

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: September Programme**

**September 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Already circulated (as September 5<sup>th</sup>!) Evan not available. **Suggest Host David. Lead Peta.**

**September 9<sup>th</sup>:** **Ecclesiasticus 30: 1-25. Host David, Lead Evan.** Disciplining a son. Health and happiness. This very physical approach to bringing up boys was common across cultures for many centuries. The idea of teachers not being allowed to use corporal punishment on girls and boys, and parents risking Social Services intervention if they get physical, is very recent in this country....though that doesn't mean all teachers and all parents were physical. At my Secondary School, prefects could cane boys (though some prefects refused to do it), and some masters had canes on display (though others never used a cane or a hand). What was your experience? Where do you stand on smacking? Do we now live in a less violent society??? Note the injunction against even playing with your son: cf the Victorian pater familias. Interesting that we imagine boys being favoured over girls, but it is the boys who are the target of physical parental violence. No mention of the mother's role. Do we over-do children's rights? How much should up-bringing be a matter for society, and not just a matter for parents.

Note this parent/child relationship background to what the Bible says about the God/human relationship. Jews in Bible times did not see an indulgent father as a good father!

Wealth clearly doesn't guarantee health....though, particularly when there is no NHS and no Social Security, etc, better off people are maybe better placed to eat well and live well? Interesting to see the very negative view of living with illness and disability, at a time when happy healthy heaven wasn't seen as the alternative. Not sure I swallow the indulge yourself advice? I do admire those people with neither health nor wealth who stay cheerful and positive.

**September 16<sup>th</sup>:** **Ecclesiasticus 31: 1-31, 32: 1-13: Host David, Lead Andy:** Disadvantages of wealth. Behaviour at banquets. Remember Jesus talking about rich folk finding it hard to get into heaven – though his message emphasised not being able to take your riches with you. (Ben Sira didn't believe in a heaven to go to, so doesn't follow this theme.) I have sympathy with the Fiddler on the Roof view that it is perfectly possible to use (legitimately gained) wealth for the benefit of yourself and others: being poor is no guarantee of being virtuous!

I love Chapter 31 verse 21; but don't commend it! (You will see that the notes mention the convention of eating everything put in front of you... no fridges in those days, of course. A bit hard to reconcile hosts being generous with guests being both abstemious and visibly grateful!) I won't push my views on alcohol. On the whole, the advice about moderation and table manners seems sound; and useful even if you don't often get invited to banquets.

Would we still run with age taking precedence when it comes to talking? My feeling is that we are more concerned these days to make sure everybody gets the chance to speak, without anyone being forced to speak? Maybe, also, we are more inclined to see the elderly as being out of date, rather than to see them as wise from experience?

**September 23rd: Ecclesiasticus 32: 14-24 and 33: 1-6: Host Toyin, Lead Miranda.**

Preparation for life through reflection. Trusting in God. These are sort of “Yes, but....” passages. Listen to God. Yes, but how can you be sure it is God you are hearing? Listen to good advice. Yes, but how can you be sure it is good advice. Make up your own mind. Yes, but how do you know you are in possession of all the facts, and have reached a balanced view on all the options? Archbishops with advisory councils are still fallible. Sometimes, it is terribly tempting not to decide; but what if a decision has to be made. Sometimes you feel sorry for leaders whose best decision is liable to be only the apparently (at the time) least stupid decision.

**September 30th: Ecclesiasticus 33: 7-31: Host Toyin, Lead David.** Opposites in the natural world. Author’s personal note. Keeping one’s independence. Treatment of slaves. Determinism?! We would probably agree that the Christian calendar, for example, is not dictated by God; and that it is human choice not Divine revelation (or established history) that Christmas is December 25<sup>th</sup> for most of us, and Easter (whatever date in a particular year). Not even Christians agree on the Christian dates. We would probably also agree that God doesn’t make people “sin”. God may or may not dictate the consequences of sin. Room for an interesting debate here: What does “God is in charge” mean?

The personal note is modest and assertive.

We are not independent; but we do need to make sensible use of such independence as we have: making our own mistakes! As regards inheritance, there were no death duties at that time....and the general economic/social context was hugely different. Accountability and responsibility are still real.

The treatment of slaves section is fascinating: very mixed messages. Do we over-emphasise the racial aspect of the sad history of slavery? How do you feel about the State’s and the Church’s schemes for making amends?