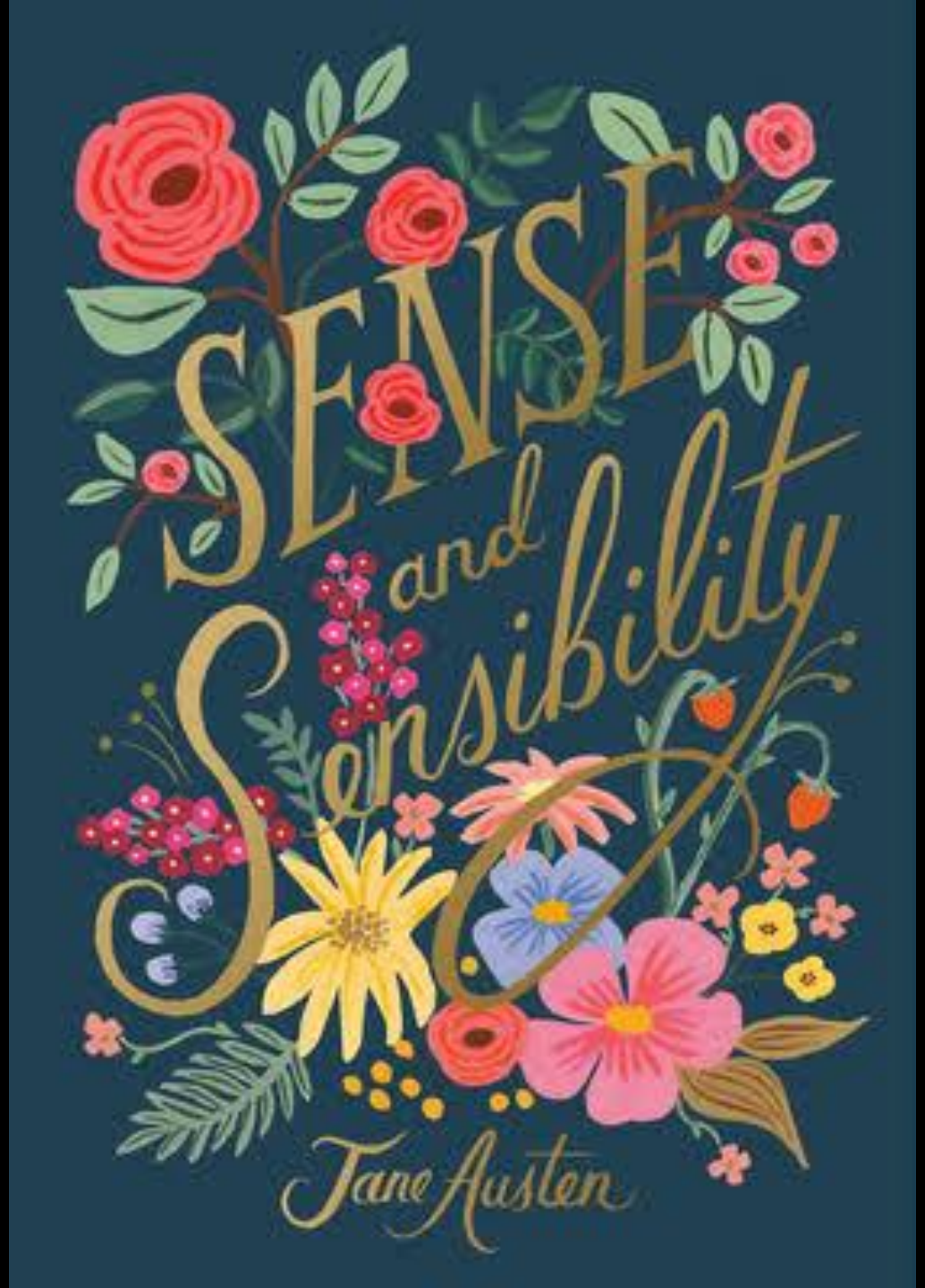
Breathing Lessons

Wisdom from Ecclesiastes for this Fleeting Life


Sense
and
Sensibility
Jane Austen

Wisdom and Folly: A Study in Contrasts

Ecclesiastes 9:13–10:20

1. The Superiority of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 9:13–10:1

Ecclesiastes 9:13-15

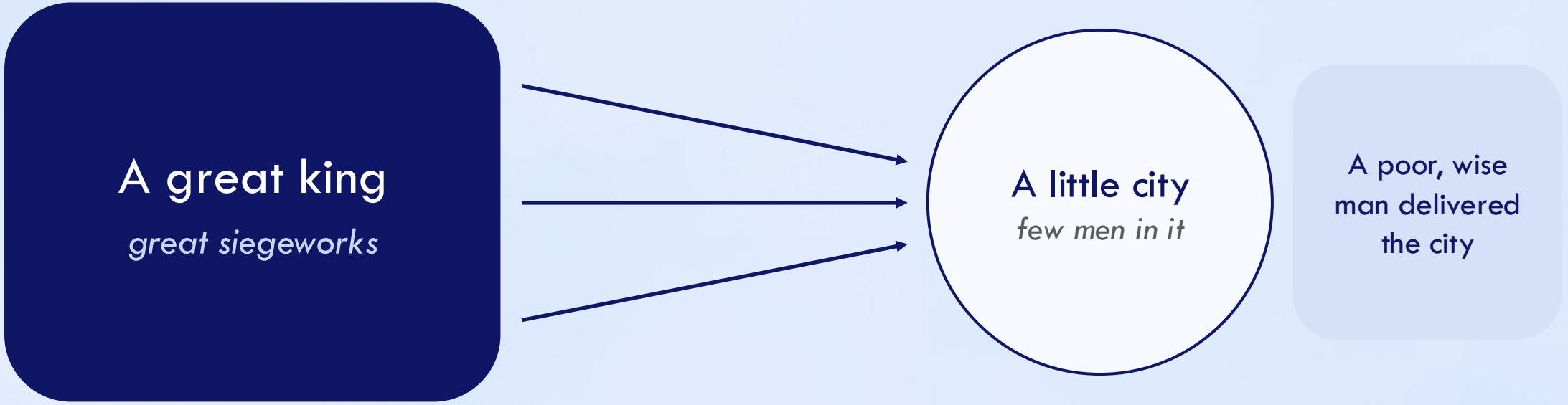
13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed
great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great
king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against
it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom
delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

1. The Superiority of the Wise

Wisdom is better than folly, even though folly can undo much good.

(a) An anecdote: The forgotten wise man

1. The Superiority of the Wise



Yet no one remembered that poor man.

1. The Superiority of the Wise

Wisdom is better than folly, even though folly can undo much good.

(a) An anecdote: The forgotten wise man

(b) Three “better than” proverbs

Ecclesiastes 9:16-18

16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

17 The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

1. The Superiority of the Wise

Wisdom	*better than*	Might
The words of the wise heard in quiet	*better than*	The shouting of a ruler among fools
Wisdom	*better than*	Weapons of war

…but one sinner destroys much good.

1. The Superiority of the Wise

Wisdom is better than folly, even though folly can undo much good.

(a) An anecdote: The forgotten wise man

(b) Three "better than" proverbs

(c) A summary statement

> Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. (10:1)

2. The Inclination of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 10:2–4

2. The Inclination of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by the different orientations of their hearts.

(a) Our choices flow from our inclinations

Ecclesiastes 10:2-4

2 A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,

