

Ecclesiastes - Chapter Seven

Former heavyweight boxer James "Quick" Tillis was a cowboy from Oklahoma who fought out of Chicago in the early 1980s. Years later, he still remembers his first day in the Windy City after his arrival from Tulsa.

"I got off the bus with two cardboard suitcases under my arms in downtown Chicago and stopped in front of the Sears Tower. I put my suitcases down and I looked up at the Tower and I said to myself, 'I'm going to conquer Chicago.' "When I looked down, the suitcases were gone."

Tillis, like we ourselves had great plans. He was ready to take on the world, but the world fought back. It's pretty easy to get the wind knocked out of you and become discouraged in this world.

Chapter summary – In chapter six we found that God does not overrule the natural and unpredictable negative consequences of the sin cursed world even for the believer! The believer and unbeliever alike suffer the same trials, calamities and even horrors. Neither are exempt from the disasters this world can bring upon them. There are no guarantees that anyone will have the satisfaction of enjoying the possessions he acquires or the relationships he establishes! But, just when you think all is lost! Just when you think there is no acceptable answer to Solomon’s soul searching question; “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (Ec. 1:3), ... who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun? (Ec 6:12), Solomon shifts gears.

Life under the sun affects us all and it can be pretty depressive at times. Solomon seems to have painted as depressing a picture as he possibly could in chapters one through six. He seems to have laid out every possible negative scenario, to where you think there is no further depths to which life can fall. Thus, with nowhere further to look but up, Solomon says, “Here are some things you can do in spite of this sin cursed world.” Some daily practices that will provide you with not only the greatest eternal reward in heaven for meeting your God given responsibilities, but will also provide you with the greatest potential for benefiting as much as possible from this life.”

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IV. In Solomon’s search for an answer to his question, he now tells us how to live for that which exists above the sun, (Ch. 7:1-12:7)

1. SOLOMON DESCRIBES FOR US THE BEST WAY TO BENEFIT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM OUR LIFE UNDER THE SUN, (7:1-12:7)

NOTES:

1) Solomon details the real value of wisdom that is from God, (7:1-9:18)

(1) God's wisdom enables us to discern true values, (7:1-10)

1a God's wisdom enables us to discern the true value of a good name, (1a)

 **INTERPRETATION:**

¹ **A good name** (a good reputation—being a man or woman of inner character and thus a great model and influence), **is better** (a greater possession), **than precious ointment**, (expensive, highly desired, delightful perfume [used for trading, anointing at special events {Jesus by Mary}, prominence, even as deodorant, {cp., Prov. 10:7; 22:1—*better than silver or gold*}]])

(A good name means a lot, even to cowboys.) **As two of them were talking, One said, "Howdy, My name's Tex." The second one said, "Hay, Tex, you from Texas?" Tex said, "Nope, from Louisiana, but what cowboy wants to be called Louise?**

A good name is important! Who wants to be called a liar, a cheat, untrustworthy, mean, unforgiving, etc..

Inner beauty (such as godly character), is better than anything external you can put on the body no matter how expensive or exquisite. No matter whose designer label you are wearing.

What did God tell David was better than an expensive sacrifice? A broken and contrite spirit. Inner beauty, not external works (no matter how wonderful they may be), is what God treasures most.

You know you have a good name when you hear comments like:

- "I trust you" or when someone refers to you by saying, "You can trust him or her."
- "Your word is good enough."
- "You don't have to explain anything to me."
- "If you want honest answers, talk to _____."
- I think the greatest comment is, "I believe you."

In a world that can be harsh and is always unpredictable, a good name is something that will be invaluable in such a world and it is yours to keep. No one can take your character from you. You have to give it to them, surrender it, compromise it. The world can falsely tarnish your good name, but it does not change the truth about who you really are. That works the other way too, if you are corrupt. No matter what you try to look like, you are what you are. God blesses and judges according to what you are.

NOTES:

2a God's wisdom enables us to

discern the true value of keeping eternity in view, (1b)

^{1b} **and the day of** (one's), **death** (is better—a greater time of celebration), **than the day of one's birth**; (for the believer only; entering eternity is greater than being born on this earth—but dying and going to hell isn't!)

Paul, who also knew how to get the best out of this hostile world, said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Ro 8:18) Paul also mentioned when talking to the Philippians, ²³ *“I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. ²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”* Php 1:23-24

God tells us in the Book of Revelation that in heaven, ^{3b} *“the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* (Re 21:3-4; cp., 1 Cor. 15:26, 54-58)

The difference between life here on earth as compared to life in heaven is obvious to us all. Larry Crabb in his book, “Shattered Dreams” makes the following statements about the hostile world we live in. “Why is God so inconsistent, so maddeningly unpredictable? One set of parents raises a child who becomes an honor student, a youth leader. Another set, equally good, maybe even better, places their son in a drug rehab. One man's ministry takes off. God's blessing is evident. Another man, just as godly, watches his ministry die. Why? Suffering seems so random; one dream realized, another shattered.”

Amy Carmichael, who was a missionary in India, ministering to orphaned children, wrote this poem during the time of her service on this earth. It depicts what we can expect to experience as we live and serve our Lord as well as our fellow man upon this earth.

Hast Thou No Scar

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar,
Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beast that compassed Me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound?

NOTES:

No wound? No scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wound nor scar?

---Amy Carmichael

These kinds of experiences we face here on earth, do not make life on earth wrong, it just puts life here in perspective for us. For example:

- Why don't you always tell your boss your innermost thoughts?
- Why don't you swim with alligators?
- Why don't you ask a woman her age?

You don't do these things because the chances are high that there would be negative consequences for doing so.

Tell me then, should we or should we not love the world.

God explicitly tells the believer in 1 John 2:15, ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”***

To the person who has not placed saving faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior, God says, ***“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** Mt 16:26

God tells believers through the Apostle Paul, in Romans 12 how He wants us to live in this world, ***“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*** Ro 12:1-2

In a world that is so unpredictable and thus at times decimates your dreams, testing your faith to its extreme limits, bringing terrible pain and sorrow into your life without a moment's notice; eternity will be far better. Eternity will put all of your trials and testings behind you forever! You will never ever experience another problem or sorrow in heaven. In eternity everything will be perfect and thus happen just as everything should happen.

Our Lord knows that we will all experience some tumultuous times here on this earth. That is why He encourages us with these words. ***“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world... We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them... let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*** (Jn 16:33; Eph 2:10; Ga 6:9)

NOTES:

3a God's wisdom enables us to discern the true value of personal reflection, (2)

NOTES:

² **Better to go to the house of mourning** (a funeral home), **than to go to the house of feasting** (to a celebration banquet—if you have a choice between the two, going to the funeral is better), **for** (the reason), **that** (death), **is the end** (the conclusion), **of all men** (*as it is appointed to all men once to die, but after this the judgment*); **and the living** (those who have ears to hear and eyes to see), **will take it to heart**, (seriously reflect upon where they came from, why they are here on this earth, and where they are going when they die—It is the idea behind what the Psalmist prays in Psalm 90:12. “*Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” God tells us in Ephesians 5:15-17, *See...that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*)

The message in this verse could read. “Coming face to face with death is better than being surrounded with sumptuous living and full stomachs, in that it forces us to focus on the undeniable, inescapable and fundamental nature of life.” We could put it another way too, “Taking walk thought a cemetery is better than going to someone’s house for a party, in that it will give more perspective to life in general and your life specifically.

I have walked through the cemetery more than ever before since our son’s death. I ask myself a lot of questions while doing so. Some of the questions I ask are, “What have I accomplished thus far, and what will I accomplish with the rest of my life? Have I and will I really make a difference in this world? Will I truly love? Will I serve my fellow man? Will I finish my life being faithful to my God?” Seeing your name on a tombstone that you will soon be buried under is very sobering.

We humans have a major problem because all too often we try to ignore and deny some of the realities of the world we live in. We try to run from them or drown them out with lots of activity or noise. But when we walk into that funeral home there is no escaping the realities of life. Life needs to be faced head on and processed in such a way that puts God on display and strengthens your faith and character. Funeral homes and cemeteries will force us to reflect on these issues.

4a God's wisdom enables us to discern the true value of affliction, (3-4)

³ **Sorrow** (personal grief and brokenness), **is better than laughter** (festive joy, in this way), **for by a sad countenance the heart** (which represents the source of one’s life, energy, emotions, disposition, will and reasoning), **is made better**, (one’s heart is

more focused yet searching, stronger yet tenderer, serious yet relaxed, alone yet intimately attached to others, quieter yet more well-known, hurting yet compassionate, [another way to look at it is from a less and more perspective], less prideful and more humble, less immune to pain but more willing to risk it, less stubborn and more open-minded, less sure of one's self and more dependent on God, less selfish more gracious, less judgmental more merciful, less insensitive more loving, [We must always remember though that God says there is "***a time to laugh***" too, Ecc. 3:4]).

