



Lesson 4: You Get What You Deserve, Don't You?

Dear Fellow Travelers,

One of the primary goals of wisdom thinking in ancient Israel was to pass knowledge about life on to the next generation and to form character. I wonder what kind of wisdom we are passing on to our children and grandchildren these days. It has been recently reported that the average child, no matter what age, watches more than 40,000 television commercials a year. The American Psychological Association has urged federal regulators to restrict TV advertising aimed at children 8 and under because these kids "lack the skills to question a commercial's claims as anything but fact." Is our media wisdom, encapsulated in commercials, creating obese children who learn early that buying things is the key to happiness?

In ancient Israel, the wisdom outlook on life was rooted in experience that showed how one could live life successfully. Proverbs, short sayings that summed up life, were optimistic about our ability to live in harmony with the order that God intended for the world. Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* perpetuated that kind of wisdom: a penny saved is a penny earned. Today, we seem not to understand the foundation of ancient Israel's wisdom thinking: that actions have consequences. We ignore the possibility that manipulative commercials selling sugary cereals will make our children obese or contribute to diabetes. Bumper stickers, our modern, popular proverbs, mock "act/consequence" (the idea that our actions have direct consequences) with an in-your-face attitude: the one who dies with the most toys, wins. Our cynicism has replaced ancient optimism about life. So-called "prosperity theology" insists that the good life can be ours if we just pray the right way. The focus is no longer on forming character, but on power and consumer satisfaction.

Take a look at this bumper sticker web site and gauge for yourselves how our modern wisdom teaching has changed: www.InternetBumperStickers.com

Ancient Israel believed that older people were natural sources of wisdom. In this regard, see *A Very Present Help: Psalm Studies for Older Adults* by Miriam Dunson.

May God give you the wisdom to live optimistically this week,

Denise