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Wisdom when life is complex

Ecclesiastes 7-8, 9:11-18, 10

ECCLESIASTES 7

7 WISE SAYINGS

A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

- ² It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
since that is the end of all mankind,
and the living should take it to heart.
- ³ Grief is better than laughter,
for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad.
- ⁴ The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure.
- ⁵ It is better to listen to rebuke from a wise person
than to listen to the song of fools,
- ⁶ for like the crackling of burning thorns under the pot,
so is the laughter of the fool.

This too is futile.

- ⁷ Surely, the practice of extortion turns a wise person into a fool,
and a bribe corrupts the mind.

- ⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning;
a patient spirit is better than a proud spirit.

- ⁹ Don't let your spirit rush to be angry,
for anger abides in the heart of fools.

- ¹⁰ Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?"
since it is not wise of you to ask this.

- ¹¹ Wisdom is as good as an inheritance
and an advantage to those who see the sun,

- ¹² because wisdom is protection as silver is protection;
but the advantage of knowledge
is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

- ¹³ Consider the work of God,
for who can straighten out
what he has made crooked?

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that no one can discover anything that will come after him.

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ECCLESIASTES 8

AVOIDING EXTREMES

¹⁵ In my futile life I have seen everything: someone righteous perishes in spite of his righteousness, and someone wicked lives long in spite of his evil. ¹⁶ Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand. For the one who fears God will end up with both of them.

¹⁹ Wisdom makes the wise person stronger than ten rulers of a city.

²⁰ There is certainly no one righteous on the earth who does good and never sins.

²¹ Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you, ²² for in your heart you know that many times you yourself have cursed others.

WHAT THE TEACHER FOUND

²³ I have tested all this by wisdom. I resolved, "I will be wise," but it was beyond me. ²⁴ What exists is beyond reach and very deep. Who can discover it? ²⁵ I turned my thoughts to know, explore, and examine wisdom and an explanation for things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity and folly is madness. ²⁶ And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a trap: her heart a net and her hands chains. The one who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her. ²⁷ "Look," says the Teacher, "I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find out the explanation, ²⁸ which my soul continually searches for but does not find: I found one person in a thousand, but none of those was a woman. ²⁹ Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes."

8

WISDOM, AUTHORITIES, AND INEQUITIES

Who is like the wise person, and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A person's wisdom brightens his face, and the sternness of his face is changed.

² Keep the king's command because of your oath made before God. ³ Do not be in a hurry; leave his presence, and don't persist in a bad cause, since he will do whatever he wants.

⁴ For the king's word is authoritative, and who can say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵ The one who keeps a command will not experience anything harmful, and a wise heart knows the right time and procedure. ⁶ For every activity there is a right time and procedure, even

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ECCLESIASTES 9

though a person's troubles are heavy on him. ⁷Yet no one knows what will happen because who can tell him what will happen? ⁸No one has authority over the wind to restrain it, and there is no authority over the day of death; no one is discharged during battle, and wickedness will not allow those who practice it to escape. ⁹All this I have seen, applying my mind to all the work that is done under the sun, at a time when one person has authority over another to his harm.

¹⁰In such circumstances, I saw the wicked buried. They came and went from the holy place, and they were praised in the city where they did those things. This too is futile. ¹¹Because the sentence against an evil act is not carried out quickly, the heart of people is filled with the desire to commit evil. ¹²Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, I also know that it will go well with God-fearing people, for they are reverent before him. ¹³However, it will not go well with the wicked, and they will not lengthen their days like a shadow, for they are not reverent before God.

¹⁴There is a futility that is done on the earth: there are righteous people who get what the actions of the wicked deserve, and there are wicked people who get what the actions of the righteous deserve. I say that this too is futile. ¹⁵So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun.

¹⁶When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the activity that is done on the earth (even though one's eyes do not close in sleep day or night), ¹⁷I observed all the work of God and concluded that a person is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a person labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if a wise person claims to know it, he is unable to discover it.

9 THE LIMITATIONS OF WISDOM

...¹¹Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them. ¹²For certainly no one knows his time: like fish caught in a cruel net or like birds caught in a trap, so people are trapped in an evil time as it suddenly falls on them.

¹³I have observed that this also is wisdom under the sun, and it is significant to me: ¹⁴There was a small city with few men in it. A great king came against it, surrounded it, and built large siege works against it. ¹⁵Now a poor wise man was found in the city, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man. ¹⁶And I said, "Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of the poor man is despised, and his words are not heeded."

¹⁷ The calm words of the wise are heeded
more than the shouts of a ruler over fools.

¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war,
but one sinner can destroy much good.

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10 THE BURDEN OF FOLLY

Dead flies make a perfumer's oil ferment and stink;
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

² A wise person's heart goes to the right,
but a fool's heart to the left.

³ Even when the fool walks along the road, his heart lacks sense,
and he shows everyone he is a fool.

⁴ If the ruler's anger rises against you, don't leave your post,
for calmness puts great offenses to rest.

⁵ There is an evil I have seen under the sun, an error proceeding from the
presence of the ruler:

⁶ The fool is appointed to great heights,
but the rich remain in lowly positions.

⁷ I have seen slaves on horses,
but princes walking on the ground like slaves.

⁸ The one who digs a pit may fall into it,
and the one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

⁹ The one who quarries stones may be hurt by them;
the one who splits logs may be endangered by them.

¹⁰ If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen its edge,
then one must exert more strength;
however, the advantage of wisdom is that it brings success.

¹¹ If the snake bites before it is charmed,
then there is no advantage for the charmer.

¹² The words from the mouth of a wise person are gracious,
but the lips of a fool consume him.

¹³ The beginning of the words from his mouth is folly,
but the end of his speaking is evil madness;

¹⁴ yet the fool multiplies words.
No one knows what will happen,
and who can tell anyone what will happen after him?

¹⁵ The struggles of fools weary them,
for they don't know how to go to the city.

¹⁶ Woe to you, land, when your king is a youth
and your princes feast in the morning.

Life Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

What is something in life you wish someone would have taught you earlier? Or, put another way, what is something about life that you hoped would make sense by now, but still doesn't make sense? _____

Look Down

How do these verses redefine what wisdom looks like in a world that often feels unfair and unknowable? _____

Look Out

Where do people today struggle with the idea that life isn't always fair or predictable?

Look In

What practices help us stay humble about what we know and don't know about how God may be working amid complex life circumstances and world events? _____



Family Discussion Questions

Questions for Kids

Can you think of a time when you tried your best, but things didn't turn out how you wanted? _____

How does knowing Jesus is in control help when things feel unfair or confusing? _____

Questions for Youth

When life is a confusing mix of good and bad, what helps you trust God? _____

In these complex seasons, how do we still enjoy the life God gives us? _____

RHYTHM
REMINDER



Prayer

