

Proverbs 14:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

Analysis

This proverb addresses the privacy of individual emotional experience. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness" acknowledges subjective pain. Lev yode'a marat nafsho (לב יודע מרת נפשו), the heart knows the bitterness of its soul. Marah (מָרָה, bitterness) describes deep sorrow, anguish, grief. Only the individual truly knows the depth of their own suffering.

"And a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" extends privacy to gladness. Uvesimchato lo-yit'arav zar (ובשׁמְךָתוֹ לֹא-יַתְעַנֵּב זָר, and in his joy a stranger does not share). Simchah (שִׁמְחָה, joy, gladness) remains partially inaccessible even to outsiders (zar, זָר, stranger, outsider). True joy, like deep sorrow, has private dimensions others cannot fully enter.

The proverb teaches human limitation in empathy. While we should weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15), we cannot fully experience another's inner emotional reality. This calls for humility—not presuming to fully understand others' pain or joy. It also points to Jesus as the perfect empathizer. Hebrews 4:15 declares Christ "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He alone fully knows our bitterness and joy, having experienced full human emotion. This truth comforts—when no one else understands, Christ does perfectly.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture emphasized communal solidarity, yet recognized individual emotional experience. Job's friends tried understanding his anguish but failed (Job 2:11-13, 42:7-9). Hannah's bitterness was unknown even to Eli (1 Samuel 1:12-17). David's psalms express both bitter anguish and ecstatic joy beyond others' comprehension. This proverb acknowledges both community's importance and its limits in accessing individuals' inner lives.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing the privacy of others' emotions cultivate humility and prevent presumptuous judgments?
2. In what ways have you experienced the loneliness of sorrow or joy that others couldn't fully share?
3. How does Jesus' perfect understanding of your heart's bitterness and joy (Hebrews 4:15) provide comfort when human empathy falls short?

Interlinear Text

לֹא וְבִשְׁמַךְתִּוּ נַפְשׁוֹ וְמִכְתָּבָדֵעַ
The heart knoweth bitterness his own with his joy H3808

H3820 H3045 H4787 H5315 H8057

רֹבֵב יְתַעַן!
doth not intermeddle and a stranger H2114

H6148

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:14 (Parallel theme): The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

Philippians 4:7 (Parallel theme): And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Job 10:1 (Parallel theme): My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.

Proverbs 15:13 (Parallel theme): A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Revelation 2:17 (Parallel theme): He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Job 7:11 (Parallel theme): Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

John 14:18 (Parallel theme): I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

1 Samuel 1:10 (Parallel theme): And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

1 Peter 1:8 (Parallel theme): Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: