

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES “THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

STUDY NUMBER SIX – Wisdom from the Pits; Digging Out of Depression; Thinking Through Trauma 7:1 – 8:17

TEXT:

v. 1 A Good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

v. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.

v. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.

v. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

v. 5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.

v. 6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools.

v. 7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

v. 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

v. 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

v. 10 Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.

v. 11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.

v. 12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

v. 13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

v. 14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

v. 15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

v. 16 Do not be over righteous, neither be overwise – why destroy yourself?

v. 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool – why die before your time?

v. 18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

v. 19 Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

v. 20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

v. 21 Do not pay attention to every word people say or you may hear your servant cursing you –

v. 22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

v. 23 All this I tested by wisdom and I said, “I am determined to be wise” – but this was beyond me.

v. 24 Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound – who can discover it?

v. 25 So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.

v. 26 I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

v. 27 “Look,” says the Teacher, “this is what I have discovered: “Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things –

v. 28 while I was still searching but not finding – I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.

v. 29 This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.”

8:v.1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance.

v. 2 Obey the king’s command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

v. 3 Do not be in a hurry to leave the king’s presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases.

v. 4 Since a king’s word is supreme, who can say to him, “What are you doing?”

v. 5 Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.

v. 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man’s misery weighs heavily upon him.

v. 7 Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?

v. 8 No man has power over the wind to contain it; so, no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

v. 9 All this I saw, as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun.

v. 10 Then too, I saw the wicked buried – those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

v. 11 When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.

v. 12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.

v. 13 Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

v. 14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

v. 15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

v. 16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth – his eyes not seeing sleep day or night –

v. 17 then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

INTRODUCTION:

Reuel Howe in his book The Creative Years says, "Our crowd sure fits the description. We men are an ulcerous, tension-ridden, sex-obsessed, money-mad bunch who are too busy and too tired to enjoy life. And our women match us with their worry about diets and double chins, with the problems of modern women and modern children. Both of us are lonely and scared. We are lonely because we have lost our own youth with the hopes that we had and we're scared because of the oncoming youth that even now is pushing us aside. I guess we are afraid life is over for us and we need more than Geritol."

The old body isn't as good as it used to be. Doc says that I am at the age when I must live right. He means to easy on the drinks, late nights, too vigorous exercise. He's right, sure. But that's not what gets me down. It's the tension, the competition with the other guy like Jim Crowthers, who's crowding up from the bottom. I'm in a big squeeze. The other fellows are in it but we don't let on to each other that we are. It's sure lonely. If misery loves company, wonder why we don't admit it. It might relax things a bit. If I'm lucky, I'll enjoy the tidy finish of a heart attack. Otherwise, I'll enjoy the more moderate blessing of uselessness and senility until the benefits of social security.

One of the burning problems of mid-life is the depression which develops because of problems and difficulties that seem overwhelming.

Psalms 42 describes the picture –

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, Where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul; how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me, therefore I will remember you from the

land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me, prayer to God of my life. I say to God my rock, Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony, as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, Where is your God? Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

Stuart Briscoe, when he speaks on this 42nd Psalm, points out, “Then David talked about ‘God my rock’. This is a beautiful sort of thing a depressed person should meditate on. When all seems lost and you have an awful sinking feeling, what could be better than to know that there is a rock beneath you upon which you can stand when you’re through sinking? He can bear your weight. He will not shift position. ‘God...is the health of my countenance.’ This is a beautiful expression. There is no doubt that a depressed person often shows on his face what is going on inside his head. But the Lord can make all the difference. He can bring health to a countenance. That means that he can so fill your thoughts that you get off yourself and your woes and get on to Him and His blessings. Then your face will change.

“One thing remains to be said. After careful self-evaluation, self-confrontation, and self-discipline comes the direct command to the depressed soul: ‘Hope thou in God’. This is the final key to over-coming depression. When a believer sinks into spiritual depression, it is because of lost hope, lost confidence, lost trust. Next time that happens to you, here’s what to do:

- Examine the causes of depression
- Remind your will of the need to act positively
- Channel your mind into thoughts of God
- Say to yourself: ‘Hope thou in God’

Get your trust where it belongs and God will get your depression where it belongs – in depths of the sea.

