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# **“Chasing After The Wind”**

## **Wisdom Helps Us See Life Clearly and Face Life Stronger (Ecclesiastes 7:11-29)**

### **Introduction**

1. Two weeks ago as we began our study of Ecclesiastes 7, I pointed out that in chapters 7 & 8 addresses a question he asked at the end of chapter 6, “For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime?” (Ecclesiastes 6:12).
2. Based upon a commentary by Warren Wiersbe, we noted in the first ten verses of chapter 7 that “wisdom can make life better.”
3. Tonight, I hope to finish chapter seven and look at two more benefits of wisdom:
  - a. First, wisdom helps us see life clearly.
  - b. Second, wisdom helps us face life stronger.
4. If you are seeking answers in life, I encourage you to listen to what Solomon, a man to whom God gave great wisdom, has to share with us.

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## **I. Wisdom Helps Us See Life Clearly**

### **A. WEALTH (VV. 11-12)**

“Wisdom along with an inheritance is good  
And an advantage to those who see the sun.  
For wisdom is protection just as money is protection,  
But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its  
possessors.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:11–12, NASB95)

1. Solomon's purpose here is not to compare "wisdom" to "money", but to show the value of "money" when accompanied by "wisdom."
2. The person who has "wealth" but lacks "wisdom" will only waste his or her inheritance, while the person who has "wisdom" will know how to preserve the inheritance he or she has received.
3. Just as shade provides protection from the sun, so does wisdom provide protection by preserving the life of its possessor.

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**B. PROVIDENCE (v. 13)**

"Consider the work of God,  
For who is able to straighten what He has bent?"  
(Ecclesiastes 7:13, NASB95)

1. In Ecclesiastes 1:15, Solomon wrote, "What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted."
2. While you or I might find fault with "the work of God" (something He has done), we have no power to change whatever we thing is wrong or unfair — "who is able to straighten what He has bent?"
3. Many of you have heard of the "**Serenity Prayer.**"
4. This prayer, written in 1934 by Reinhold Niebuhr fits well with what Solomon is saying here:

**God grant me  
The serenity to accept the things I cannot change;  
The courage to change the things I can;  
And the wisdom to know the difference**

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**C. ADVERSITY AND PROSPERITY (v. 14)**

"In the day of prosperity be happy,

But in the day of adversity consider—  
God has made the one as well as the other  
So that man will not discover anything that will be after him.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:14, NASB95)

1. When Job had lost everything — his material wealth, his children — and was sitting in ashes with a broken piece of pottery, scraping the boils on his skin, his wife told him to “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9).
2. His response reminded her of this truth: “Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10).
3. Earlier, Job had said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 2:21).
4. “God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble” (Wiersbe).
5. Why does God do this? “To keep us from thinking we know it all and that we can manage our lives by ourselves.”
6. Regardless of how much we think we know, or how much experience we have, as Christians, we still walk by faith.

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#### **D. RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SIN (VV. 15-18)**

- 15 “I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.
- 16 Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?
- 17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?
- 18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:15–18, NASB95)

1. One of the difficult questions of life with which many a godly person has wrestled is, “Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?”
2. Solomon acknowledges having seen it himself: “there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness” (v. 15b).
3. Others in Scripture asked about this seeming inequity as well.
  - a. **Job:** “Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful” (Job 21:7).
  - b. **David:** “Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes” (Psalm 37:7).
  - c. **Asaph:** “For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind” (Psalm 73:3-5).
  - d. **Jeremiah:** “Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?” (Jeremiah 12:1).
4. The answer, as Asaph realized, is “the wicked appear to prosper only if you take the short view of things.”
5. Asaph said,

“When I pondered to understand this,  
It was troublesome in my sight  
Until I came into the sanctuary of God;  
Then I perceived their end.”

(Psalm 73: 16-17, NASB95)
6. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said of those who give, who pray and who fast to be seen by others “they have their reward in full” (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16).

7. Such individuals may gain the whole world, but lose their own soul  
(Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36, KJV).

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8. Verses 16-18 have been misunderstood by those who believe Solomon to be teaching the “golden mean” or “moderation” in everyday life.
9. In other words, “don’t be too righteous, but don’t be too great a sinner” either. Learn to “play it safe.”
10. So what is it that Solomon is saying?
11. In verse 16, Solomon urges us not to be “excessively righteous” or “overly wise” lest we “ruin (destroy)” ourselves.
  - a. It seems that the best way to interpret this is that Solomon is saying we should not depend on our righteousness or our wisdom to guarantee God’s blessing.
  - b. If we do, we may find ourselves confused, dismayed or disappointed like the righteous person who Solomon had seen perishing in spite of his or her righteousness.
12. In verse 17, Solomon also urges us not to be “excessively (overly) wicked . . . and a fool” lest we die before our time.
  - a. There are times when God does not punish us immediately. These should not be taken as a license to sin (“be excessively wicked”).
  - b. If we do this, God might judge us and we die before our time.
13. Solomon concludes his argument by stating “it is good” to follow both warnings — “the one who fears God” avoids both extremes, that of . . .
  - a. Depending on one’s own righteousness.
  - b. Becoming loose in one’s living (being overly wicked).

