

Wisdom: The Foundation for a Meaningful Life, Part 1

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

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Theme and Text: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 7:1-29**. The title of tonight's message is "Wisdom: The Foundation for a Meaningful Life".

We all want to have a meaningful life. If we are married, we want to grow old together. If you have children, you want to see your children and grandchildren follow Christ. You want to make a difference for Christ. Living the "good life" is not about how much money or pleasure or knowledge you have. It's about wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to make practical decisions in a way that is in line with God's will.

Proverbs 4:7 says, "Wisdom is the principal thing: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight."

What is wisdom? Wisdom is essentially knowing how to live right, but it is not only that. It is right living for the right reason. It is right living for the Lord's sake.

Who are the Wise? Believers!

When the Bible talks about the "wise" it is talking about believers, plain and simple. Look at **Proverbs 9:10**, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."

It doesn't matter what seems right to us. **Proverbs 16:25**, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

Clearly the New Testament teaches us that ultimate wisdom cannot be had apart from knowing Jesus Christ.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1:24**, "but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Christ is called the Word (Jn. 1:1) and the Truth (Jn. 14:6). He is wisdom! To know Him and to fear Him and to live with Him as the center of your life is WISDOM.

Therefore, Ecclesiastes, which points us to the meaning of life gives us first the concern of wise people. We won't spend much time here since this is review from last week.

- I. The **Heart** of the Wise (vs. 1-6). The wise are careful, serious minded people (vs. 1-6). They take the gift of life seriously. They are responsible people, and they use all the gifts of God carefully. You will die well if you live wisely.

Verse 2, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart”.

Verse 4, “The **heart** of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth”

The wise do not ultimately center their lives around life under the sun. They live for eternity.

II. The **Character** of the Wise (vs. 7-10).

A. Wise people are **pure**. They cannot be intimidated or bought. **Ecclesiastes 7:7**, “Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”
Is it your desire to please God?

1. When people oppress, pressure and manipulate us, we are tempted to **give people their way**, to enable them, to patronize them. When they pressure and intimidate. This happens on all levels of society. It drives wise people to madness!
2. When people entice us through what they can do for us, they’ll do something for us if we give them their way, that is bribery.

God’s people are pure! They cannot be intimidated or bought.

Ephesians 5:9, “...the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and **true**”. Their goal is to please God, not people. They have integrity. When you hold them up to the light, they are sincere people. For them to live is Christ.

Let’s see something else about the character of believers. They are patient.

B. Wise people are **patient**. **Verse 8**, “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.”

Galatians 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**...”
Patience is the ability to rest in God’s control, and to suffer long. The opposite of that is sinful anger.

1. We lose patience when we are controlled by **emotion**. Look at **verse 9**, “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.” Fools are shortsighted and overly sensitive.

Application: Do you take what people say personally and get angry?

The fruit of lost people is to get angry when they don't get their way. We cannot be controlled by that.

2. Others become impatient when they are controlled by **circumstances**.
Verse 10, "Say not, 'Why were the former days better than these?'" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this."

Application: Do you get depressed when you see life going up and down? Are you controlled by circumstances?

Let me read **verse 8** again, "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit."

God's people take the long view.

Look at **2 Peter 1:5-11**, "...make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so **nearsighted** that he is **blind**, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, **be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure**, for if you **practice** these qualities you will never fall. 11 For **in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**".

The motivation for continuing in holiness, self-denial, and a separation from the world and worldliness is our "**entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**". We can suffer long if there is something worth suffering for! Christ is our treasure! We long to see Him! It doesn't matter how we start, but how we finish! "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning..." (**verse 8**).

III. The **Treasure** of the Wise (vs. 11-15). The wise treasure certain things. They don't treasure money. They don't think everything has to go their way.

- A. Wise people treasure the **wisdom** of God more than money (vs. 11-12). **Verse 11-12**, "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an **advantage** to those who see the sun. 12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that **wisdom preserves the life of him who has it**."
The wise don't treasure money. They treasure eternal life!

Illustration: Have you ever seen a wise person become very rich through their wisdom, and then you notice their children who do not have a clue? Riches are fine, but a greater advantage is wisdom.