David determined to remember the Lord even though the very environment in which he was going to do the remembering was hostile. He only had to look around him to be reminded of the circumstances that depressed him, but he made up his mind to look away to the Lord. He had to concentrate on the Lord to succeed, but he believed God would enable him to do it. You must learn to do this. If it is your hospital room that depresses you, make a definite decision to turn your eyes from the bed to the Bible. If it is your small children who are getting you down, turn your eyes from diapers once in a while to the crown that will be yours when they are raised to the glory of God. Another thing. Don’t keep the depression bottled up inside. Make up your mind to ‘say to God’ what is on your heart. Say it aloud. Not because He is hard of hearing but because it is good for you to listen to what you

expect Him to listen to! Start talking to Him. Make up your mind to do this. It will stop your pouting and start you moving. The word praise may seem strangely out of place in a discussion of depression but it appears in a psalm on depression so it must be fitting. 'I shall yet praise Him,' David said. To understand this, you must take a look at the things David said about the Lord and the special relationship they enjoyed together. His heart became so full of considerations of his God that he found his lips and his heart breaking out in praise and thanksgiving. I know of no better cure for depression than praise. Not the empty noise that some people seem to mistake for praise. Nor do we need the evasion of truth and the escape into unreality that some call victory. But the intelligent concentration of the mind on the Lord, to such a degree that the heart becomes warm from the truth the mind is pondering, can work wonders.

Martin Lloyd Jones in his book Spiritual Depression says, "How do we reconcile the two things in this way? I say that we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing ourselves to talk to us. Do you realize what that means? I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression, in a sense, is this that we allow ourselves to talk to us instead of talking to our self. Am I just trying to be deliberately paradoxical? Far from it. This is the very essence of wisdom in this matter. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you awake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they start talking to you. They bring back the problems of yesterday. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Yourself is talking to you. Now this man's treatment was this. Instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him, so he stands up and says, 'Self, listen for a moment. I will speak to you.' Do you know what I mean? If you do not, you have had but little experience. The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand. You have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul, 'Why art thou cast down?' What business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself. Upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself, 'Hope thou in God,' instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God – Who God is and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged himself to do."

Indeed, I can put it finally like this: the ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief. For if it were not for unbelief even the devil could do nothing. It is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to God that we go down before him and fall before his attacks. That is why the psalmist keeps on saying to himself: 'Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him...' He reminds himself of God. Why? Because he was depressed and had forgotten God, so that his faith and his belief in God and in God's power, and in his relationship to God, were not what they ought to

be. We can indeed sum it all up by saying that the final and ultimate cause is just sheer unbelief.

Charlie Jones in his book Life is Tremendous tells us how to really handle the problems that perplex us and that lead to depression. “Flexible Planning says: plan on your plan going wrong so that you’re ready with an alternate plan because “That’s my plan!” Do you know that a lot of people are miserable because they expect everything to go right? They’re asking for misery! I expect things to go wrong, and so I’m jubilant all the time! A smart guy asked me: ‘What if something goes right?’ Easy; I can work it in. I haven’t had much trouble with that yet! Try this tomorrow morning when you start out. Say, “Lord, send me some miserable problems today.” I’ve done it, and no sooner did I get started than I said, ‘You sure answered that prayer in a hurry.’ You may say you don’t have to pray such a prayer – the miserable problems come anyway. But you aren’t prepared for them, are you?”

“Flexible Planning says to have a plan that enables you to roll with the punches, to adapt and adjust. Be learning to capitalize on things that go wrong, making them stepping stones of progress. That makes the “wrong” things “right,” an exchange that anyone should appreciate.

Thus far in our series of studies in the book of Ecclesiastes we have seen the foundation for the mid-life in chapter 1:2: Here Solomon says, “Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.”

In bearing out this thesis he raises the question: (1) What is the gain from my labor? (2) What else is new? (3) Who is going to remember what I do anyway?

This brought us to chapter 2 where we see Solomon testing life against pleasure, the building of great projects and the frustration of finding that all that he had acquired was going to be given to somebody else.

In study #3 we saw the sovereign hand of God and a man in mid-life is bumping up against God’s ultimate purpose with the frustrations that he is often facing. Study #4 we saw oppression and the power struggle creating a scene of suffering. In the conclusion of that study we saw the man turn toward God.

In study #5 we talked about being snared by materialism. And Solomon summarized it pretty well in the statement, “Whoever loves money never has money enough. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.”

This now brings us to chapter 7 and 8 where we are going to be seeing Wisdom from the Pits; Digging Out of Depression; Thinking Through Trauma 7:1-8:17.

v. 1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

Veldey points out, “Having come to the conclusion that man cannot rely on either the present or the future, and having asked what is good for man, Solomon gives some suggestions on how to make the most of our difficulties. He suggests that man cultivate sobriety instead of frivolity. Life’s sorrows properly met develop depth of character. The frivolous are shallow, without depth or substance like the crackling of metals under kettles. When I am in trouble, I shall to go someone who has himself gone through much trouble, and there I shall find understanding and help.”

Leupold points out, “Perhaps amore satisfactory approach would be to say simply, the first verse must be kept in close connection with what follows. The day of death is better than the day of birth insofar as good lessons are to be learned by those who go to the house of mourning with their hearts open for instruction.”

Robert Browning Hamilton’s little poem pretty well describes it:

“I walked a mile with Pleasure, she chattered all the way
But left me none the wiser for all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow, and not a word said she
But oh, the things I learned from her, when sorrow walked with me.”

v. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.