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## **II. Wisdom Helps Us Face Life Stronger**

### **A. THE STRENGTH WHICH WISDOM PROVIDES**

“Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:19, NASB95)

1. How is it that wisdom can strengthen a wise man?
2. In Job 28:28, Job said, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”
3. In Psalm 111:10, we find these words, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
4. Solomon said the exact same thing in Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
5. The reason that wisdom can strengthen a wise man is that a wise man fears the Lord.
6. In Psalm 112:1, the psalmist wrote, “how blessed is the man who fears the Lord” and then tells us some of those blessings:
  - a. “. . . he will never be shaken” (Psalm 112:6a).
  - b. “He will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord” (Psalm 112:7).
7. In Psalm 118:6, we find the psalmist saying, “The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”
  - ❑ It is because the wise person fears the Lord that he or she does not fear anyone or anything else.

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### **B. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS IN LIFE FOR WHICH WE NEED WISDOM’S STRENGTH?**

#### 1. *Sin*

“Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20, NASB95)

- a. This is no doubt something Solomon had learned from his father, David

(Psalm 14:1,3; 53:1,3).

“There is no one who does good . . . There is no one who does good, not even one” (Psalm 14:1,3; 53:1, 3).

- b. All of us here tonight are guilty of two types of sin:
  - 1) Sins of omission (we fail to do what God has told us to do).
  - 2) Sins of commission (we do that which God has told us not to do).
- c. The good news is that if we walk in the fear of the Lord and follow His wisdom, we will be able to defeat the evil one when he comes to tempt us.

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2. *What people say about us (vv. 21-22).*

“Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.” (Ecclesiastes 7:21–22, NASB95)

- a. The wise person will pay no attention either to gossip or to the false criticisms about him or her, because they have more important matters to which they must attend.
- b. Charles Spurgeon once told his students, “You cannot stop people’s tongues . . . therefore the best thing to do is to stop your own ears and never mind what is spoken. There is a world of idle chitchat abroad, and he who takes note of it will have enough to do” (*Lectures To My Students*; Marshall, Morgan, and Scott reprint edition, 1965; p. 321).
- c. If we are honest with ourselves, we must also admit that there are times when we have also said something about someone else.

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3. *Our inability to grasp the meaning of all that God is doing in this world (vv. 23-25).*

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“I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can

discover it? I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.” (Ecclesiastes 7:23–25, NASB95)

- a. Solomon admitted that, even with all his God-given wisdom, there were things which he could not understand.
- b. As with Job, when God questioned him, Solomon realized there are things about God’s creation which are “remote and exceedingly mysterious” — there are no final answers.
- c. The NEB translates verse 24 as, “Whatever has happened lies beyond our grasp, deep down, deeper than man can fathom.”
- d. In verse 25, Solomon used three terms — “to know, to investigate (search out) and to seek” — to describe his diligence in trying to comprehend “wisdom and the scheme of things.”
- e. He hoped to understand just how evil and foolish “folly” and “madness” are.
- f. A wise man knows what he does not know, and leaves the secret things to God (Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 139:6).

“The secret things belong to the Lord” (Deuteronomy 29:29a).

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:6).

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4. *The sinfulness of humanity in general (vv. 26-29).*

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“And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her. “Behold, I have discovered this,” says the Preacher, “adding one thing to another to find an explanation, which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one

man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

“Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.” (Ecclesiastes 7:26–29, NASB95)

- a. There has been some mystery as to the identity of the woman Solomon describes in verse 26 :
- b. Some suggest she is a prostitute or adulteress — thus the application would be to avoid sexual sin
- c. Others believe her to be the personification of that wickedness which is folly itself.
  - 1) She is the “strange woman” of whom we read in Proverbs 1-9.
  - 2) The noun “folly” (v. 25), which in Hebrew is a feminine noun, serves as the antecedent of “the woman.”
  - 3) This reasoning is corroborated by the tactics which folly uses to lure one away from wisdom’s embrace.
    - ❑ The point is: Foolishness is like a seductive woman, so beware for she will lead you to your demise. Be like a wise person who refuses to be captured by her. Use discretion as you travel this life.
- d. A third suggestion seems to combine the two — she is the ungodly woman.
  - 1) As with the two previous explanations the “one who is pleasing to God will escape her” while “the sinner will be captured by her.”
  - 2) In Solomon’s search for wisdom he encountered such women.
  - 3) In all of his searching, it seems that one of the things he was looking for was an “upright” man or woman.
  - 4) He found one man among a thousand, but such a woman was harder for him to find.

NOTE: Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1000 women). It is possible that he is saying out of all these women he did not find one who was truly a godly woman.

(Cf. 1 Kings 11:1-3)

- e. Verse 29 gives us the conclusion of Solomon's search:
- 1) Initially, all of God's creation was good.
  - 2) Mankind can understand and implement God's will.
  - 3) However, mankind is also creative and energetic in the area of evil and rebellion.
  - 4) Even though we are morally capable, we have a tendency to turn from God's will to self-will at every opportunity.

## **Conclusion**

1. Do you want your life to be better?
2. Do you want to see things in life more clearly?
3. Do you want to face life with greater strength?
4. Solomon tells us that wisdom makes all of this possible.
5. Most importantly, the God who provides such wisdom offers something far greater — a whole new life, found only in His Son, Jesus Christ.
6. He calls you tonight to get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent in this world and to receive God's implanted word which is able to save your soul (James 1:21).
7. Only God, through His Son, can bring cleansing to your soul and make you a part of His eternal family.
8. Tonight, will you repent of your sin, confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and be buried with Him in baptism so that this new life can begin?