but a fool's heart to the left.

3 Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense,

and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place,

for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

2. The Inclination of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by the different orientations of their hearts.

(a) Our choices flow from our inclinations

A wise person chooses the right road; a fool takes the wrong one. (10:2, NLT)

2. The Inclination of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by the different orientations of their hearts.

(a) Our choices flow from our inclinations

(b) Our inclinations reveal themselves in our behavior

2. The Inclination of the Wise

When the ruler's anger rises against you…

FIRST IMPULSE

Defensiveness · Arguing
Storming out
Saying something regrettable

WISDOM

Calmness
Composure
Restraint

"Calmness will lay great offenses to rest." (10:4)

2. The Inclination of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by the different orientations of their hearts.

(a) Our choices flow from our inclinations

(b) Our inclinations reveal themselves in our behavior

> The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. (Proverbs 8:13)

2. The Inclination of the Wise

Wise choices: loving what God loves, turning from evil

A heart inclined toward what is true, good, and beautiful

The fear of the LORD

Biblical wisdom is rooted in an orientation toward God himself.

3. The Discretion of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 10:5–11

3. The Discretion of the Wise

Though fools may have power and privilege, the wise person navigates life with discretion and care.

(a) Wisdom in an upside-down world

Ecclesiastes 10:5-7

5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error
proceeding from the ruler: 6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich
sit in a low place. 7 I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on
the ground like slaves.

