

Can I Keep on Going?  
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Ecclesiastes 7 and 8

**Opening question: Imagine that you have a skeptical friend who demands: “How can you trust God when you have no explanation for life’s mysteries?” How would you respond to that question?**

- Here are some questions we’ll consider today:
  - How should we live in a world where bad things happen to GOOD people; and often BAD people SEEM to get a free pass?
  - How can we serve God in that kind of world and not become CYNICAL or at least FATALISTIC?
  - How can we keep our JOY in the midst of the twists and turns of life?
- If you had to, could you boil the answers to those questions down to JUST TWO WORDS? After studying Solomon’s wisdom in Ecclesiastes 7 and 8 we’ll WILL!
- Let’s begin reading in 7:15:

Ecclesiastes 7:15–18 (ESV)

15 In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. 16 Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? 17 Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

- Verse 15: Solomon had seen it ALL! His sad conclusion: Many times the righteous die young or suffer, and the wicked live long in their evil doing.
- **Why does that reality offend our sense of “fair play”?**

Jesus reinforced this reality in Matthew 5:44–45 (ESV)

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

“...the wicked appear to prosper only if you take the short view of things. They may gain the whole world, but they lose their own souls. This is the fate of all who follow their example and sacrifice the eternal for the temporal.”

- The next three verses, 16-18, can seem puzzling at first glance.
- “Do not be overly righteous” and don’t “make yourself too wise.” But, in 17 he also says “Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool.” If you glossed over this, **What could it seem to be saying?**

- We might think Solomon is saying, “It’s okay to sin if you just sin a little.”
- We know that isn’t right because look at 7:20: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”
- **What do you think Solomon meant by, “Do not be overly righteous” and don’t “make yourself too wise.”?**
- In our human nature we all want a system like we described earlier: Doing GOOD = long life and no suffering; Being WICKED means you get ZAPPED. **Why wouldn’t that kind of system work when you consider God’s HOLINESS and His standard of RIGHTEOUSNESS? (See Romans 3:10 and following)**
- **Why was this a problem with the Pharisees in Jesus’ time?**
- We’re headed somewhere, let’s move to Chapter 8 beginning in verses 10-12:

Ecclesiastes 8:10–12 (ESV)

10 Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

- Solomon had seen the funerals of wicked people where all their bad deeds seemed to be forgotten.
- Ever been to a funeral and they said such good things about the wicked dead man you wanted to check the casket to see if you were in the right funeral?

11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

- Verse 11: When bad people seem to get away with their evil deeds what does verse 11 say tends to happen?
- Still, Solomon believed God would make things right, verse 12:

12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.

- This brings us back to our opening questions:
  - How should we live in a world where bad things happen to GOOD people; and often BAD people SEEM to get a free pass?
  - How can we serve God in that kind of world and not become CYNICAL or at least FATALISTIC?
  - How can we keep our JOY in the midst of the twists and turns of life?
- I promised you earlier, we’d have the answers to those questions in JUST TWO WORDS by the end of the lesson. Let’s get busy doing that!
- Our first instinct is to try to FIGURE OUT WHY life is like it is. Why is life such a mystery? Solomon tried to figure it out, verse 16...

Ecclesiastes 8:16–17 (ESV)

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one’s eyes see sleep, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man

may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.

- **Verse 17: What was Solomon's conclusion?**

- Look back in chapter 7 beginning with verse 11. Solomon says...

Ecclesiastes 7:11–14 (ESV)

11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,  
an advantage to those who see the sun.

12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,  
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

- When Solomon talks about wisdom here, he's talking about skill or knowledge
- He says wisdom (or knowledge) plus money equals an advantage in life.
- But, wisdom (or knowledge) is even BETTER than money.
- **Why would wisdom be better than money?**
- Verses 11 and 12 make sense. Having wisdom or knowledge is important.
- But, the first words of verse 13, tell us when HUMAN wisdom or knowledge fall apart:

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

- We heard a similar thought in 1:15. **What does verse 13 mean?**
- As we studied a couple of weeks ago, God has ORDAINED that we not understand everything in life. **Why did we say God doesn't give us all the answers?**

Ray Stedman wrote:

*God has designed life to be full of the unexpected so we might realize that we do not control our future. We are not in charge of life. The great satanic lie that subtly comes at us a thousand times a day is that we are gods, we are in charge, we can plan, we can direct, we can control.*

Here's a thought I wrote down about this:

The purposes of God are not a riddle to be solved or a formula to be discovered. Trusting God is an adventure that can only be lived through daily relationship and obedience to Him. It's an adventure of trust, communion, and obedience.

- **When a child reaches about two what is their favorite QUESTION to ask about everything?** For a two year old it's not a bad thing...it's how they learn (though it will drive the parents nuts!)
- For a child of God it's okay to have that question in your heart, God can handle it. But OBSESSING over it can lead to a miserable life.
- Here's another thought I had this week: We waste so much time trying to figure out the WHY of God rather than enjoying the WHO of God.
- In verse 14 Solomon gives us some sage advice on how to live with the ups and downs of life:

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

- The writer of our Sunday School teachers guide paraphrased it nicely: *"We should be filled with joy in good times and filled with faith in hard times, accepting both from God's hand and trusting Him to work out His plan."*
- The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS!"

So, What's The Takeaway?

- I promised we'd summarize how to live in this imperfect world in two words.
- Ronald Reagan summarized his plan for establishing diplomacy with the former Soviet Union in two words. Remember what they were?
- We live in an IMPERFECT WORLD, but we serve a PERFECT GOD.
- With Him we also must TRUST, but we can NEVER VERIFY...we can't straighten what He has made crooked. Instead, the two words for the child of God are captured in the words of an old hymn. It's recently been recorded in a contemporary style by Big Daddy Weave. While they changed the style, they words remain the same:
- TRUST and OBEY, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to TRUST and OBEY.
- How can we live in a world where bad things happen to GOOD people; and often BAD people SEEM to get a free pass?
- How can we serve God in that kind of world and not become CYNICAL or at least FATALISTIC?
- How can we keep our JOY in the midst of the twists and turns of life?
- We don't have to figure out God's purposes or to try to be "good enough."
- We only have to *"...be filled with joy in good times and filled with faith in hard times, accepting both from God's hand and trusting Him to work out His plan."*
- We just need to remember and live out those two words: TRUST and OBEY.