Solomon does not say that a man should never to the house of feasting. He simply says that lessons of wisdom may be learned at the funeral which cannot be learned at the festival. In the house of mourning we are reminded of our own mortality. Our pride is checked. The spirit of sympathy within us is deepened. And all this tends to make us wiser and better men. Sorrow is better than laughter for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. Solomon, indeed, had already said that there is a time to laugh. And, doubtless, he recognized the fact that innocent laughter has its own uses in the economy of human life. But he felt that so far as the highest objects of life are concerned, a man is more likely to be benefitted and blessed by sorrow than by laughter.

v. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.

v. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

Jennings points out, “More than at any other time a solid foundation for comfort is needed in times of deep grief. Then the hosts of darkness press round the dismayed

spirit. Clouds of darkness roll across the blackened sky. The sun and all light is hidden. In the storm rack the fiery darts of the wicked one fall thick as rain. Every long-accepted truth is questioned. The very foundations seem to dissolve. A firm foothold, indeed, must we have on which to stand at such a time. Faith must be seen not at war with her poor blind or at least short-sighted sister Reason, but in perfect accord, leading her with her feeble powers by the hand. But here is where the world's efforts to comfort and indeed, alas, the worldly Christians too stand fast on airy speculations and to distill comfort from wax flowers, as it were, the creations of the imagination. How solid the comfort here given in contrast with all this."

Charles Bridges points out, "When the solemn messenger knocks, when his entrance spreads a pall over the joyous house, then indeed does he speak to the heart. Seal his impression there and stir up the inquiry, How may I meet the crisis in peace, confidence and acceptance. And then comes insight the remedy, most welcome because most fitting to the sinner's case. Sin, his disorder; Christ, his physician; pain, his medicine; the Bible, his support; the grave, his bed; and death itself, an angel, expressly sent to release the worn-out laborer or crown the faithful soldier. The bitter is before the sweet and that also will make the sweet sweeter."

Solomon says, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." We have already noted Solomon's pursuit of pleasure back in chapter 2 and his evaluation of that as being meaningless.

Here we are disciplined to lessons of inestimable value. We obtain the knowledge of that dark mystery, our own hearts. We learn the Christian alphabet and spell out in the Lord's dealings the letters of wisdom – forbearance, faithfulness and love. We study the Christian dictionary and often find such views of the character of God and his ways presented to us as a whole life of ordinary study and contemplation could not have set forth. We find the Bible to be a book of realities. We cannot but bear our witness to it. We have felt its power. "I believed and therefore have I spoken." Now then let us take the balance and see. Is not sorrow better than laughter? It is not only a school of instruction but the house of consolation. "By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." Here is meat to eat that the world knows not of. Thanks be to God who causes us always in sorrow not less than in comfort to triumph in Christ. We hear our Father's voice. We live on his promise. We assure ourselves with undoubted confidence in his power to make every promise good, to perform it even more than we have anticipated. And our answer to the question is joyfully given, All is well. Bless my trials thus to sever me forever from the love of self and sin. Let me through them see thee clearer, find thee nearer, grow more like to thee within.

v. 5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.

v. 6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.

Leupold points out, “Having by way of contrast or comparison demonstrated the value of suffering, which for the present appears as grief, the author, goes on to show how we are to meet suffering if it is really to prove valuable to us. It is to be met by harkening to the rebuke of the wise. In this instance the Preacher again employs a contrast, dwelling primarily on the wrong way of meeting it, inasmuch as this way was by far the most common.”

Swindoll points out that “God instructs us in a context of trust, not suspicion. I trust you, Lord. When you turn your situation over to man, there will often be suspicion that you will make the mistake again. Man will be there with 17 warnings, 6 sermons, 2 songs and a poem to back them up and a long, long index finger driving itself into your chest saying, You’d better watch that. God instructs us in a context of trust, not suspicion.

v. 7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Here Solomon gives a warning with his wisdom. “Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”

How often have we seen this in government and the tragic results of such activity.

v. 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

Bridges points out, “The first clause is not indeed a universal maxim. Sometimes and that is that in the most important of all matters the ending is far worse than the beginning thereof. Yet it often holds good. Solomon had already given an example in verse 1, in the instance just to. The oppressor may appear to have the advantage at first but the end may bring him low. The ordinary trials of the Christian life are grievous in the beginning but fruitful in the end. Therefore, whatever be the trial of faith, never despond. Never look at the present dark face of things except in connection with the will of God’s love.”

The joy of the Christian expressed in the time of suffering is the joy of anticipation of how the Lord is going to use this trauma to bring about triumph in the life.

Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

The second clause of our verse naturally contrasts patience with pride. Pride is the source of impatience, as humility is the principle of gentleness and endurance. Our

patience harmonizes with the will of God and ministers to our comfort as pride does to our trouble. Blessed grace, exclaimed the saintly Martin. How it smooths the furrows of care and guilds the dark paths of life. It will make us kind and enable us to do more for God and the Gospel than the most fervent zeal without it. Every way, therefore, better is the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit. The one waits for the end, the other in the impatience of self-will revolts.

Foster in his book Celebration of Discipline points out, “More than any other single way the grace of humility is worked into our lives through the discipline of service. Humility, as we all know, is one of those virtues that is never gained by seeking it. The more we pursue it, the more distant it becomes. To think we have it is sure evidence that we don’t. Therefore, most of us assume there is nothing we can do to gain this prize Christian virtue and so we do nothing. There is something we can do. We do not need to go through life faintly hoping that someday humility may fall upon our heads. Of all the classical spiritual disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is for the most part a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirit.”

Swindoll points out, “I have learned that waiting involves trusting. I have learned that waiting includes praying. I have learned that waiting implies resting. I promise you God will keep His word if you are only willing to wait.”

v. 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Ephesians 4:26, 27 “Be angry and yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And do not give the devil an opportunity.

David Augsburger in his book The Freedom of Forgiveness says, “Wisdom is always on the side of self-control. This should be obvious to us in the fact that we never get angry just once. It’s always twice. Once at the other person and later, as we come to our senses, at ourselves. There are few things more bitter than just feeling bitter toward others and yourself. A man’s temper venom poisons himself more than his victim. Not long ago a parlor car on one of the major railways a man with only a coach ticket wandered in and took someone else’s seat, innocently unaware of the small mistake. The trainman, checking tickets, mercilessly balled him out. As the man left the car, another passenger asked him hotly, ‘Say, why didn’t you poke that conductor in the nose? At least, report him to his superiors.’ ‘Oh, no,’ replied the gentleman. ‘If a man like that can stand himself all his life, surely I can stand him for two minutes.’ A good definition of temper is a method of punishing ourselves for other people’s sins. Temper is dangerous medically. Dr. Willard Harris of Ohio State University reports that anger and fear affect the heart in identical ways. The pulse speeds up and the breathing rate doubles. Dr. John Henderson writes, ‘Acute anger has been associated with an acute heart attack. Heart damage can be done

with repeated bouts of anger over a long period of time. But more serious is the sickness a hair trigger temper produces in a man's personality. It prevents personal and social development, halts all spiritual progress, cuts him off from fellow humans and blocks all good judgment. Temper is a sign of weakness, not strength. When you are in the right, you can afford to keep your temper. When you are in the wrong, you can't afford to lose it.

In summary, to live with hostility and angry emotions admit they are a problem to you. Don't just repress them and don't just express them on others. Confess them by owning up to God and to another honest person who is following Christ in life. Then open up to God, to God's love, to God's truth, to God's word. Let Him enter, control and cleanse your life to its depths with His healing love. He can only go as far and as deep as you will let him go.

Oswald Chambers points out, "All through the Bible emphasis is laid steadily on patience. Three things test a man's patience: himself, God and other people. A good illustration of patience is that of a bow and arrow in the hand of God. He is not aiming at what you are aiming at nor is He asking your permission. He has you in his hands for his own purpose and he strains to the last limit, then he lets fly and the arrow goes straight to his goal. Our Lord says, 'Acquire your soul with patience.' Don't get impatient with yourself."

v. 10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.

MacDonald points out, "Another foolish activity is living in the past. When we constantly harp on the 'good old days' and wish they would return because they were so much better, we are living in a world of unreality. Better to face conditions as they are and live triumphantly in spite of them. Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Philippians 3:13 "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead."

Hebrews 12:2 "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

v. 11 Wisdom like an inheritance is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.

In I Kings chapter 3:9 Solomon, as he is communing with the Lord, requests, "O give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of thine." It was pleasing

in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing and God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice. Behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you nor shall one like you arise after you.” When Solomon speaks then of wisdom he speaks from personal experience.

v.12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom let him asks of God who gives to all men generously and without reproach and it will be given to him.

v.13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

Here Solomon is pointing out the advantages of wisdom when it comes to seeing the sovereign purpose of God, to rightly relate to circumstances in life, one must walk in wisdom as he has spoken of in the previous verses. We cannot straighten what he has made crooked. We cannot change his vast eternal plan, which determines the direction of our lives.

v.14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

Even as we have seen back in chapter three, there is a time and a season for every activity and the sovereign purpose of God is being carried out in all the circumstances of life. He says that when times are good we can be happy, but when they are bad it's a time for internal investigation for us to consider, that God is the author of one as well as the author of the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

Bridges points out, “This day is indeed most important not only as our school of discipline but as the test of our improvement in the school for if prosperity doth best discover vices, adversity doth best discover virtue. The diligent improvement of this day brings with it a mighty blessing. The internal malady is checked, creature dependence is put away. In the darkest hour of the day we can look up with confidence and enjoyment, all is passing away and withering but thou art my portion O Lord. Give me faith to believe all thy love to me.”

v. 15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

v. 16 Do not be over-righteous, neither be overwise – why destroy yourself?

v. 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool – why die before your time?

v. 18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

The key to what Solomon is saying is from the last phrase in verse 18, “The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.”