Laughter keeps us going and sorrow keeps us growing. Sorrow doesn't diminish your laughter, it actually enriches it. It enriches it because you realize more than ever, just how special a joyous or humorous occasion/moment is, and how much you need it.

⁴ **The heart of the wise** (then, those with ears to hear and eyes to see), ***is in the house of mourning*** (they go to the funeral homes, they visit the terminally ill, they engage those who have suffered tragic losses. Why? Because they recognize the value sorrow offers and desire to be changed and directed by it), **but the heart of fools** (the stupid, self-absorbed and arrogant), ***is in the house of mirth***, (they only want to party; they are not only willing to remain as they are, they desire it; they see no wisdom at all in engaging in anything even remotely related to sorrow or hardship. Those who do, they view as the fool).

F **APPLICATION:**

"There's a true story that comes from the sinking of the *Titanic*. A frightened woman found her place in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the raging North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they cast off. She was granted three minutes or they would have to leave without her.

She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly pushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in.

Now that seems incredible because thirty minutes earlier she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over even the smallest diamond. But death had boarded the *Titanic*. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values [of the wise]. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment she preferred three small oranges to a *crate* of diamonds. [That woman had eyes to see, and ears to hear. Adversity had changed her life in a better way.]

NOTES:

Death gives you that kind of wisdom. Those who live their lives suffering from a terminal disease usually demonstrate a remarkable degree of wisdom in the way they spend their time. It is amazing what happens even to one's conversation! [When you go to visit them, your prayer is that you will be a blessing to the person. But, more often than not, when you leave you feel like the one who received the greater blessing.] Solomon seems to have lost interest in the silly side of life. He's beginning to come back home. Wisdom is beginning to pay its dividends."¹

There is a poem that puts this whole issue in perspective.

“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 ne'er a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me.”

If those whom we have loved and died could come back some Sunday and share the message, what do you think they would tell us about the sorrow they experienced? Do you think they would leave you young people out of the message? No way. Do you think they would only talk about how wonderful heaven is with its streets of gold, walls of precious gems, gates of solid pearls, etc.? Not a chance. They would be more concerned about how we are living our lives here on earth.

How we are facing the challenges of life. How we are allowing those challenges to change our life. Their greatest concern would be that we are becoming more christlike. Do we have ears to hear and eyes to see the obvious though. Or, are we like the fool, only too happy to remain living as we are and only want and seek pleasurable experiences? Are you allowing your afflictions to turn you into an incredible man, woman, teen, or child? Or, are you letting them turn you into a mean, bitter, angry, and apathetic person? The next time you go to a funeral, walk through a cemetery, suffer a great affliction, or visit a terminally ill friend, ask yourself, “How have I changed (become more like Christ), since the last time I was here?”

5a God's wisdom enables us to discern the true value of admonishment, (5-6)

⁵ ***It is better to hear*** (respond favorably to), ***the rebuke*** (or we could say, the admonishment, the constructive criticism, the censure, the reprimand), ***of the wise*** (those who care about you), ***than for***

COMMENTARY:

¹ Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, p. 195.

a man to hear (respond favorably to), **the song** (the blabbering, jabbering, cackling), **of fools**, (who don't really care about you.)²
 6 **For like** (or just as), **the crackling of thorns** (burning), **under a pot** (makes a lot of noise), **so** (likewise), **is the laughter** (the mocking response), **of the fool**, (noise being the only virtue of their words. The thorns themselves provide a hot fire, but the snapping and popping of the thorns accomplishes nothing. It's just noise). **This also is vanity**, (meaningless, valueless, useless, a lot of hot air).

It's not easy for any of us to be admonished, even if you are an evangelist such as this **visiting evangelist who was met at the end of the service with the blunt appraisal, "That's the worst sermon I have ever heard!"**

The visiting preacher, quite disturbed, told the pastor that a certain man had said something rather critical and pointed him out.

The pastor said, "Oh, don't worry about him. That man is not really responsible for what he says. He never has an original thought. He just goes around repeating what everybody else is saying."

Noah tried to admonish the people before the flood, did he not? For 120 years he warned them about the judgment to come. But, the only response he received was the mocking laughter of fools. The air was filled with their cackling. You know what it sounds like. You often hear the same cackling when you take a stand for God and His Word at work, at school, in your neighborhood, maybe even in your own home. None of Noah's neighbors response was positive. Their every response to his admonition, was vanity, meaningless, valueless, stupidity, a lot of noise. How did that situation end? It ended in disaster. Would they have been better off if they had listened? Of course! That is exactly what God is telling us in this passage. If we don't listen to our godly spouse, parents, friend, etc., we may find our self experiencing some sort of disaster!

Remember **Rehoboam** who took over as king after Solomon's death. He had to make a decision as to how he would reign. The older and wiser sages of his administration counseled Rehoboam to rule with a kinder more gracious hand than his father, Solomon. The younger members of his administration laughed and spurned the words of the wise and counseled Rehoboam to tell the people that if they thought Solomon was tough, they hadn't seen anything yet. Rehoboam spurned the counsel of the old and wise and followed the counsel of the young and foolish. How did that situation end? It ended in disaster. The result was that the Kingdom of Israel was split in half. Would they have been better off if they had listened? Of course!

² (A good verse for you to memorize so you can draw strength and direction from it the next time someone shares some wise criticism with you is Proverbs 12:1. ***"Whoever loves correction loves knowledge; but the one who hates reproof is stupid."***)

It has been said that there is not a man or woman alive who could not retire comfortably in their old age if they could sell their experience for what it cost them. Is there not a great deal of truth in that statement?

How many disasters can you think of that you have faced in the past, right off the top of your head? Some disasters are unavoidable, but can you think of any that if you had followed the counsel of a wise friend or God's Word, that you could have avoided or at least tempered some? I'm sure you can think of a few.

We as adults refuse to listen at times to the godly admonition of others as well as God's Word, and instead follow the counsel of the less wise or our own flesh. What does it get us?

You children refuse to listen at times to your parents admonition and instead follow the counsel of your friends or maybe the person you are dating. What does it get you? Disaster.

Tragically, and far too often, counsel is that which the so called wise don't need and the fools won't accept.

A truly wise person learns from the experience of godly people. An ordinary man learns by his own experience. A fool learns by nobody's experience.

A man was on the practice golf course when the club pro brought another man out for a lesson. The pro watched the fellow swing several times and started making suggestions for improvement, but each time the pupil interrupted with his own version of what was wrong and how to correct it. After a few minutes of this interference, the pro began nodding his head in agreement. At the end of the lesson, the student paid the pro, congratulated him on his expertise as a teacher, and left in an obviously pleased frame of mind.

The observer was so astonished by the performance that he asked, "Why did you go along with him?" "Son," the old pro said with a grin, as he carefully pocketed his fee, "I learned long ago that it's a waste of time to sell answers to a man who wants to buy his own echoes."

Is that you? Do you think that pupil improved his golf game any? Of course not. Do you think you can improve your daily walk and purify your faith if you don't listen to the godly admonishment of others? Of course not.

God and the godly are trying to give us answers to life. What are we buying?

6a God's wisdom enables us to discern the true value of patience, (7-10)

If I told you that by doing one thing you could:

- strengthen your spirit

- reduce your temper
- manage your anger
- control your pride and
- bridle your tongue

would you want to know what it was?! Sure you would, and here is: “practice patience.””

⁷ **Surely oppression** (by those who abuse their opportunity, power and/or authority in such a way that they trample all over or crush you and/or your loved ones—of which this sin cursed world is full of, {e.g., your rights, privileges, or opportunities—e.g., King Ahab’s wife Jezabel killing Naboth simply for his vineyard—Think of what the other family members went through and how helpless they were to do anything about it, Ki. 21}), **destroys a wise man’s reason** (it can cause temporary insanity, make a person act totally out of character {ever found yourself saying or doing something you deeply regretted later? Sure you have and sometimes it was prompted by oppression---There is a saying that says, “*Patience is the ability to throttle your motor when you fell like stripping the gears.*” If you strip the gears in your car’s transmission, you are going to pay a big price to get it fixed. But, if you strip the gears in your relationships you are going to pay ten times as much.}), **and a bribe** (although it may get fast and effective results—but what does God say it does in the end? It), **debases** (corrupts), **the heart**, (hardens the heart towards the things of God [e.g., The Chief priests bribed Judas with 30 pieces of silver, Matt. 26:15; 27:3–9; Mark 14:11; Luke 22:5]).

