

Where Is the Balance?  
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Ecclesiastes 7

Balance is a state of equilibrium; not leaning too far in one direction. We learned about balance as toddlers learning to walk. Jesse could tell us about balance on a bicycle. We would see the importance of balance if we looked at one of Wayne Marshall's big construction cranes. Balance isn't only physical. Balance is important in finances, art, and our justice system is represented by balanced scales. Question: How is balance important in how we decide to live our lives?

Ecclesiastes chapter seven is a collection of proverbs – short observations about life that state a truth or give advice<sup>i</sup>. Just like the book of Proverbs (also mostly written by Solomon) these short observations may seem to be random and disconnected, however, as we “thumb through” Solomon's wise sayings in this chapter we can see a thread of an idea woven around these verses.

Truth that should change us: Human beings are imperfect but God offers us wisdom for everyday life. His wisdom teaches us to be realistic, avoid extremes, and live a life of balance.

Let's look at Solomon's observations and learn about the balanced life.

**Ecclesiastes 7 (NLT) — 1** A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born. **2** Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies— so the living should take this to heart. **3** Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. **4** A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time.

- Thinking about reputation, one extreme is to think too much about what people think of you. The other extreme is not to care at all what people think about you. Why is a good

reputation helpful in living life? Why is it especially important for the follower of Christ?

- A good reputation opens doors of trust and opportunity in life. For the Christ follower it can open (or close) the door to reach the unsaved.
- “The day you die is better than the day you were born?” “Spend your time at funerals?” Some want to run from the idea of death. Others obsess about it. What is the balanced, wise way to look at death?
- Why do we learn more in sorrow than laughter? (See. Ps. 119:71)
- C.S. Lewis: *“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>xi</sup>*
- Pain is a reality God allows into our lives. Some try to numb it others let it destroy them. The wise person trusts God and learns from the pain in life.

**5** Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool.

**6** A fool’s laughter is quickly gone, like thorns crackling in a fire. This also is meaningless.

- Criticism is painful. Flattery is seductive. The balanced person welcomes the criticism of wise and caring people and ignores the praise of fools.
- How can you know if someone is a worthy and wise critic?
- The laughter of “fools” may be fun but burns out quickly (but no warmth!)

**7** Extortion turns wise people into fools, and bribes corrupt the heart.

- Life Application Study Bible: *“It is said that everyone has a price, but those who are truly wise cannot be bought at any price.”<sup>xiii</sup>*
- This verse (& 1 Tim. 6:10) teaches us the “love of money” can ruin people.
- Sir Francis Bacon said, *“Money is a great servant but a bad master.”<sup>xiv</sup>*
- Money can help and hurt. The wise person is balanced about money.

**8** Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride.

- The wise, balanced person strives to finish well and without regrets.
- Wiersbe on patience, *“Far better that we wait patiently and humbly for God to work out His will than that we get angry and demand our own way.”*<sup>v</sup>

**9** Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool.

- No commentary needed on that one!

**10** Don't long for “the good old days.” This is not wise.

- Some people (as my grandmother would say) “wish their life away,” others pine for the past. The wise, balanced person knows that today is all we can grasp and lives to make the most of NOW. *“Carpe diem!”* – Horace<sup>vi</sup>

**11** Wisdom is even better when you have money. Both are a benefit as you go through life. **12** Wisdom and money can get you almost anything, but only wisdom can save your life.

- As we said, money is good and even better with wisdom. The problem with an extreme focus on money: **Proverbs 23:5 (NLT)** In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.
- Money can be lost but wisdom “can save your life.”

**13** Accept the way God does things, for who can straighten what he has made crooked? **14** Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.

- God is sovereign. The wise person accepts that He is in control.
- Why do we sometimes NOT enjoy prosperity? Why is Solomon's advice in verse 14 especially relevant for a Christ-follower?
- We don't know the future but we CAN know the author of that future, our Heavenly Father. When times are good, enjoy God's blessings. When times are hard, trust that God has a plan for “our good and His glory.”
- Now, Solomon addresses one of the hardest realities of life.

**15** I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people.

- Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do the wicked prosper?
- This one has been pondered for centuries. (Here's a good article: <https://www.gotquestions.org/bad-things-good-people.html> )
- The balanced Christ-follower accepts that God is loving, just, and Sovereign. If we trust Him for our eternal destiny, certainly we can trust His will when life seems to be unfair. It's not easy, but it is wise.