Veldey points out, “Now Solomon advocates what might be called the Golden Mean. But in so doing, he does not mean that moderate wickedness is allowable. A strict Pharisaic legalism is bad but that does not mean that a man can then indulge himself. Liberty is not license. If God is properly worshiped, man will live a well-balanced life.”

Bridges points out, “Even in well-doing, there may be over-doing. And in this over-doing may inadvertently progress toward undoing. Indeed, much of this is not religion but superstition, which is not the excess of godliness, but the misdirection of it. The exhausting of it in the vanity of man’s devising. It is important that our religion should be reasonable, consistent, uniform, not a matter of opinion but of the heart. Great indeed is our need and constant should be our prayer, ‘Oh let me have understanding in the way of godliness.’”

Richard DeHaan points out, “I like the comment of A.R. Fausset, ‘There cannot be over much of the righteousness that is by faith but there is over much of the righteousness that consists in punctiliousness as to external ordinances when these are substituted for the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, faith and love of God. And when they blind a man to his utter guiltiness. The second wrong reaction is that of going down the road of lustful living, giving one’s self over to unbridled sensuality. When Solomon says, “Be not wicked over much”, he is not implying that we may be a little bit wicked. No, indeed. He is merely setting up the antithesis to the other peril of self-righteousness. Many who see apparently good people suffer adversity or die young go down the pathway of a false and artificial works religion, while others go down the road of unrestrained wickedness. Both courses will lead to disaster.’”

Robert Foster says, “Here in the seventh chapter, Solomon is admonishing us that both in well doing and evil doing there may be over doing that ends in undoing. The danger in excess, as well as the danger in defect, going too far and in stopping too short, both contain the hazards of extreme. Don’t go overboard. Keep everything in proper perspective. Is it possible to be too religious? This caution is against the counterfeit, the sham righteousness of talking too much, mere outward show, the emphasis upon the external, legalism, pressed out of measure and proportion,

overmuch righteousness are the trifles magnified unduly. The rules and regulations of Christian living become the priorities. This overdose of true Christianity is not the excess of godliness but the misdirection of it, the exhausting of it in the vanity of a man's selfish exploitation. This is not a challenge against too much righteousness. We cannot love God too warmly nor honor Him too highly nor serve Him too earnestly, nor trust Him too implicitly, nor pray to Him too assuredly. Our prime duty is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. This is a challenge against the formalist, the externalist, the insincere possessor who would use Christ and His church but refuses to be used by Christ and His church."

v. 19 Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city. Solomon says that wisdom puts a man in a more powerful position than even ten rulers in a city.

v. 20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Romans 3:10 "As it is written, there is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become useless. There is none who does good. There is not even one."

v. 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.

v. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

This is hardly the way we would normally evaluate humanity but this is God's evaluation of us. Let's sum it all up in baseball language. There are all kinds of ball players in the major leagues. There's the poor player who has a .180 batting average. There's the good player who hits .275 and then there is the batting champ who comes up with an amazing .394. But who bats 1,000? God looks at man and sees him stepping up to the plate, grounding out and striking out time and again, even though once in a while he manages to get a double off the boards. Even for the best of us, it's a pretty poor performance. No one bats a thousand.

John Erickson points out, "We do our best to live godly lives, to stay within the boundary lines of God's commandments, making every effort not to go out of bounds. And yet, by our own willingness or errors, or because we are pressured by other forces around us, we sometimes find ourselves out of bounds. Once outside the confines of the game, be it basketball or life, we are of little value. As a matter of fact, we are of no value. I have often chided my players about not being able to score from out-of-bounds. So, once they are out-of-bounds, it is necessary to get back onto the court as quickly as possible. This is also true in our personal lives. We often try to participate in life while standing out-of-bounds. This is of no significance because we are not in the game. We are most fortunate that God's

rules are made for us and that the initial in-bounds play is not difficult if we trust in Him. We cannot buy our way in or earn our way onto His court but rather God, through His grace and love, brings us into the game through our repentance and faith.”