⁸ (In light of verse seven), **The end** (or conclusion), **of a thing is better** (to react to), **than its beginning** (i.e., the wise person will exercise patience in a troublesome situation and wait to see how the situation matures before he responds to it—thus); **the patient in spirit** (the one who [in God’s strength] can handle tribulation, who profits by or learns from his experiences, who always hopes, who is more tolerant of others [Rom. 5:1-5]), **is better than the proud in spirit**, (who is the one who won’t wait upon the Lord or others, the one who will not allow himself to be mistreated, the one who is ruled by worry rather than rules over it, the one who lacks self-control, must take matters into his own hand [Prov. 25:28]).

F APPLICATION:

A department store floor manager noticed a young boy staring intently at the handrail of an escalator. The manager walked over to him and asked, "Son, are you all right?" The boy nodded yes without looking up. "Can I help you?" he asked. The boy shook his head no and continued to look at the handrail. "Do you want me to explain to you how escalators work?" The lad replied, "No thank-you." A little exasperated the manager said, "Well, what is the problem then!?" The lad replied, "You’re the one with the problem, Mister. I’m just waiting for my bubble gum to come back!"

The one who has a patient spirit has a great advantage over the one who does not. The clerk got upset and even created a problem over nothing. He was not the possessor of a patient spirit who could just wait and see how the situation would mature before interacting.

Concerning the end of a matter being better than a the beginning, think about these examples.

- Queen Jezebel started as a powerful and influential Queen, but she ended up hated and eaten by dogs, (2 Kings 9:30-37). The patient in spirit would have probably lived to see it. The proud in spirit would probably be put to death too, or be put in prison.
- The Prodigal Son started with excitement and riches, but ended with suffering and disgrace (Luke 15:11–24). The father reveals that he had a patient spirit.
- Judas started out rich with his 30 pieces of silver, but ended up taking his life (Mat. 27:3-5). Jesus was patient in spirit here.
- On the other hand, Joseph began as a slave, then progressed to a prisoner, but ended up a prince second to none.
- Daniel began as a slave, and was later thrown to the lions, but ended up a prominent and beloved Wiseman.
- Satan typically starts by promising the world to us, but then leads the sinner into suffering, despair and sometimes even death.

We must be patient then and wait for a situation to mature before we respond. We need to beware of appearances and shortcuts. Often times they only lead to humiliation, difficult situations, pain, sorrow and remorse. We need to exercise much patience in this life of ours. The reason being, if we pluck the blossoms, we will have to do without the fruit. ...*we [need to] glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

(Ro 5:3-4; Jas 1:3-4)

⁹ (God goes on to tell us), **Do not hasten** (be quick), **in your spirit to be angry** (don't be quick to hit back or become defensive—We never weather the storm by storming the weather.), **for anger rests** (abides), **in the bosom of fools** (it is a common practice of fools, but the wise and patient strive to avoid these pitfalls. We must wait for a situation to mature and then make wise intervention).

F APPLICATION:

Write down the word “danger.” Next cross out the “d” and you end up with “~~d~~anger.” Those who are quick to be angry are habitually angry put themselves and those around them in danger.

- **“Be angry, and do not sin”:** *do not let the sun go down on your wrath, [for to do so is to] give place to the devil.* Eph 4:26-27

- *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* Jas 1:19-20 NIV

¹⁰ (Impatience can cause us to react too quickly and/or to become unduly angry, but we also have to be careful that we), **Do not say**, (when we are tempted to be impatient about change or some trial) **“Why were the former days better than these?”** (Don't grumble about where the supposedly good ole days have gone?!) **for you do not inquire wisely** (intellegently), **concerning this** (as there is nothing new under the sun—the packaging of our everyday experiences may be alittle different, but in principle they are the same. The Apostle Paul never got tied up in a LA traffic jam, but I am sure he was frustrated with delays at times).

F APPLICATION:

“While you are dreaming of the [past] or regretting the [future], the present, which is all you have, slips from you and is gone.”³ We need to realize that in principle the past, present, and future are one as far as the challenges life presents us. A wise person will realize this. A wise and patient person will look for the age old solutions to life's everyday challenges. *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* 1 Cor. 10:13 Longing for the so called “Good ole days,” is an offence to God's all sufficient grace and mercy as well.

So you see, by simply practicing patience, we will as a natural consequence:

- strengthen your spirit
- reduce your temper
- manage your anger
- control your pride and
- bridle your tongue

The only question is, “Will you make the decision and apply yourself to becoming patient in spirit?”

(2) **God's wisdom enables us to discern true living, (7:11-12)**

There are many forms that wisdom can take, but there are only three basic sources from which it can be obtained. One kind every human being possesses, and that is earthly/sensual wisdom. The other every human being is pressured to accept, and that is the devil's. The third source of wisdom is offered to every human being, and that is God's; wisdom that is from above. To acquire God's wisdom we must seek and ask for it. It is God's wisdom that we **must** have, if we are going to ever discover and experience true living in this hostile world.

³Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Satisfied*, Ec 7:1. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1990.

¹¹ **Wisdom is good** (along), **with an inheritance** (God is not telling us that material possessions are equal to wisdom, because He tells us in Proverbs 16:16, *How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.* He is simply saying they both have something good to offer), **and profitable** (an advantage), **to those who see the sun**, (to those on this earth who recognize their good and benefit from them.)

¹² **For** (the reason they are good is that), **wisdom is a defense** (“defense” here means *shade* or *shadow*—see footnote below)⁴ **as money is a defense** (^[1] wisdom that is from above and is not earthly or devilish {cf., Ja. 3:13-18} and ^[2] material possessions that are properly used and not loved, will bring a measure of protection and relief to your life in this unstable world), **but the excellence** (or the greatest benefit) **of** (this), **knowledge is that wisdom gives life** (not life itself, but a longer, more enjoyable and productive fulfilling life), **to those who have it**, (to those who understand, embrace and exercise this wisdom).

F APPLICATION:

In the 1984 Summer Olympic Games, Carl Lewis won four gold medals. Despite his outstanding performance, he was accused of holding back in the long jump. Instead of going for the world record, he stopped competing after his first jump, knowing that he had won the gold. The interviewer found his response to criticism inspiring. Carl said that the Olympic trials had taken more out of him than he had expected, so he decided to save his strength. He explained that he was there to win gold medals - not to set records that would probably last only a short time. So rather than risking injury or overexertion in pursuit of a world record long jump, he conserved his energy and went for the gold in his other events.

Carl's decision ought to remind us of an emphasis made in the Word of God. The Bible tells us that we must make wise choices about how we are going to live our life, if we want to live a longer, more enjoyable and productive, fulfilling life. (We are told in Ephesians 5:16 to redeem the times because the days are evil.)

So, do you want to have this kind of wisdom that provides this kind of life? Turn to James 3:13-18 then to see if you have it, or the devil's substitute. God begins in verse 13 by asking us:

⁴ In a positive sense, “shadow” conveys the ideas of shade, protection, and defense. Shade, even that of a boulder, gives some relief from the heat of the day, especially for the slave (cf. Job 7:2). “Under the shadow of one’s roof” connotes that the head of the house provides protection for his guests (Gen 19:8, ASV). Similarly a strong nation may offer someone or another nation shelter (Isa 30:2f.; cf. Ezk 17:23). Yahweh is the shade or the source of protection for his people (Ps 121:5f.; Isa. 25:4). Therefore the Psalmist prays that God may hide him under “the shadow of his wings” (Ps 17:8; cf. 36:7 [H 8]; 91:1).

Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Page 767. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980.

¹³ **Who is wise** (meaning “Who has godly insight and can skillfully apply this insight to the daily affairs of life?”), **and understanding** (which means “Who possesses in-depth knowledge or discernment”) **among you?** [e.g., *instruction/knowledge*, don’t touch the hot stove—*understanding*, you touch it and get burnt—*wisdom*, you don’t touch it next time—“*Who among you knows what to touch and what not to touch in this world?*”) **Let him show** (meaning prove it), **by** (telling you so!? No. There is a good saying that fits here. It goes, “*Don’t brag and blow; it isn’t the whistle that pulls the train.*” That is what God tells us here when He says, “Let him prove he is wise and understanding by), **good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom**, (i.e., without selfish-ambition, bragging, disputing or resentment, but simply because it is right, it is best and it is for the benefit of all. Is that your conduct? God says if you have His wisdom and understanding, that is what your conduct will entail. “Who among you is wise and understanding?”)

¹⁴ **But** (everyone listen up), **if you** (on the other hand, find or know that you), **have bitter** (deep-seated, gnawing, angry, resentful), **envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast** (that you have godly wisdom and understanding), **and lie against the truth**, (lie against what you and God know is the truth about yourself—that you are full of pride, jealousy, bitterness, resentment. You are looking out for number one. You are wanting to carve out a piece of the world all for yourself. Is that not why the devil left his position as God’s door keeper? The devil wanted to carve out a kingdom for himself! Think about that! What has it gotten the devil? What will it get him? Has it gotten him a more enjoyable, productive and fulfilling life that God says, His wisdom alone can provide? The one who enjoys true living, does so through gaining and exercising God’s wisdom.— *Take a lesson from the whale: When it’s spouting off, that is when it is most in danger of being harpooned.* Have you ever been harpooned?)