Application: Truly wise people have something that is a protection like riches. Riches can protect us from many things on a superficial level. It can get us good health insurance, it can buy us a house in a secure neighborhood. We can get a security system.

But wisdom is better, because it gets eternal spiritual protection.

Mark 8:36, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

We can say with Job in **Job 19:25-26**, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, 27 whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”.

- B. Wise people treasure the **will** of God more than peace and prosperity. The wise don't think everything has to go their way. Some people are all about making their life happier. They are tossed about by the crazy circumstances of life. Instead the wise consider God and His plans.

Verse 13, “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?”

God sometimes makes our days crooked. By “crooked” Solomon is not saying morally crooked. God could never be the author of evil. He is talking about difficulty. There are times when things are going along just fine, and BOOM, we are brought to a crooked place.

1. What should our response be to the **difficulties** that are part of God's will? (vs. 14). What are we to do?

Verse 14 tells us, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.”

The reason God sends adversity is that you will become dependent on God. You will never be like God in knowing what tomorrow brings. Stop worrying about your situation and accept the adversity as a pathway to draw near to God.

2. What about the seeming **discrimination** sometimes against God's people? (vs. 15). Solomon has an answer for that as well. **Verse 15**, “In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.” We all wish we could straighten out the injustices in this life. But

understand we are all going to stand before the Lord. The sheep and the goats will all give an account. Injustice is ultimately against God, and He will settle it. Be wise and trust in Christ!

- IV. The **Balance** of the Wise (vs. 16-18). Believer ought to be reasonable, balanced people. There is a predictability with them. They don't go off on tangents.

Verses 16-18, “Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? 18 **It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.**”

The Amplified Bible puts it this way, “Be not [morbidly exacting and externally] righteous overmuch, neither strive to make yourself [pretentiously appear] overwise--why should you [get puffed up and] destroy yourself [with presumptuous self-sufficiency]? ¹⁷ [Although all have sinned] be not wicked overmuch or willfully, neither be foolish--why should you die before your time?”

- A. Don't be **legalistic** (vs. 16). Solomon was not saying we should not be righteous and morally holy. He was telling us to avoid being the overly zealous individual who is so concerned about externals and legalistic rules. God is concerned about the heart.
- B. Don't live with **license** (vs. 17). Neither should we be unconcerned about God's law and be wicked. Paul asked the question, “Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?” If you do that, you may very well “die before your time” (vs. 18). “God is not mocked”!
- C. What is the **answer** (vs. 18)? “**It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.**” Live in the face of God and in the fear of God. Don't ever let go of living in the presence of the Lord, and you will be delivered from both legalism and license.

- V. The **Power** of the Wise (vs. 19-29). Wise people are **powerful**. **Verse 19**, “Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city”. What is their secret? Apart from what Solomon has already mentioned, consider the following.

- A. The wise are not overly distressed by **people** (vs. 20-22). People are not to be ultimately trusted. “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. 21 Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. 22 Your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.”

Jeremiah 17:5, “Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.”

You are wise if you do not allow people to control your outlook on life. People make their own choices. We cannot control the choices of other people.

- B. The wise are not overly **proud** (vs. 23-25). The wise realize they have not arrived! “All this I have **tested** by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. 24 That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can **find** it out? 25 I turned my heart to **know** and to **search** out and to **seek** wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.”

There is a real humility with wise people. They realize that God is so vast and so great and so amazing, that we all end up saying with Solomon, the wisest man in the world, ““I will be wise,” but it was far from me.” (verse 23).

- C. The wise are not controlled by **passion** and **pornography** (vs. 26). “And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her”.
- D. The wise understand the answer is not found in **human philosophy**. (vs. 27-29). “Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— 28 which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. 29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

So where does Solomon get his answers? He alludes to it in almost every chapter. He speaks in **verse 18** of “the one who fears God.”

Conclusion: What is the essence of wisdom? It could be said many ways. Paul said, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”. Do you fear the Lord? Do you live for Him? Is He the very center of your life? We cannot play with God. We will not find the answers among human philosophies.

But even “unlearned fisherman” were the wisest men that walked the earth. If you want to be wise, seek Jesus Christ! He is the “wisdom and the power of God”.