A governor of Texas spoke to the assembled convicts of a penitentiary of that state. He finished by saying that he would remain to listen if any man wanted to speak with him. He further announced that what he heard would be held in confidence. Nothing a man might tell him would be used against the man. When the meeting was over, a large group of men remained, many of them life-termers. One by one they each told the governor that he was there through a frame-up, an injustice, a judicial blunder. Each asked that he be freed. Finally, one man came up and said, “Mr. Governor, I just want to say that I am guilty. I did what they sent me here for but I believe I have paid for it. If I were granted the right to go out, I would do everything I could to be a good citizen and prove myself worthy of your mercy.” This man the governor pardoned. So, must it be with the great God who alone can pardon. The one difference is that we cannot say that we have paid for any of it. We can come and say, “O God, I just want to say that I am guilty. I am a sinner, a rebel against thy power and thy justice. But I believe that Jesus Christ paid for my sin. If in thy mercy, because of Him, thou wilt take me out of darkness into light, I will live as one who is alive from the dead.” This, of course, is the man whom God pardons.

v. 21 Do not pay attention to every word people say or you may hear your servant cursing you –

Sticks and stones may hurt my bones but words will never hurt me.

It is Paxton Hood who says, “When we advance a little in life, we find that the tongue of man creates nearly all the mischief of the world.”

Someone has said, “If each knew what one said about the other, there would not be two friends left in the world.”

v. 22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Here Solomon gives the reason for his previous admonition: “Do not pay attention to every word people say.”

v. 23 All this I tested by wisdom and I said, “I am determined to be wise” – but this was beyond me.

v. 24 Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound – who can discover it?

Solomon here speaks of the frustration of his pursuit of wisdom and raises the question, “Who can discover it?”

v. 25 So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.

Romans 11:33, 34 “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and unfathomable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who became his counsellor?”

v. 26 I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

DeHaan points out, “When standing at the crossroads, take the route marked out by God’s revelation. Stay off the crowded road of human wisdom that leads nowhere. The inspired writer undoubtedly remembered the days when he tried to solve life’s problems through secular wisdom and now he contrasts the truth that comes from God with the speculations that originate in the minds of men. He portrays human philosophy as a lewd, seductive woman, who repeatedly entices men to follow her, then leads them to shame and despair. A careful reading of verses 23 -25 establishes the fact that Solomon is discussing the quest for human wisdom not the dangers of fast women. He says that when he thought he could gain an understanding of life through study, he found the solution to be far from me and exceedingly deep. Following the pattern established in Proverbs, he speaks of the woman whose heart is snares and nets. To view these verses as only a warning against harlots is to do an injustice to the context. Solomon is presenting us with a comparison. Even as a man who has been beguiled by an evil woman may afterwards say that the consequences are worse than death, so the person who succumbs to the allurements of man’s wisdom may suffer the same pangs of remorse. The terms ‘snare’ and ‘nets’ and ‘bands’ used to describe the woman suggest the fact that human wisdom binds a person to a thought system that leads to hell. This warning applies to our day more than ever before. Existentialism, the prevailing philosophy of contemporary man, has plunged many people over the brink of despair. One who has been trapped in this way of thinking must seek deliverance by calling upon the Lord, for he can never break free through his own strength and intelligence.”

Leupold points out, “Since at the beginning of the chapter the discussion is still on the subject of wisdom, it cannot seem strange if we claim that here the discussion centers wholly on the same subject, otherwise we run into the reprehensible interpretation which has the author, without any apparent warrant, yea, without

rhyme or reason, skip from one subject to another that is quite unrelated to the preceding. We maintain, then, that the strange woman is heathen philosophy or any form of human philosophy, even as she is in the book of Proverbs. Since Ecclesiastes freely cites earlier books, we need not be surprised to find this book taking the same view as Proverbs does on this matter. It seems quite obvious that Proverbs cannot have intended anything other than that the warnings against a strange woman be construed as referring to heathen philosophy.”

James 3:15-18 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

v. 27 “Look” says the Teacher, “this is what I have discovered: “Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things –

v. 28 while I was still searching but not finding – I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.

Leupold points out, “This word can mean but one thing, since it occurs in the connection of seeking after wisdom, and that is, one man of a thousand did I discover who actually finds wisdom, but not a woman among all the seekers. The peculiar form of introduction to these findings indicates that thus far a certain result has been arrived at but that the author is still on the quest to let his investigations be made more and more thoroughly. The term ‘thousand’ is apparently used loosely for a great number. To understand the author’s conclusions, it must be borne in mind that in verse 23 he has classed himself among those who had not found wisdom. He can hardly be saying anything harsh or cynical if he predicates the same thing of women. He has, however, found that some few men can be said to have arrived at this goal. It appears that he had in mind worthy men of God like Abraham and Joseph and Moses and Samuel and David. We should hardly care to question his conclusion.”

A kind of sidelight is thrown on the problem when we observe that in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, not one woman was honored by being chosen to write a Biblical book. That is a task for which truly wise men only happen to be chosen. The whole statement involved must continually be related to the passage as a whole, which is concerned with the quest after wisdom.

In verse 28 Solomon says, “while I was still searching (that is, for wisdom) but not finding – I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.”

v.29 This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.

Bridges points out, “they have sought out many inventions to fall away from God. Man’s discontent with the happiness which God has provided for him, this was his first invention. Hence, he fancied a higher perfection than that in which he had been confirmed. Hence, he yielded to follow the new way which Satan and his deceived heart had placed before him despising his Creator’s law, suspecting his truth. Nay, even aspiring to share his sovereignty. This first invention was the parent of the many, all marked by the same falsehood, folly and impiety all flowing out of the bottomless depths of the heart alienated from God, full of windings and turnings, turning everyone to his own way. All sin is only a form of self-love instead of the love of God. The many inventions take the throne in turn. Former vanities soon produce the weariness of disappointment. Others step into their places so that this usurped dominion is changed only, not subdued. Man is constantly meddling with endless questions instead of the path of duty, the way of safety, the one only way to God. Never can he charge God. Let him cast all the blame upon himself and cast himself upon the second Adam for restoration.”

Richard Foster in his book Celebration of Discipline says, “When we are truly in this interior simplicity, our whole appearance is franker, more natural. This true simplicity makes us conscious of a certain openness, gentleness, innocence, gaiety and serenity which is charming when we see it near to and continually with pure eyes. Oh how amiable this simplicity is. Who will give it to me? I leave all for this. It is the pearl of the gospel. Simplicity is freedom. Duplicity is bondage. Simplicity brings joy and balance. Duplicity brings anxiety and fear. The preacher of Ecclesiastes observed that God made man simple. Man’s complex problems are of his own devising. Because many of us are experiencing the liberation God brings through simplicity, we are once again singing an old Shaker hymn: ‘It’s a gift to be simple; it’s a gift to be free; it’s a gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we see ourselves in a way that’s right, we will live in a valley of love and delight. When true simplicity is gained, to live and to love we will not be ashamed. To turn and to turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning we turn around right.’ The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. Both the inward and outward aspects of simplicity are essential.”

8:v. 1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance.

Veldey points out, “The right interpretation of life is a great and important thing. In the midst of disorders and disappointments which would make one’s countenance saddened and wrinkled, a true insight into life will change the face and make it glad. The need of interpreting life properly is evident in our relation to our rulers. Government is ordained of God and we must obey the laws of the land when they do

not conflict with the laws of God. We may have to submit to injustice and the wise man will bide his time, hoping that justice will be done in the end. God's purpose will prevail and punishment will come upon unjust rulers so man cannot control the wind nor delay death nor escape from forced service in war, so cannot an unjust man escape retribution on wickedness?"

DeHaan points out, "A believer, however, is still confronted with the responsibility to make the better choices day by day. A successful and joy filled life is conditioned upon continual fellowship with God and obedience to his word. That is why Solomon has given us the nine specific directives discussed in this chapter to guide us. We must choose to be serious minded and helpful to others rather than frivolous and shallow. We are wise to heed the word of deserved rebuke not to evade reality through the giddy entertainment of the world. We must be patient as we trust God's wisdom and love and not give in to anger. We are to walk the path of true godliness and not become involved in acts of self-righteousness or fleshly indulgence. We must exercise self-restraint as we think of what people might be saying about us. We must be marked by a spirit of humble submission as we walk in obedience to the Lord."

v. 2 Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

Solomon now outlines some of the ways wisdom can brighten a man's face and changes his hard appearance. First is by obedience to the authorities that are over us.

This is also a reference in Romans 13 and I Peter 2.

v. 3 do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases.

v. 4 Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?"

v. 5 Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.

v. 6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him.

v. 7 Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?

Bridges points out, "All concerning us is determined in the counsels of God and all in judgment. The time is the best time because it is God's time. Tis a solemn thought to us all. Most precious to the Christian that each of us has been in the mind of God, the subject of the thoughts of God from all eternity. Every particle of

our being, every trial, every step in our journey, the most minute as well as the most important, everything has been marked with the stamp of the divine purpose. And what a dignity does it give to the various trifle of circumstance or work. Yet, what can be called a trifle that is a link in the purpose of the great sovereign.” Much, indeed, of the future is far beyond the keenest and most sagacious eye. What or when it shall be is our present exercise but prayer and diligence will bring the light in God’s fittest time. Meanwhile, this ignorance does not touch our security or cloud our competence. We know that all things, including the whole universe, the mightiest as well as the weakest movement, the chastening as well as the healing, the sharp as well as the gentle, all combined for the one grand issue, our present and eternal good. Rich indeed must be the portion that includes death in its treasures, not as a bar to keep us out but as a bridge by which we pass over and possess our inheritance. Thus, the certainty of death assures the certainty of heaven. Both worlds are provided for. Things present and things to come – all are ours. Whatever be the threatening trial, the sure testimony of God received in humble realizing obedient faith is the only remedy for the evil.

v. 8 No man has power over the wind to contain it; so, no one has power over the day of his death. As no one is discharged in time of war so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

