

MEANING (LESS)

“Finding a Heart of Wisdom”

(Ecclesiastes 7-8)

In 1982 a California man named Larry Walters decided to follow his lifelong dream of flying. Along with some friends, Larry went to an Army Surplus store and purchased some weather balloons and a couple of tanks of helium. He tied the balloons to the arms of a lawn chair with the plan of floating at about 10,000 feet, tethered to the ground, then shooting some balloons out with a pellet gun, and then slowly descending to the earth.

Things did not go according to plan. The ropes tethering the chair to the ground snapped, and Larry and his amazing chair floated quickly up to 16,000 feet and into the flight path of the San Diego Airport. The other thing he hadn't thought through was how much a role fear would play. He couldn't let go of the arms of the chair to fire the pellet gun. When he finally did take the chance, he took two shots and then dropped the gun.

By now he was on the radar of the airfield. A pilot reported, through the clouds, seeing a man floating in a lawn chair. But luckily, he had hit a couple of the balloons before dropping his gun. They did have to pry his hands off the lawn chair when he finally landed! Larry “gained a heart of wisdom” from his experience floating high in his lawn chair. He never tried it again! Sometimes we learn wisdom the hard way.

Solomon is taking us on a bird's eye tour of life from his perspective “under the sun” or, life without taking God into account. Solomon's writing goes through something of a transformation at this point. We don't know exactly what brought about his turning point, and he now seemed headed in the right direction. The words “wise” and “wisdom” are used 30 times between Chapter 7 and Chapter 12.

To have God's perspective is the definition of wisdom. Seeing ourselves and seeing life as He does...no balloons... through His Word, through His Spirit, and through His people. That is wisdom.

Observations About Wisdom

Four things that flip our way of thinking on its head.

1. *It is better to go to a funeral than a party.... (7:1-4)*

It was Solomon's conclusion that going to a funeral, “the house of mourning,” will teach you wisdom more effectively than going to a party. Honestly, would you rather go to a wedding or a funeral? People have asked me more than once, “would you rather preach a funeral or a wedding?” Well, funerals are simpler. There's no rehearsal, no seating charts, no mother of the bride or bridezilla to manage, no drama. It's just simpler.

I enjoy weddings. Yet we learn more at funerals. Every funeral is a caution to us. My grief class taught me that every funeral is a mortality check. ^ It reminds us of our own limits. All of us won't end up having a wedding. But short of the coming of Jesus, all of us will have a funeral. “The end of a thing is better than the beginning.” Weddings are loud and joyful and expensive celebrations. But a big wedding doesn't mean the marriage will last. There's something quietly, deeply glorious seeing a couple

who have made it 60 or 70 years and to see the widow or widower sitting on the front row, reflecting on their life lived well. "The end of things is better."

Solomon is just saying, "Don't miss the wisdom that comes from times like that." In fact, occasionally it's not a bad thing to walk through a cemetery. I know. That's morbid, right? One guy walking through a cemetery came to a grave marker that said, "Pause friend, as you pass by. As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, so you will be. So, take your heed and follow me." Someone came along and added another line to the marker. "To follow you I'm not content, until I know which way you went."

Wisdom is knowing which way you'll go when this life is over. As we have on our sign outside, there's only two choices of destination. Which way are you going? Paul had no question about this. In Philippians 1:23-24— "to depart and be with Christ."

2. It is better to receive a rebuke than a compliment...

Mark Twain said, "I can live two months on a good compliment." But Solomon is suggesting that we will live those two months with wisdom after a good rebuke. I don't like criticism. No one does. Sometimes criticism is unwarranted. An old farmer told his son, "Son, when a mule kicks you, just consider the source." Yet "a rebuke is better than a compliment." It takes a courageous person to offer an honest rebuke. Wisdom tells us to receive those as gifts, not curses. A wise person learns from the critics.

3. It is better to be patient than to be angry

You know, anger is something that all of us struggle with to different degrees. Some of us blow up externally at a situation and others implode internally and make ourselves sick with it. But anger is an inevitable part of being alive. It is a God-given defense mechanism. But for insecure people, their "defense" button is stuck. They are continually angry about something or someone. Anger is like a porcupine's quills. They stick everything in their path. That's what an angry person does. And the first law of the jungle is, "You can't hug a porcupine." Angry people alienate others.

Solomon gives clear warning to that person. It is unwise to live in anger, lest it make its home in you. (v9). Anger releases a chemical that we become addicted to. We can't live without it. Then, we have to have it to feel ok. And then it owns you.

4. It is better to experience adversity than prosperity...

You know who disagrees with that? Those who are going to through adversity right now! But we actually learn far more from difficulty than prosperity. We see people struggle sometimes and feel sorry for them, and yet Solomon says, "They're better off." Jesus Himself was called "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Our sufferings make us more like Jesus, but they also give us "a heart of wisdom." As AW Tozer said, "God can use no man greatly until He has hurt him deeply."

Laughter is fine, but Solomon says it's empty, "like thorns crackling in a fire." It's empty, with no heat, no depth, no lasting value. A man came to his doctor complaining that his life was tedious, hard, and it just made him not want to get out of bed. The doctor gave him a prescription and advice: "There is this great comedian holding some shows at a nearby comedy club...Doc, I am that comedian!"

There are none who are perfectly righteous; this is the beginning of wisdom (v20)

Then Solomon takes us to the beginning of wisdom. The beginning of wisdom is realizing that there is no righteous person on earth. No one, in themselves, is righteous. This paves the way for the most important lesson in life: By ourselves, we can never make ourselves acceptable to God. "There is none righteous, no not one." Paul said. Solomon agreed. (v29)

Conclusions Regarding Humility

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10)

Wisdom is seeing life from God's perspective. Someone has said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

a. In the presence of authority. (8:1-9)

One of the most important lessons we have to learn in life is that there is always some authority we must learn to obey. A parent, a teacher, a police officer, a military chain of command, a CEO, a board of directors, the president. And they don't always exercise their authority wisely. It's hard to humble yourself in their presence at times. But wisdom dictates that we must exercise humility in our dealings with those in authority. We need to learn we are not always in control and understand our limitations (v 8)

We obey, Solomon said, "because we have made a vow." Because the government can compel us to do so, and because we don't always have understanding of what God is doing through the authorities placed in our lives.

b. In the times of injustice. (8:10-14)

Sometimes in life, the wicked prosper and are celebrated, while the righteous seem to suffer for doing good. It is hard for us to live in a world where things seem so unjust and inequitable. "Oppression drives the wise person mad." We are angry at Russia because of the unfair match-up against the Ukraine. It's like an entire nation, or a demagogue dictator, has become the school ground bully. They are good people who just want to be left alone. But it torments us to see good people hurting. We feel this because the love of justice and fairness is hard wired into every person by God. (Evidence of God's identity in you)

c. In the moments of mystery (8:15-17)

Life is full of mysteries. Why does your peanut butter sandwich or your toast always fall jelly side down? Why is your traffic lane or your grocery store checkout line always the longest? Where do your spare socks go in the washing machine? And why is it just ONE? Solomon says, in these closing verses, that some things in life will always be a mystery. There are some things that we must just have the humility to say "I don't get it. I don't understand." Some things are just out of our pay grade. But then, we trust in the God Who holds the keys to all mysteries!

Romans 11

[33] Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! [34] "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" [36] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.