3. The Discretion of the Wise

WHAT WE'D EXPECT

High places
Wisdom and the qualified

Low places
Folly

AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

High places
Folly · slaves on horses

Low places
The rich · princes on foot

Wisdom isn't always rewarded, nor folly always punished.

3. The Discretion of the Wise

Though fools may have power and privilege, the wise person navigates life with discretion and care.

(a) Wisdom in an upside-down world

(b) Wisdom anticipates danger

Ecclesiastes 10:8-9

8 He who digs a pit will fall into it,

and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall.

9 He who quarries stones is hurt by them,

and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

3. The Discretion of the Wise

Digging a pit
…you may fall in

Breaking through a wall
…a serpent may bite

Quarrying stones
…the stones may hurt you

Splitting logs
…the logs may endanger you

Ordinary activities carry risks.

Ecclesiastes 10:10-11

10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed.

11 If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

3. The Discretion of the Wise

Though fools may have power and privilege, the wise person navigates life with discretion and care.

(a) Wisdom in an upside-down world

(b) Wisdom anticipates danger

> The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it. (Proverbs 27:12)

The “SAFER” model

S

Summarize

Review the work and what could go wrong

A

Anticipate

Identify possible errors and their causes

F

Foresee

Think through worst-case consequences

E

Evaluate

Identify safeguards and contingency plans

R

Review

Draw on lessons learned from others

4. The Conversation of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 10:12–15

4. The Conversation of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by their choice and use of words.

(a) Wise and foolish speech

Ecclesiastes 10:12-14

12 The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor,

but the lips of a fool consume him.

13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness,

and the end of his talk is evil madness.

14 A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be,

and who can tell him what will be after him?

4. The Conversation of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by their choice and use of words.

(a) Wise and foolish speech

> The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. (10:15)

4. The Conversation of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by their choice and use of words.

(a) Wise and foolish speech

(b) Other passages in Ecclesiastes

> Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. (5:2)

4. The Conversation of the Wise

<u>The wise and foolish are distinguished by their choice and use of words.</u>

(a) Wise and foolish speech

(b) Other passages in Ecclesiastes

> For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. (5:3)

4. The Conversation of the Wise

The wise and foolish are distinguished by their choice and use of words.

(a) Wise and foolish speech

(b) Other passages in Ecclesiastes

> It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. (7:5)