**16** So don't be too good or too wise! Why destroy yourself? **17** On the other hand, don't be too wicked either. Don't be a fool! Why die before your time? **18** Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes.

- What? We said avoid extremes but Solomon says "don't be too good?"
- What on earth could Solomon mean with that advice?
- How can being "good" be taken to an unhealthy extreme?

David Moore writes, *"Trying to curtail our "badness" through the energy of the flesh will produce self-righteousness (Augustine, "On the Gospel of John," 369). Trying to be good in our own strength is not only exhausting; it is impossible."*<sup>vii</sup>

- The balanced person avoids wickedness AND a self-righteous attitude.

- In verses 19 & 20 Solomon pauses to reinforce these proverbs:

**19** One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town!

**20** Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.

- The wise, balanced person acknowledges that everyone sins. (Rom.3:23)

- Speaking of that, Solomon gives a good, practical example:

**21** Don't eavesdrop on others—you may hear your servant curse you.

**22** For you know how often you yourself have cursed others.

- Human nature makes us want to call 'em up and let 'em have it!
- The wise person doesn't obsess about hurtful comments.
- This advice is bigger than just dealing with gossip or snide remarks.

- When we are tempted to lash out at someone for their bad conduct, it's wise to remember: "I've done the same kind of thing myself."

**23** I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, "I am determined to be wise." But it didn't work. **24** Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. **25** I searched everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness.

- Count the "I's" in those verses. Why didn't Solomon's method succeed?
- **Proverbs 3:7 (ESV) — 7** Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
- Solomon's last proverb can be controversial if it is misread.

**26** I discovered that a seductive woman is a trap more bitter than death. Her passion is a snare, and her soft hands are chains. Those who are pleasing to God will escape her, but sinners will be caught in her snare. **27** "This is my conclusion," says the Teacher. "I discovered this after looking at the matter from every possible angle. **28** Though I have searched repeatedly, I have not found what I was looking for. Only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one woman! **29** But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path."

- We can all agree, allowing ourselves to be seduced into sexual immorality with the opposite sex is a "trap, a snare, and chains."
- Let's deal with the controversy. "...not one woman" is virtuous."
- Was Solomon a misogynist? Look at the context. He's referring to a "seductive" woman not women in general. Giving in to bad girls was Solomon's undoing so he's describing his own flaw. Solomon's writings in Proverbs and Song of Solomon confirm his admiration for women.
- His point: It's hard to find a truly "virtuous" person, man or woman.
- The wise person who recognizes this can avoid a lot of heartbreak.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- How do we tie what feels like a list of random observations up with a bow?
- What central idea can we apply to our lives from this chapter?
- We said, human beings are imperfect but God offers us wisdom for everyday life. His wisdom teaches us to avoid extremes and live a life of balance. So, how do we do that?
- Instead of spending our days in frustration asking why life is the way it is, we need to accept the realities of life and trust God to give us wisdom.
- First we must realize what Solomon identified as the real problem in human life: No one is completely good; everyone sins. The only solution to that is a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. (Rom. 3:23, 6:23)
- How we respond to pain, temptation, pride, and anger will determine whether our life is one of wisdom and balance or futility and failure.
- We need to acknowledge that death is certain, life is short, and we should live to “finish well” and avoid looking back in regret.
- Life lived with God’s wisdom is a life of balance and trust.
- We need to accept and embrace “the way God does things” trusting His love, goodness, and justice. Enjoy the blessings and trust Him in the trials!
- This week let’s apply verses 18 and 19 to all these wise sayings: **Ecclesiastes 7:18–19 (NLT) — 18** Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid [all] extremes. **19** One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town!

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/proverb>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/C\\_S\\_Lewis\\_on\\_the\\_Problem\\_of\\_Pain\\_page3](https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/C_S_Lewis_on_the_Problem_of_Pain_page3)

<sup>iii</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 150819-150820). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/446478-money-is-a-great-servant-but-a-bad-master>

<sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Satisfied* (p. 87). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>vi</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe\\_diem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpe_diem)

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<sup>vii</sup> Moore, David. Holman Old Testament Commentary Volume 14 - Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.