¹⁵ **This wisdom** (that is “*not*” exercised in meekness, but in selfishness), **does not descend from above** (it does not come from God), **but** (quite the contrary, it), **is earthly** (Its standards and sources are [worldly]. It measures success in worldly terms; and its aims are worldly aims.)⁵, **sensual** (this wrong kind of wisdom is no more than an animal kind of thing; it is the kind of wisdom which makes an animal snap and snarl with no other thought than that of prey or personal survival.⁶

⁵*The Letters of James and Peter.* Edited by Barclay, The Daily study Bible series, Logos, software.

- What or who determines your standards for character?
- Whose standards do you base your decisions and convictions on?
- What is your view of being successful as a student, athlete, musician, wife, husband, parent, child, friend, employee, Christian, etc.? Who tells you what success is?
- What are you aiming for at this point in your life?
- What is your ultimate goal in life?

⁶*Ibid.*

We live in a dog eat dog world. It is a world where you use people like rungs in a ladder to elevate yourself. You are a taker in this world, not a giver; a dictator, not a servant.),⁷ **demonic** (It is devilish. Its source is not God, but the devil. It produces the kind of situation which the devil delights in, not God.⁸ It lowers you to the level of the devil and your depraved flesh, rather than elevate you to the position and privilege that God has given you at salvation.)⁹

¹⁶ **For where envy** (the driving force of bitter, angry lamenting and/or craving what you don't have or have lost [v.4]), **and self-seeking** (selfish attitudes, motivations, aspirations, goals and actions), **exist, confusion** (i.e., disorder, disharmony), **and every evil** (worthless, of no account, depraved), **thing are there**, (this kind of fruit accompanies those who exercise this kind of ungodly wisdom—**According to zookeepers, two reptiles will sometimes grab different ends of the same piece of food. Sooner or later their struggle for that last bite brings them nose to nose. But then comes the surprise. The snake with the widest bite will keep right on going and if allowed, actually try to swallow the other. Only as we rely on God will the love of Christ in our hearts replace the man-eating impulses of worldly, sensual, demonic wisdom.**). Have you ever used the phrase, “He chewed him up and spit him out?”

F APPLICATION:

Anything that God is a part of does not produce confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), nor is God associated in any way shape or form with anything evil (1 Jn 1:5). **For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints...**[and] **This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.** (1 Co 14:33; 1 Jn 1:5) So, wisdom that causes disharmony and is deceitful cannot come from God.

Wisdom that is earthly, sensual and/or demonic isn't from God and it doesn't bring people together, it drives them apart. It doesn't produce the peace and harmony that God's wisdom produces, it produces division and strife. This ungodly wisdom doesn't build people up it causes conflict and tears apart personal relationships piece by piece. To exercise this kind of wisdom is to be part and party with our “**adversary the devil** [who] **walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,**” [chew up and spit out!] (1 Pe 5:8). It is to be a part of his pride and a member of his team, working together with his demons and your depravity to accomplish his work. It is the kind of wisdom the devil tries to entice us to accept and exercise.

⁷ It is a world where you are told you are an animal and to think you can control your sexual impulses, for example, is ludicrous. Abstinence before marriage is impossible.

That is the kind of wisdom we all possess and if we are not careful, exercise.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ It is dark. It is what you do and hide hoping no one will find it out. It even scares you to realize what you are capable of. It destroys yourself and others. It is evil in origin and in its conclusion.

¹⁷ **But** (in contrast to earthly, sensual and demonic wisdom), **the wisdom that is from above** (that is from God), **is first pure** (sincere, it is holy, it is not divided by a mixture of good and bad aims, it doesn't crack the door for sin. It is unpolluted of all sinful ulterior motives and selfish ambitions. You don't have to ask, "What's the catch?" What you see is who I am, inside and out. Its opposite is deceptive, undermining, conniving, setting snares),¹⁰ **then peaceable** (they are at peace with themselves as well as with God and they want to spread peace towards others—its opposite is strife, causing conflict—*When a man finds no peace within himself, it is useless to seek it anywhere else.*)

The late Dr. Wallace Hamilton, novelist and playwright, liked to tell the story of an Indian sheep farmer who had a big problem. His neighbor's dogs were killing his sheep. It got so bad that he had to do something. So he considered his alternatives. First, he could have shot and buried the dogs. Second, he could have built stronger fences so that the dogs couldn't get in. But he had a better idea.

He gave some lambs to his neighbor's children. When the lambs began to multiply and a little flock began to develop, the neighbor tied up his dogs, and the problem was solved. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Being a peace maker takes considerable discernment. It does not just happen. There has to be a desire, a plan and a lot of work for it to take place.

gentle (considerate, not demanding one's own rights, he forgives knowing he has the right to condemn, it is the desire and ability to offer to others the compassion that we would desire to receive ourselves. The opposite is to go by the book, the letter of the law.),¹¹ **willing to yield** (flexible, approachable, willing to listen and to change, willing to follow God wherever He may lead. Its opposite is fixed, wanting to control. It is going to be his way, or the highway! *He is the person who slams his mind in your face*), **full of mercy** (is forgiving, full of compassion towards those who suffer even if it is their own fault; it makes no difference, they love others as Christ loved us even when we were unlovely because of our sin—its opposite would be to enjoy seeing them suffer, saying, "They are getting what they deserve.")

¹⁰ Worldly wisdom might well wish to escape God's sight; the true wisdom is able to bear his very scrutiny. *The Letters of James and Peter*. Edited by Barclay, William, If you are doing something good, you want others to see. But, if you are not...

¹¹ A good example is when a prostitute, caught in the act, was brought to Christ, (Jn. 18:3-11). The scribes and Pharisees knew that Christ was gentle. That is why they brought the prostitute to Him.

Christ says in Matthew 11, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mt 11:28-30)

Is that true of you when people come, or are brought to you? Or, are you more like the scribes and Pharisees, always ready to slander and persecute?

When a Michigan deer hunter found a big buck struggling to get out of a mud-bog in which it was hopelessly stuck, the hunter's first thought was to shoot, but he couldn't bring himself to pull the trigger. Instead, he called for the help of his partner. They worked together until they freed the deer from bog. The moment it was freed, the deer bolted to freedom. The hunter later recalled, "When you see a deer like that, eyeball to eyeball, it's a little different. I think the eyes did it--that longing look, like, "What are you going to do?"

Until we can look eyeball to eyeball at someone who is bogged down in the muck and mire of sin, and not blast away at them with words and ill thoughts, we will never be able to extend God's mercy towards them and play a major role in helping to set them free.

and good fruits (their love necessitates acts [not just words] of compassionate help and friendship. This person makes time. He is burdened to touch lives in meaningful and tangible ways. Its opposite would be to do everything possible to intensify their suffering, saying, "They made their bed, let them lie in it."), **without partiality** (prejudice or uncertainty, not hesitating or changing your mind half way though [or several times back and forth] about a person and their situation, it is a state of being, not a temporary or fluctuating emotion—its opposite is double minded, you are selective about who you reach out to), **and without hypocrisy**, (sincere, honest, not pretending or doing something because you have to or for personal gain—its opposite is to approach with a mask that hides your true intentions and motivations, its interacting simply for personal reasons, because you can use the situation to your benefit. *There is a German proverb that goes, "Oh the slyness of sin, that puts an angel before every Devil!"* Remember that devil himself comes as an angel of light, [2 Cor. 11:14, 15]. Have you ever had a so called friend turn on you?)

¹⁸ **Now the fruit of righteousness** (which comes from above, and is not earthly, sensual and demonic), **is sown in peace by those who make peace** (remembering that peace can only be experienced and shared by those who are in right relationship with God and man. This is living as God intends for life to be lived, yielding a fruit that God desires for us to harvest). James 3:13-18

F APPLICATION:

What we *are* is what we live, and what we live is what we sow. What we sow determines what we reap. If we live in God's wisdom, we sow righteousness and peace, and we reap God's blessing. If we [exercise] man's [earthly, sensual] wisdom, we sow sin and war, and we reap "confusion and every evil work."

It is a serious thing to be a troublemaker in God's family. One of the sins that God hates is that of sowing "discord among brethren" (read Prov. 6:16-19).¹²

¹²Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt., Jas 3:16. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989.