One event specially stamped with uncertainty but linked with the divine purpose is the time to die. This most momentous event in man’s history hangs upon the almighty fiat. Who can tell a man when it shall be? But the word once given who has power over the spirit to retain the spirit. Such is the uncontrolled government of God. Man after all his mightiest efforts to make himself independent of God cannot retain his spirit in its tabernacle prison a single moment beyond the time. Nay, he has not power at all in the day of death. The king is as impotent to resist as the beggar. The power that sways millions with a nod fails here. The wealth that procures for its owner all that his heart can wish fails here. The might of the warrior which has slain his thousands and which no human arm can withstand fails here. The most earnest desire of life and the tears and the wailings and the fond caresses of disconsolate affection all fail here. Only one of the children of Adam has ever claimed this dominion over his life and he, while he thus asserted his prerogative while was pleased for our sake, blessed forever be his name, to waive it. No man, declared the divine redeemer, taketh my life from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again (John 10:18).

Foster points out, “In the military discharge places a man beyond the point of danger of death but not here. The Christian soldier, businessman or executive has no privileges under the title emeritus. Your business, industry or profession may put you out to pasture but like every book, every musical score, every ballgame, every plane ride, there is written across your life, the end. ‘Make me to know, O

Lord, my end and the length of my days, what it is. Let me know how transient I am.’ (Psalm 39:4)

v. 9 All this I saw as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun. There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt.

Hubbard points out, “The third danger that Ecclesiastes noted in authority was that it often presents a power that abuses relationships. The words are tragic, ‘while man lords it over man to his hurt.’ They can be documented in every society and every age throughout human history. The authority whose purpose is to help the human family cope with its problems and achieve its goals has been thrown into reverse gear. It has worked just the opposite of what it was intended to do. Public servants have viewed themselves as masters and laid the whip of oppression to the backs of those whom they were supposed to serve. So it goes with authority. It is dogged with major problems. It has dangers which make it prone to abuse and it has limits which often make its exercise ineffective.”

v. 10 The too, I saw the wicked buried – those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

A profound point the Preacher has made, unless people believe firmly in the reality of divine judgment, human authority has difficulty enforcing its laws. When God seems to let people get away with wrong-doing, government sanctions and strictures may prove ineffective.

v. 11 When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.

Leopold pints out, “On verse 10 the meaning is simply this: the situation being as just depicted the wicked, namely, holding the rule over the godly. I saw the situation now developing in the following manner: Such wicked rulers were buried. The same men still being under consideration and they departed from the place of the holy man. Now we see what the author is aiming to set forth. These wicked men are removed from the theater of activity where, according to verse 9, there were but two actors on the stage: the wicked man and the godly man. Whereas, the latter is here called the holy man. So the holy man strays, being left behind. That is a prominent truth that experience substantiates again and again. The wicked vanish and their works perish with them. The godly prevail and are preserved by God.

v. 12 Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.

Solomon makes an observation here that God is not laughed at. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'

v. 13 Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with the, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

v. 14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men, who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

Veldey points out, "Solomon had made a ceaseless effort, without rest day or night to try to understand God's ways, but in vain. Life's riddle baffles the wisest quest. How unsearchable are God's judgments and his ways past tracing out. Man may apply his heart, his whole inner nature, intellectual and emotional, to know the business done upon the earth. But the problems of life are beyond man's power to grasp. We must recognize God's sovereignty over all human affairs. All are in the hand of God. Whether God's dealings are with favor or displeasure, we cannot know because we are unable to read the future. However, the future is in God's hands and it is foolish for us to try to take it into our own hands. In that sense I am not the captain of my soul nor the master of my destiny."

v. 15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.

Thompson points out, "The advice to enjoy life here is found in the context of man's inability to discover what is the best thing to do in the present and serves as Solomon's conclusion to this section. He has said in chapter 7 that man should enjoy prosperity and learn from adversity, since no man can alter or understand God's sovereign disposal of adversity and prosperity. He then went on to caution the reader against overzealous righteousness or over indulgent sinfulness, since true righteousness is a real rarity and no man can discover the best course of action. Solomon then advises submission to the king because, though no man knows when, wickedness will be judged. Finally, even though the doctrine of retribution often seems contradicted, Solomon advises the reader to enjoy life because God's providence is inscrutable."

v. 16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth – his eyes not seeing sleep day or night.

v. 17 then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

Solomon ends his search with the frustration of not being able to comprehend the workings of God's wisdom and his ultimate purposes in life.

CONCLUSION:

What are the lessons that can be drawn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: At the bottom of all depression is unbelief.

LESSON #2: Patience is better than pride.

LESSON #3: Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit.

LESSON #4: Never say, 'Where are the good old days?'

LESSON #5: The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

LESSON #6: Don't pay attention to every word that people say.

LESSON #7: God has made man upright but men have gone in search of many schemes.

LESSON #8: Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance.

LESSON #9: A man's misery weighs heavily upon him.

LESSON #10: No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun.