

Proverbs 27:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

Analysis

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel—The Hebrew shemen u-qetoret (שֶׁמֶן וְקֶתֶרֶת, 'oil and incense') evokes pleasant sensory experience that gladdens the lev (לֵב, 'heart'). Yet superior to aromatic delight is a friend's metheq-nephesh (מְתַקֵּן נֶפֶשׁ, 'sweetness of soul')—counsel that comes from etzah nephesh (עַצְתַּנֶּפֶשׁ, 'counsel of soul'), advice rooted in genuine care.

True friendship offers more than pleasant company—it provides 'hearty counsel,' the Hebrew suggesting advice from the depths of one's being. Such counsel may be difficult to hear, yet it's sweeter than perfume because it genuinely benefits the hearer (Proverbs 27:6). The gospel provides the ultimate friendship: Christ calls His disciples 'friends' and counsels them through His Spirit (John 15:15).

Historical Context

Perfumed oils and incense were luxury items in ancient Israel, used for anointing, religious rituals, and personal fragrance. Their pleasant aroma provided sensory delight in a world with limited such pleasures. The comparison elevates friendship to the status of precious commodities—relationships as valuable as expensive aromatic goods.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Do your friendships provide 'hearty counsel' that challenges and refines, or merely pleasant agreement?
2. How can you cultivate the kind of soul-deep friendship that gives honest, loving counsel?
3. In what ways does Jesus's friendship offer counsel that's simultaneously difficult yet 'sweet' to your soul?

Interlinear Text

רְעֵהוּ שָׁמֶן וְקַטְרַת יְשַׁפְּחָה לְבָבְךָ וְתַקְנֵה שְׁמַעַת הַמֵּן
Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart so doth the sweetness of a man's friend
H8081 H7004 H8055 H3820 H4986 H7453

מְעֵצָה נְפָשָׁה
counsel by hearty
H6098 H5315

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 104:15 (Parallel theme): And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

Proverbs 16:21 (Parallel theme): The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.

Psalms 23:5 (Parallel theme): Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Proverbs 15:23 (Parallel theme): A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!

Song of Solomon 3:6: Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?