That is to say, nothing good can ever grow in an atmosphere where men are at variance with one another. A group where there is bitterness and strife is a barren soil in which the seeds of righteousness can never grow and out of which no reward can ever come. The man who disturbs personal relationships and is responsible for strife and bitterness has cut himself off from the reward which God gives to those who live his life [and he progressively, systematically cuts himself off from his mate, family, friends, neighbors and fellow man].¹³

God's wisdom enables us to discern true living, which:

- strengthens our soul and spirit against our weak flesh
- makes us bold and resolute in our Christian walk, by building our life on the solid rock and not the shifting sands
- intensifies our interest of doing the will of Jesus who saved us
- gains us friends and a reputation as we learn to love and serve them, as God Himself does
- reinforces our service in times of sufferings, and against the attacks that are made upon us

The English surgeon Lord Lister was known for the sensitivity and compassion he displayed. If a student who was assisting him would be careless in handling a fractured leg, the doctor's kind face would grimace as if he himself felt the pain. With seemingly infinite gentleness he ministered to bruised and broken bodies and hearts! He was never rough, never in a hurry. His loving approach was part of the cure. The injured and hurting were unusually comforted by his presence even before he began to physically treat their injuries.

Would you like that said of you? I can think of no higher compliment.

We cannot condone/overlook sin in the lives of others. Jesus didn't. Nor can we overlook it in our churches. But, we can approach every situation as did this surgeon and Christ. There was no question as to Jesus' motives and desires. The only question was the sinning persons response. Would he confess and repent of his sin.

Even in our churches, when we need to be firm and unrelenting concerning sin, it ought to bring us no small measure of pain. It ought to always make us grimace; never smile.

(3) God's wisdom enables us to accept life's instability, (7:13, 14)

Back in the days when fathers waited outside for the baby to be born, there were three men waiting for the joyous news. The first was informed by the nurse that his wife had twins. He told the nurse, "Isn't that ironic. I pitch for the Minnesota Twins."

NOTES:

¹³*The Letters of James and Peter*. Edited by Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow. The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed., Jas 4:1. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976.

A few minutes later the second man learned his wife had triplets. The coincidence was that he worked for 3-M.

The third man panicked and raced for the door. He was stopped and asked what happened. “I work for a 7-11 store, and I'm getting out of here!”

Life is full of surprises isn't it. Good ones and bad ones. For example:

- Someone goes in for a regular cold and they find out they have cancer.
- Someone finds flowers delivered to them at home or work.
- A husband or a wife finds that their spouse is leaving them and they didn't have a clue anything was wrong.
- Your boss gives you an unexpected raise.
- A child gets a dog who quickly becomes a close friend and then it gets hit by a car.

¹³ **Consider** (Have you ever said to someone, “Think about your response before you answer me?” That is what God is saying to us with this word “*consider*.” Take some serious and sincere time to think about, reflect upon, rehearse), **the work of God** (whether you think it's fair or unfair, whether you think it makes sense or doesn't, whether you think it is pleasant or offensive; think about God's work from the beginning of the history of the earth and man until now—whose “*thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [His] ways...For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than your ways, and [His] thoughts than your thoughts...Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times [the] things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’*”¹⁴ [Isa. 55:8, 9; 46:9, 10]), **for who can make straight** (understandable, acceptable, and pleasing), **what He has made crooked**, (confusing, harmful and even horrifying?—Another way of saying it would be, “Who is like God and can cause or allow the straight and beautiful as well as the warped and revolting experiences in our life and still be perfectly just, holy, good, loving, wise, etc., for doing so, and thus, is still worthy of our worship and servitude, [cf., Job 2:10]. *Especially* as He has sovereign power and authority over all things.” Meaning God can make things turn out any way He wants them to.)

¹⁴ Noah is saved from the flood. Yea!

Joseph is thrown in prison for not sleeping with Potiphar's wife. Boo!

David kills Goliath. Yea!

Job loses all of his children, livestock and servants. Boo!

You have something good happen to you or hear some good news. Yea!

You have something bad happen to you or hear some bad news, Boo!

The Bible is full of stories like that and so is your personal life.

A rustic preacher once said to his congregation referring to this verse, "Learn to cooperate with the unavoidable!" Rather than cooperate we typically try to fight it don't we. What does it get us?...

We can learn something from the little boy who came to see a farmer one day. He wanted to buy a big watermelon.

"That'll be three dollars," said the farmer.

The boy replied, "I've only got 30 cents."

After frowning at the boy a few moments, the man looked around and then pointed to a very small watermelon. "Thirty cents will buy you that one," he growled.

"OK, I'll take it," said the little boy, handing him the 30 cents. "But leave it on the vine. I'll come back and get it in about a month." The little boy didn't fight against it. He cooperated, as we must do with God.

[Bit & Pieces, Vol. M, No 1D (1991). Page 2.]

The Living Bible paraphrases [this Ecc. 7:13 this way], "**See the way God does things and fall into line. Don't fight the facts of nature.**" [Warren Wiersbe comments here saying], This is not a summons to slavish fatalism; like Ecclesiastes 1:15, it is a sensible invitation to a life yielded to the will of God. If God makes something crooked, He is able to make it straight; and perhaps He will ask us to work with Him to get the job done. But if He wants it to stay crooked, we had better not argue with Him. We don't fully understand all the works of God (11:5), but we do know that "He [has] made everything beautiful in its time" (3:11). This includes the things we may think are twisted and ugly."¹⁵

¹⁴ **In the day of prosperity** (when things are understandable, acceptable, and pleasing), **be joyful, but in the day of adversity** (when things are confusing, harmful and maybe even horrifying), **consider** (remember, don't forget): **surely** (without question, or with just as much certainty), **God** (Himself, for whatever reason), **has appointed the one as well as the other**, (Why does God do this?), **so that man can find out nothing that will come after him**, (so that man will never be able to predict the future and will always have to live by faith).

F APPLICATION:

Think of it like this. Why did God give the Law of Moses? "**Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.**" (Ro 3:19) God never intended for the

Israelites (to be able to fulfill the law, it was to show them how far short they fell from God's holiness; to show them how sinful they really were. It was meant to convict and humble them. It was to cause them to repent of their sinfulness and ask God's forgiveness. They were also to take this truth to the Gentiles. But, was that the

¹⁵Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Ec 7:11. Logos,

affect it had upon them. No, especially the religious leaders. The Pharisees not only felt they could fulfill the law, they even added additional man-made rules to it. They became proud and pious rather than convicted and humbled. So much so that Jesus called them serpents and white washed sepulchers. Neither did they reach out to the Gentiles, but loathed them.

In principle God appointing prosperity and adversity in our lives is to accomplish the same thing. Again in principle. Adam, unleashed sin and its consequences upon man and the world. God told Adam what the consequences would be before he disobeyed Him. Since that moment, the consequences of sin has been a constant part of our daily lives. God doesn't take the consequences of sin away from us that causes great instability in our lives, but He does help us through all of them and uses our experiences to cause us to grow. God causes and allows both prosperity and adversity into our lives to show us how out of control we are and that we need Him, (like the Law of Moses was to do). God knows when it is best to make or allow something in our life to become crooked. God also knows when it is necessary to make the situation straight again. Some portions of our life will never be made straight again this side of heaven. God wants and expects every one of His children to walk by faith. To trust Him. To look at what He has done in the past concerning others, and believe that He will do the same for them.

Prosperity is to encourage and sustain us, and adversity is to humble and convict us of our weaknesses. Both are meant to benefit and strengthen us. God also wants us to put Him on display in our lives before a lost world by demonstrating our confidence in Him for all to see.

“Wisdom gives us perspective so that we aren't discouraged when times are difficult or arrogant when things are going well. It takes a good deal of spirituality to be able to accept prosperity as well as adversity, for often prosperity does greater damage (*[I rejoiced in the Lord greatly the Apostle Paul said, that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me].*) Phil. 4:10–13). Job reminded his wife of this truth when she told him to curse God and die: “*What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil [trouble]?*” (2:10) Earlier, Job had said, “*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*” (1:21).

God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble. If all we had were

blessings in our hands, we would fall right over, so the Lord balances the blessings in our hands with burdens on our backs. That helps to keep us steady, and as we yield to Him, He can even turn the burdens into blessings.

Why does God make up our lives in this way? [Again] The answer is simple: to keep us from thinking we know it all and that we can manage our lives by ourselves. ***“Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future”*** (v. 14 , NIV). Just about the time we think we have an explanation for things, God changes the situation and we have to throw out our formula. This is where Job’s friends went wrong: they tried to use an old road map to guide Job on a brand new journey, and the map didn’t fit. No matter how much experience we have in the Christian life, or how many books we read, we must still walk by faith.¹⁶

Do you remember the “Serenity Prayer?” Part of it goes:

***O God, give us
Serenity to accept what cannot be changed,
Courage to change what should be changed,
And wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.***

We could rewrite that prayer, just a little and still keep the same message.