4. The Conversation of the Wise

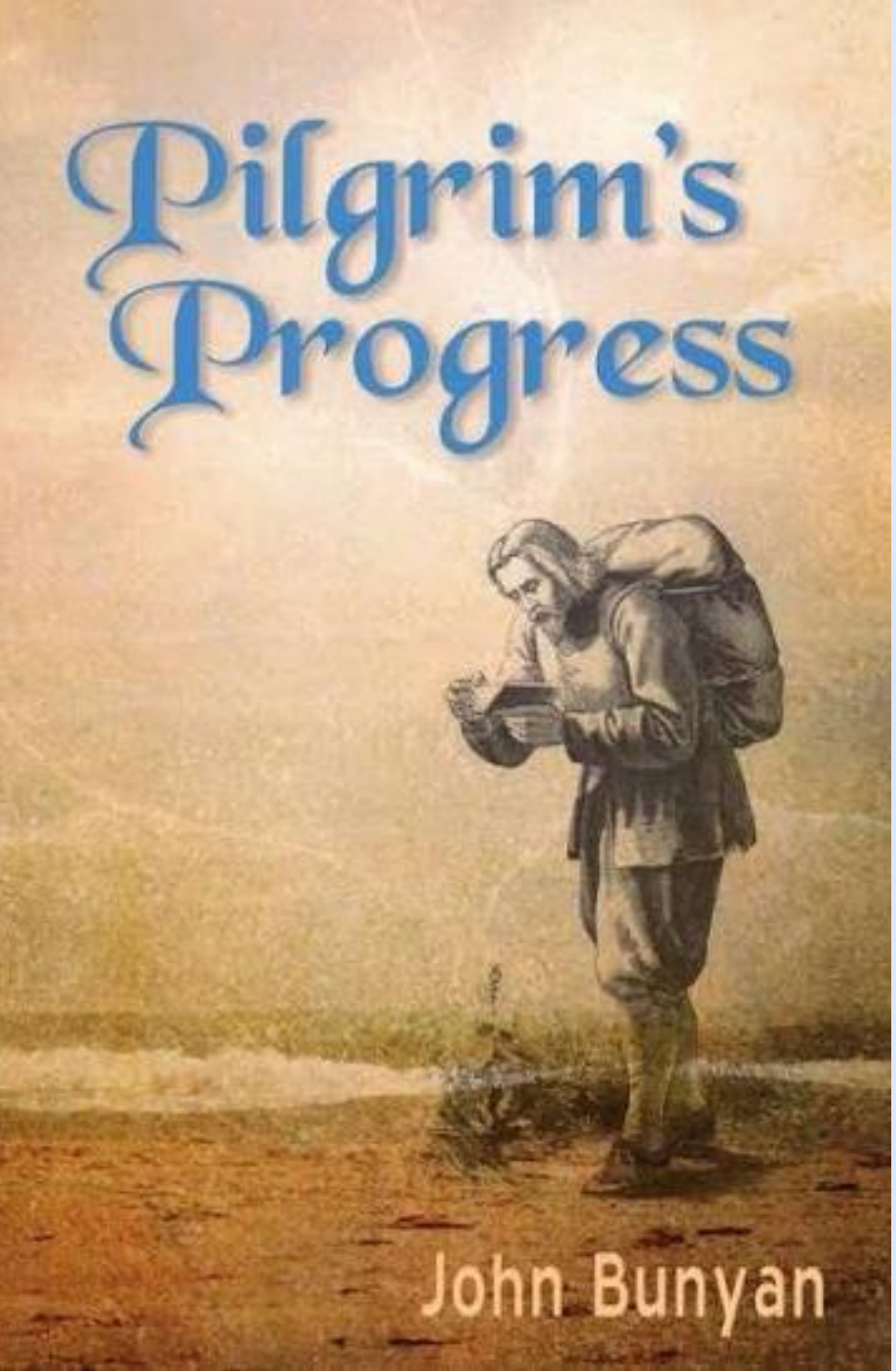
WISE WORDS ARE…

- Measured
- Appropriate to the occasion
- Balanced with listening
- Open to correction

FOOLS…

simply babble on.

Wisdom isn't measured by how much we say.



John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress:

Talkative

"Notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow."

"A saint abroad and a devil at home."

"All he hath lieth in his tongue, and his religion is to make a noise therewith."

"His house is as empty of religion as the white of an egg is of savor."

5. The Influence of the Wise

Ecclesiastes 10:16–20

5. The Influence of the Wise

Both the wise and foolish have great influence upon others.

(a) Two kinds of leaders

Ecclesiastes 10:16-17

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child,

and your princes feast in the morning!

17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility,

and your princes feast at the proper time,

for strength, and not for drunkenness!

5. The Influence of the Wise

"Woe to you, O land"	*"Happy are you, O land"*
King is a child Princes feast in the morning *Immature, self-indulgent: position serves pleasure and privilege*	King is the son of the nobility Princes feast at the proper time, for strength *Mature, disciplined: authority as stewardship*

The character of leaders affects entire communities.

5. The Influence of the Wise

Solomon: sought wisdom

- Asked for an understanding mind
- Granted extraordinary wisdom
- A golden age of peace and prosperity

Rehoboam: rejected wisdom

- Rejected the elders' counsel
- Threatened heavier burdens
- Ten tribes rebel; the kingdom divides

5. The Influence of the Wise

Both the wise and foolish have great influence upon others.

(a) Two kinds of leaders

(b) Wise leadership maintains and manages resources

Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. (10:18)

5. The Influence of the Wise

Neglect small things long enough and they become big things.

MAINTAIN WHAT HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED TO YOU

Relationships	Systems	Resources

5. The Influence of the Wise

Both the wise and foolish have great influence upon others.

(a) Two kinds of leaders

(b) Wise leadership maintains and manages resources

> Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. (10:19)

5. The Influence of the Wise

Both the wise and foolish have great influence upon others.

(a) Two kinds of leaders

(b) Wise leadership maintains and manages resources

(c) Wisdom and discretion under authority

> Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter. (10:20)

Five Characteristics of Wisdom

Summary

Superiority: Wisdom is better than folly, though folly can undo much good.

Inclination: Wisdom begins with the orientation of the heart.

Discretion: Wisdom thinks ahead and acts prudently.

Conversation: Wisdom governs our words.

Influence: Wisdom affects those around us.

Conclusion: The Wisdom of the Gospel

Ecclesiastes 9:13–10:20

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