***O God, give us
Serenity to accept what has been made crooked in our life,
Courage to change what can be made straight again,
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other***

Some wise and understanding individual once said that, **“A useless life is an early death.”** ---Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

A hinge is a useful mechanism and a great asset to those who benefit from its designed service. But when rust is allowed to creep over it, the rust (if unchecked), will eventually lock the hinge up and destroyed its purpose and usefulness. The rust renders it ineffectual, useless; being no longer able to fulfill what it was designed to do.

When your life takes a crooked turn, and it will, not just once or twice in your lifetime, but many times, the pain; anger; bitterness; apathy, and so on that is caused by it, will start to creep in over you. If it is left unchecked it will eventually lock you up. It will destroy your purpose in life and usefulness. It will render you ineffectual; no longer being able to fulfill what God has designed you do and be. Those who once benefited from your part in their life, no longer do. God’s wisdom enables us to accept and profit from life’s instabilities.

¹⁶Wiersbe, ***Be Satisfied***, Ec 7:11. Logos (bold and italics, mine)

(4) God's wisdom enables us to handle evil, (7:15-29)

NOTES:

A Detroit resident asked city officials to stop the flow of water coming from an abandoned house next door. When workers arrived on the scene, they found an unusual situation. Someone had ripped out the kitchen sink, creating a stream of water that was finding its way into the lady's basement next door. They had trouble, however, locating the shutoff valve for the water line. So they began digging a trench that ended in the woman's yard, where they found a valve. But when they tried to turn it off, it broke, rupturing the line and cutting off her water. The woman ended up with not only a flooded basement but a broken waterline, a plumber's repair bill for \$2,000, and a large pit in what had been a carefully manicured lawn.

Sometimes calling on God for help seems to result in worse trouble than the original problem. That was true with the children of Israel in Egypt. But God uses trouble in extraordinary ways to develop extraordinary people, for extraordinary work.

1a The counsel of God's wisdom in handling evil, (15-18)

¹⁵ **I have seen everything in my days of vanity** (I've seen it all, even though my entire life is but a vapor—This carries the same idea that you are expressing when you say, “Now I've seen everything.”): (Solomon now gives two examples), **there is a just** (righteous, godly), **man who perishes in his righteousness** (¹¹ whose life upon this earth is few in years even though his life is a testimony of godliness, or ¹² whose death resulted because he was living for God, [e.g., a martyr]), **and** (then on the other hand), **there is a wicked man** (who has only disdain for God and His ways; who may not even believe in God), **who prolongs life in his wickedness**, (who lives on and on and on, despite the fact that he defies God everyday).

¹⁶ (God tells us that enlight of this) **Do not** (then), **be overly righteous**¹⁷ (don't expect more out of your faithfulness to God than you ought), **nor be overly wise**

¹⁷ Read verse 16. Some say that this means not to go to extremes. Don't be extremely righteous, or try to be extremely wise. Why? “Because,” they say “You are going to get hurt if you do. Because you are not going to get the payoff you expect for being excessively righteous, and you will be deeply hurt and disillusioned.” But then verse 17 causes a problem. If you apply the same hermeneutics (rules of interpretation), to verse 17 as you did in verse 16, you are told to not be extremely wicked or foolish. Balance it out or you could die prematurely. But God says in 1 Peter 1:15, “**as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.**” Would you say that God is extremely righteous? Sure you would. Well, God is saying He expects us to make it our aim to do the same! God not only tells us to abstain from all evil, but He also tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 to, “**Abstain from [even] all appearance of evil.**”

To try to get around the obvious problem, some interpret the not being “**overly righteous**” or “**overly wise**,” as being pharisaical, legalistic or self-righteous. But that still leaves a problem with verse 17. Do we interpret being, “**overly wicked**” and “**overly foolish**,” as being habitual bullies, professional criminals, or the class clowns?

(don't expect that doing the right thing, at the right time will always pay off in positive results either—the reason why?): **why should you destroy yourself?** (“*Destroy*” here actually means to be appalled, astounded, to damage yourself, to bring devastation into your life [Notice that it is something that you do to yourself. No one does it to you]—In other words, Solomon is telling us not to think that because we do everything in a way that complies with God's will and Word that it will guarantee you abstinence from the evil that Adam unleashed into the human race and this world. Don't think that you will always get what you believe or you actually do deserve. If you do, there is the potential to do great damage to yourself, your faith and to those around watching you.)¹⁸

¹⁷ **Do not be overly wicked** (either though, expecting that you can get away with just about anything because sometimes the wicked seem to be the winner—*Don't live your life in direct disrespect to God*), **nor be foolish** (don't expect that you can get away with living recklessly or thoughtlessly either—*Don't live your life with careless indifference towards God*): **why should you die before your time?** (die prematurely—In other words Solomon tells us here, not to think that just because there are no guarantees that neither the righteous nor the wicked will always get what they deserve this side of eternity, but quite possibly the opposite, that it is worth the chance to live as the whim hits you. You don't want to put yourself in the position were you could give up or severely damage their faith, or become enslaved to evil along with the possibility of dying prematurely.)

¹⁸ **It is good** (to your benefit), **that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other** (that you grasp the full gambit of possibilities of living a righteous or wicked life in this world—*not feeling you have the right to expect [even demand] God to bless you in certain ways—or that you can make your own destiny and live above the power and will of God*); **for he who fears God** (rather than questions Him, gets angry at Him, becomes disillusioned with Him, writes Him off, demands He respond in certain ways **or** thinks he can determine his own future, can act independent of God, or thinks there is no God), **will escape them all**, (If you grasp this, and follow God's counsel, you will not put yourself in the position were you could give up or severely damage your faith; or on the flip side, become enslaved to evil, be dominated by the flesh, world and devil along with the possibility of dying prematurely.)¹⁹

¹⁸ In Romans 5:20, Paul was telling the Romans that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The response of the Romans was then, “Hay, lets sin that grace may abound!” But Paul shouted, “God forbid!” (Romans 6:2). God knows our bents and He is quick to confront us with them. Just like the Romans, it would be very easy for us to say here in Ecclesiastes, “We might as well forget about trying our best for God, seeing the result may not be positive.” In verse 17 we get our “God forbid!”

¹⁹ This is the message God wants us to get is very clear. We must remember that we are talking about how best to live life “under the sun” in a broken world, all things considered.

F APPLICATION:

In this world living righteously does not guarantee you wonderful results in this life, and neither does wickedness guarantee you God's doom; again in this world. Only in a perfect world could we expect these things.

Lets say you have two radios. One is new and in perfect conditon, but the other is 30 years old, has only one speaker, two thirds of the antena is broken off, and sometimes you have to shake it to get it to work at all. Would you expect the same results from both? No. You would expect less of the broken one. We live in a broken world, not a perfect one, but we expect perfect results. It is easy to fall into the sin of not only expecting God to bless us in certain ways, but demand that He do so, or we are ditching Him.

Second, the wicked appear to prosper only if you take the short view of things. This was the lesson Asaph recorded in Psalm 73 and that Paul reinforced in Romans 8:18—[*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*] and 2 Corinthians 4:16–18—[*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*] “They have their reward” [Matthew says in] (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), and that reward is all they will ever get... This is the fate of all who follow their example and sacrifice the eternal for the temporal.²⁰

God tells us in Isaiah 49:16, **See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me.**

God says, "You are as clear to me as the palm of My band." just as you, friend, know the lines in your hand, God knows your ways . . . and He knows them *continually*. That includes your responses, your experiences, your reactions, what you call your calamities, your dead ends, your impossible situations.

See, not only does He have you and me, the wind and the rain, and the tiny little baby in His hands, He has yesterday's failures. He has today's challenges, He has tomorrow's surprises right there in His bands. And not one of them causes God to gasp. Not one causes Him to react with surprise, "Ah! I never knew that." Not one. He is unshockable, He is immutable. He's got the whole world in His bands. What's more, He has inscribed you and me on His palms.²¹

²⁰ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos.

²¹ Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge*, p. 206

2a The enablement of God's wisdom in handling evil, (19-22)

NOTES:

Have you ever been criticized? How has it made you feel? Has it changed you? If it has do you think for the better or worse? Has the criticism helped or hurt you, and/or your relationship with the person who criticised you? Has it caused you to do something you regret? God is going to use criticism to illustrate the enabling power that His wisdom can supply us.

¹⁹ (Even though good wisdom, godly wisdom cannot guarantee you perfect results all the time in this broken world, godly), **Wisdom** (still), **strengthens the wise** (enables the wise to prevail), **more** (i.e., more consistently and in greater measure over life's challenges), **than ten rulers of the city**, (being vastly superior than mere political or military power).²²

²⁰ **For** (the reason godly wisdom strengthens is that), **there is not a just** (an innately perfect), **man on earth** (including yourself), **who** (always), **does good and does not sin**, (humanity as a whole is flawed, just as broken as everything else in this world is—God's wisdom alone can enable us to rise above our corrupt heart and mind).²³

²² Wisdom strengthens the wise in that:

- They know that you can do everything right and still suffer negative results and therefore, are not devastated when it happens at times. (*Jesus did everything right and suffered tremendously for it, but He was never devastated by it.*)
- They know that no matter what circumstances they find themselves in, they can get through any and everything with God's help. (*God can use positive and negative consequences equally well. If anything, He can use the negative ones the best, [2 Cor. 12:9, 10]*)
- They know that the proper rewards or consequences may not be met out here, but they will be in glory; where everything is perfect and works out perfectly. (A poor but devout Brazilian woman was being criticized for serving the Lord most of her 85 years by a woman she had often witnessed to. Her friend pointed out that most of the so called sinners around her were much better off than she. She quietly but staring her in the eye said, "You forgot to figure eternity to the tally. What will they have compared to me then?" Her godly wisdom enabled her to prevail.

- ²³
- Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." (Mk 10:18)
 - "You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." (Ps 86:5)
 - "...They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one. (Ps 14:1b-3)

²¹ **Also** (realizing humanities falibility, corruption, depravity), **do not take to heart** (*lit. give not your heart*—we tell our son or daughter to be careful who you give your heart to—we could say the same about) **everything people say** (whether good or bad!),²⁴ **lest you hear your servant cursing you** (for surely he will at sometime or other, and if you take it to heart what will happen?! More than likely it will hurt and anger you. Which in turn will cause a bitter and vengful spirit to rise up in you. Any one of a hundred things can happen then, you you or how you respond. In short, you have added an ingredient to a potential poison that would have otherwise remained nonleathal if you had not taken it to heart, but expected such things. God’s wisdom enables you to avoid such things—“***gossip separates the best of friends... [but the] Fire goes out for lack of fuel, and tensions disappear when slander stops.***” [Prov. 16:28b; 26:20]).²⁵

²² **For** (not a few times, but) **many times also**, (more times that you would wish to recall or admit), **your own heart has known that even you have cursed others**, (made a groundless accusation; yelled a vengful statement; spoke in ignorance of the truth; passed on some gossip, invented a story; published someones dirty laundry; and/or shared personal information. We have said some things that we have regreated and wished people had not taken to heart. Marriages have been seperated, jobs have been terminated, agreements have been broken, and friendships have been broken because something was taken to heart that should not have.—**Gerard Fay wisely said, “I have often found, the way to find out about one man, , is to ask him about another.”**).

Concerning saying something in ignorance, sometimes it is hard to get all of the facts straight even when you are trying to. This ad from the California Newspaper Publishers Association is a good example.

²⁴ Take for instance the woman asked a young man to guess her age. You could see his wheels turning and brains smoking. He finally spoke up and said, “I am pausing only because I have several ideas,” said the tactful young man with a smile. “I am perplexed with trouble. I hesitate whether to guess ten years younger on account of your incredible looks or ten years older on account of your superior intelligence.”

God tells us in His Word that, “**The purity of silver and gold can be tested in a crucible, but a man is tested by his reaction to men's praise.**” (Proverb 27:21) God also says that, “**Flattery is a trap; evil men are caught in it, but good men stay away and sing for joy.**” (Proverb 29:5-6)

It has been rightly said that the truth has to only change hands a few times to become fiction. (Norman Rockwell overhead)

²⁵ This is easily illustrated if you take a glass of water (which is drinkable), and add some pop to it. It is not as desirable but still drinkable. It remains drinkable if you add some orange juice, pop and coffee to it. Granted it is not something you would order or enjoy drinking, but who orders or enjoys criticism either. Now if we add some Clorox to the mixture, it becomes a lethal poison. It is the same when we take something to heart that we should not. Some criticism is destructive, ignorant of the facts, absurd, even malicious. That kind of criticism is like the Clorox if we take it to heart.

(Monday) "FOR SALE--R. D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Phone 948-0707 after 7 PM and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him cheap."

(Tuesday) "NOTICE-- We regret having erred in R. D. Jones's ad yesterday. It should have read: `One sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone 948- 0707 and ask for Mrs. Kelly who lives with him after 7 PM.'"

(Wednesday) "NOTICE--R. D. Jones has informed us that he has received several annoying telephone calls because of the error we made in his classified ad yesterday. His ad stands correct as follows: `FOR SALE--R.D. Jones has one sewing machine for sale. Cheap. Phone 948-0707 PM and ask for Mrs. Kelly who loves with him.'"

(Thursday) "NOTICE--I, R. D. Jones, have no sewing machine for sale. I smashed it! Don't call 948-0707, as the telephone has been disconnected. I have NOT been carrying on with Mrs. Kelly. Until yesterday she was my housekeeper, she quit!" (I think she took the add to heart...)

The wise person pays no attention to the gossip of the day because he has more important matters which to attend. Charles Spurgeon told his pastoral students that the minister ought to have one blind eye and one deaf ear. "You cannot stop people's tongues," he said, "and 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). Of course, if we are honest, we may have to confess that we have done our share of talking about others! See Psalm 38 and Matthew 7:1-3.²⁶

3a The beneficiaries of God's wisdom in handling evil, (23-8:1)

Have you ever failed at anything major in your life? Which example do you want, right? We are going to see one of Solomon's major failures here.

They say there is no better education than one's own failures. Take for instance the true story about a project manager at IBM who lost the company not thousands, or hundreds of thousands, not a million dollars, but 10 million dollars. Dejectedly, he walked into the president's office and said, "I'm sorry. I'm sure you'll want my resignation. I'll be gone by the end of the day".

The president's response showed his understanding of the value of failure. He said, "Are you kidding?! We've just invested 10 million dollars in your education. We're not about to let you go. Now get back to work."

Solomon has invested who knows how much time, energy and money into his project thus far, and he admits he has failed to achieve his goal. But, he didn't fail to gain a tremendous education that would be a great benefit to him the rest of his life.

²⁶ Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Ec 7:19. Logos

- ²³ **All this** (this seeming futility concerning life [e.g., thinking that if you do everything right only good things will happen to you, or because they don't, thinking you can live a sinful life then and get away with it, vv. 15-18]), **I** (Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived), **have proved** (tested), **by wisdom** (tested this by my human reasoning through observation and experience). **I said, "I will be wise"** (I will figure out the central issues of God and life out); **but it was far from me**, (it was WAY beyond my human abilities. I haven't even come close. I haven't even scratched the surface. I could not achieve the standard of my ideals. I utterly failed because it can never be discovered by human wisdom. Men are not the possessors of pure, good, godly wisdom. [cf., Ecc. 3:11; 8:17]). You cannot create something out of nothing, or expect to hold an ocean in a thimble. You will never be able to figure out the "**why's**" in this life.
- ²⁴ **As for that which** (I sought to obtain), **is far off** (too far beyond me to reach out and grasp), **and exceedingly deep** (too wide and mysterious for me to get my arms around), **who can find it out**, (who has wisdom sufficient to figure out why God allows things to happen as they do as well as how they relate to His good pleasure? It is beyond me or any man. [Eph. 1:9, 11])²⁷
- ²⁵ **I** (Solomon, sincerely, objectively and wholeheartedly [Ecc. 1:13]), **applied my heart to know** (understand), **to search** (investigate), **and seek out** (secure, grasp), **wisdom and the reason** (the scheme) **of things** (from a pure, truthful perspective, from God's perspective), **to know** (to know such matters as), **the** (nature), **wickedness**²⁸ **of folly** (deliberate anti-God, depraved foolish activity—[*This person purposely does what is ungodly with no fear or remorse, even challenges God to do anything about it*]), **even of** (common, everyday), **foolishness** (*it is the kind of foolishness that you reveal you have committed when you say things like, "That will teach me for not thinking or checking first." "That was pretty stupid of me, wasn't it." "Where's my head?" "I can't believe I did that!"*),

²⁷ God tells us Himself in the book of Job, "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.' God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, (Job 28:20-23—NIV).

²⁸ ...denotes the kind of life that is opposite to God's character (Job 34:10 ; Ps 5:4 [H 5]; 45:7 [H 8]), and draws statements of indictment and judgment (Isa 58:4 ; Ezk 3:19 ; Mic 6:10-11). Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. electronic ed., Page 863. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980.

and madness, (reckless, wild and foolish pursuits—[*This is the person who has an “I don’t care,” attitude or thinks, “It won’t happen to me.”*]²⁹ *It’s also the person who lives to party*]).³⁰

²⁶ ³¹ **And** (Solomon reveals that he has not found good and pure wisdom in women either. In fact Solomon says [cf., Ecc. 1:17; 2:3, 12]), **I find more bitter** (vexing, grievous) **than** (the terror of), **death** (itself),³² **the** (seductive), **woman** (primarily sexually, but a scheming woman would also apply [Jezabel for example]), **whose heart** (desire, appitie), **is snares and nets** (which are secretly laid, in hopes of seducing you for her personal gain—[*not women in general, but this specific kind of woman*]), **whose hands are fetters**, (which hold you fast like chains once you step into her

²⁹ What would you say to the person who dared you to try to jump 10’ across a 250’ chasm, even if he said that he would give you two tries? “No!” That is what you need to say to yourself when you find yourself interested in wicked or reckless, wild pursuits.

³⁰ **A 9-year-old boy refused to heed his mother's warnings about hitching rides behind cars with his roller blades. He would cleverly hide behind the vehicle while holding on to the back bumper as it was leaving a parking place. He got quite a thrill being towed for about a block; then letting go, he would coast for a long distance at high speed. One day he was late for dinner, so he grabbed the back of a big truck which he thought was going his way. Unexpectedly, the driver, who couldn't see the boy in his rearview mirror, shifted into reverse. It all happened so quickly that he had no chance to move, and the double wheels of the heavily loaded vehicle rolled over him. Death was instantaneous. The boy really had meant no harm, but he had decided to disregard once again his mother's repeated warnings. And so his life was tragically ended.** Anyone of us may be involved in any one, or any combination of the three kinds of foolishness mentioned above. We may be getting away with it now, but if we don't stop it, someday and without warning, it is going to boomerang on us.

³¹ **A father asked his son after church one Sunday, “What did you learn in Sunday School this morning?**

The son replied with great enthusiasm, “We learned about how Moses went behind enemy lines to rescue the Jews from the Egyptians. Moses ordered the engineers to build a pontoon bridge across the Red Sea for their escape. After the people crossed, he sent bombers back to blow up the bridge and the Egyptian tanks that were following them and all the soldiers drowned in the sea. And then...

But before the boy could continue, dad said, “Did your teacher really tell it like that?”

His son replied, “No, but if I told you what he said you would never believe it!”

It is so easy not to believe God. It seems so incredible to us that the standards God says we must live by are right at times. We think that His standards hinder our happiness rather than protect and enhance it.

What happens when someone tells another person that you can only do this one way if you want it to work? You want to find another way, don't you. You want to do it your way. That is the whole point of the song, “I Did It My Way.” The problem is, God says that the only way that will work if we truly want to have the best is to live His way.

The next verses are key to understanding this matter. Solomon has already told us that he has failed to grasp God's wisdom on matters like this. Now Solomon tells us though, what to do in light of that.

³² This before the sting and victory was taking out of death!

snare or net—Only). **He who pleases God**³³ (he who God finds delight in being in the presence of—or he who God stands in agreement with),³⁴ **shall escape from her** (will not be victimized by her), **but the sinner** (who does not delight God and stands not beside Him, but in opposition to Him), **shall be trapped** (enslaved), **by her**.³⁵

²⁷ “**Here is what I have found** (encountered),” **says the Preacher, “Adding one thing to the other** (by comparing one thing with another, involving men and women both), **to find out the reason** (the scheme of why things happen as they do and to thus exercise at least a little control over them. At a bare minimum understand why they happened!)

²⁸ **Which my soul still seeks** (desires to grasp and influence), **but I cannot find** (it, it eludes me): **one man among a thousand I have found** (implying that only one in a thousand was even able to help me a little in my quest—probably the just man that knew not to be overly righteous [v. 15]—but even he falls way short [v. 20, 24]), **but a** (seducing [v. 26]), **woman among**

³³ Please here is a compound word that means “to face” or “look in the face” and to be “pleasant, delightful, or agreeable.”

³⁴ That can be a difficult matter to achieve between anyone, but **especially** with God!

A wife who once tried to stand in agreement with her husband said, “I’m willing to admit I’m right if you will admit you’re wrong.”

³⁵ (Proverbs 2:16-19—“flatters with her words...none that go unto her return again”; 5:3-6—“lips like...honeycomb...mouth...smoother than oil...her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as to two-edged sword”; 6:24-26—“flattery of the tongue...beautiful...takes you by her eyelids...brings you to a piece of bread”; 7:5-27—“leys in wait...has a crafty heart...feet that don’t stay home...pursues...is diligent...promises much...takes you like an ox to the slaughter...brings death)

“The one who hauls you nearer to God is your mother or wife or sweetheart; but if your woman is not related to God, then the good Lord deliver you! No man is a match for the iniquity that is feminine when it is out of touch with God...A man can neither rise so high nor sink so low as a woman.”

Any man or woman who falls in love comes right into God’s presence, he or she instantly feels religious. Once love—my sovereign preference for another person—is awakened, it always goes direct to God like a homing pigeon. It is not hypocrisy on the part of a lad when he begins to pray, he cannot help it, his love is the finest [North star] in his life. That is the contrast between love and lust. Love can wait and worship endlessly; lust says—I must have it at once. The thing that can be hellishly wrong can be marvelously right. Chambers, Oswald. *Shade of His Hand : Talks on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. Hants UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1996, c1936, Logos.

all these I have not found, (I didn't gain any of the wisdom I sought after by them).³⁶

²⁹ **Truly, this only I have found** (I have not found what I am looking for, but one thing I have learned is): **that** (in the beginning), **God made man** (the human race), **upright** (to have the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom I seek [Gen. 1:26-31]), **But** (contrary to what God initially made them), **they** (men and women alike, beginning with Adam and Eve), **have sought out many schemes**, (i.e., many substitutes, many alternatives. The entire human race, even though initially created upright, has surrendered pure, unadulterated wisdom for vain reasoning. How many times have you and I done that? [Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 7:13-25]).³⁷

^{8:1} **Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing?** (Only he who pleases God, [v. 26]—The beneficiary of God's wisdom is the one who God finds delight in being in the presence of, who God stands in agreement with). **A man's** (procured godly), **wisdom makes his face shine** (to lighten or brighten up—it carries the idea of a clear conscience or a heart and mind at peace),³⁸ **and the sternness of his face is changed**, (in this case strengthened, fortified [Isa. 40:31]).³⁹

³⁶ In great frustration, Jill said to her husband, "All men are fools!"

To which her husband John replied, "Of course, dear. God made us that way so that all you girls wouldn't have to be old maids."

We must not think that Solomon rated women as less intelligent than men, because this is not the case. He spoke highly of women in Proverbs (12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:14; and 31:10ff), Ecclesiastes (9:9), and certainly in the Song of Solomon. In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon even pictured God's wisdom as a beautiful woman (1:20ff; 8:1ff; 9:1ff). But keep in mind that women in that day had neither the freedom nor the status that they have today, and it would be unusual for a woman to have learning equal to that of a man. It was considered a judgment of God for women to rule over the land (Isa. 3:12, but remember Miriam and Deborah, two women who had great leadership ability). Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Logos Software.

³⁷ Do we not still devise many substitutes, schemes, and alternatives in an endeavor to work around God's Word. We have God's will clearly given to us. But what do we do all too often?

³⁸ And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart."

So I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"
Ne 2:1-3

A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. (Pr 15:13)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Ps 119:105)

³⁹ But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Is 40:31)

This is the way out from under the tyranny or the “whys” and “what ifs” of life. Knowing that God’s wisdom is too far away to reach and too big around to get your arms around, But, that doesn’t mean it’s wrong. It means that faith is required. The beneficiary of this wisdom is the one who stands beside and in agreement with who God is and what He does as well as allows.

God wants your face to shine again. He wants to take the sternness in your face away; even though your consequences remain the same. God wants you to trust Him. He wants you to believe in Him, even to agree with Him, that He knows exactly what He is doing. God wants this to come first from your heart, not from your lips.

"I was bored with the routes I'd been following for my morning strolls," writes Shirley Waite. "One day I decided to walk down the alleys.

"Alleys are not romantic; they are strewn with garbage cans and trash piles. As I matched backyards with houses I'd walked by, I noticed something interesting. The back of one unpretentious dwelling resembled a fairy wonderland. A riot of flowers nearly bordered the fence; a birdbath stood in the center of a terraced rock garden. Then I came to the backyard of a beautiful home I'd admired from the street. Six-foot thistles grew close to the alley. Debris was scattered everywhere--broken toys, untended flowerbeds, automobile parts--visible only to the owner and the garbage collector.

"As I walked home, I thought to myself. My outward or 'up front' appearance may pass the world's inspection, but what about my 'backyard'? It's hidden from all but One who knows its contents. He promises to collect the garbage from my life, but He expects me to pull the weeds from my thought life, put into His hands the broken dreams, dig deep to uproot thistles of resentment and un-forgiveness, and clean out the rusty wheels of procrastination.

"Long ago God looked into King David's 'backyard' and found a man after His own heart. Could God say the same of you and me if he looked in our 'backyards'?"

[Devotions for Body and Soul from Daily Guideposts. Abingdon, 1996. Pages 31-32.]