



CENTRAL truth

Wise people admit their imperfections and seek God for guidance.



11 session 11 IMPERFECT & WISE



EXPLORE scripture ECCLESIASTES 7:11-22

ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14

11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. **12** Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. **13** Consider what God has done:

Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.

ECCLESIASTES 7:15-18

15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. **16** Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? **17** Do not be

overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? **18** It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.

ECCLESIASTES 7:19-22

19 Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. **20** Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins. **21** Do not pay attention to

every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you— **22** for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.



EXPLORE options

1. Imperfections

Bring a few items to your group meeting that have very clear imperfections, defects, or broken parts. Examples could include a favorite jacket that has a stain or hole in it, shoes that are missing laces, or a book with a torn cover or missing pages. Divide students into teams, and give each team one of the flawed/broken items you brought with you. Without pointing out the item's flaw, instruct the teams to come up with an advertisement to sell their item. Give students a few minutes to come up with their ad and then allow each team to present their idea to the rest of the group. Point out that there was an obvious imperfection in each of the items—did the teams mention this in their ads? Or did they try to hide the flaws? We all are tempted to try and hide our imperfections, not only from one another, but also from God. Remind students that God loves us despite these things, so rather than try to hide our weaknesses, we should admit them to God and look to Him for guidance.

2. Finding the Right Guide

Prior to your group meeting, compile a list of hobbies, interests, and activities that you know various students in your group participate in. Examples could include: sports, choir, band, video games, comics, etc. Say that you are going to call on a few students to share all they know about a various activity with the rest of the group. As you present each activity, deliberately choose students who you are pretty sure don't care about that activity. Your students may speak up and say you should ask someone else, but that's ok—that's the point. After allowing different students to share what they know, admit that you deliberately matched students with categories (activities) you were pretty sure they were not super knowledgeable about. Point out that this is similar to the way we often live. When we refuse to look to God for guidance and wisdom, it's like asking someone who has never played or watched soccer to explain the sport to us. Today we will see that wise people admit their imperfections and seek God for guidance.



LET'S talk

Do you work best solo or in groups? Explain.

Share about a time when you tried to do something on your own only to realize you needed help.



THIS WEEK'S focus

Some of us prefer to work on projects on our own because we don't trust others to care about the task as deeply as we do. Others of us prefer the company and guidance of other people—the help of others gives us confidence that we are approaching tasks in the best, most efficient way. If we are honest, however, we've all had moments when we took on projects we thought we could handle on our own only to learn the hard way that we needed help. In today's session, we will be reminded that we all have weaknesses, and we all need the guidance of God. Wise people admit their imperfections and seek God for guidance.



CONVERSATION

questions

READ ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14.

11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. **12** Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. **13** Consider what God has done:

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14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.

.01 What advantages does wisdom bring? What does it look like to seek wisdom?

KEY QUESTION

.02 What keeps us from seeking wisdom from God? What tends to happen when refuse to do so?



CONTEXT | What is the point of verse 13? Does God make things crooked?

The Teacher was likely alluding to Ecclesiastes 1:15, “What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.” The Teacher was reflecting on our inability as human beings to fully comprehend life with all its complexities. Here in verse 13, however, his point seems to be that God is in control of all things and His will cannot be thwarted. The Teacher is not saying that there is a defect in the way God creates things. We do, however, live in a world that God has allowed to become broken by sin. Verse 14 illustrates some of the brokenness of our world in economic terms. Our God is in control whether we are going through times of success or failure, wealth or hardship. When times are good, we should enjoy them; when times are bad, we should reflect on the fact that God is still in control and still moving. God does not allow us to know whether tomorrow will bring unexpected wealth or sudden disaster, but we can find peace by accepting all as from God.

We live in a culture where people will go to great lengths to try and ensure their safety and that of their families with things like insurance and security systems. There is also a lot of talk today about emotional safety and what it looks like to create “safe spaces” where people can feel comfortable to talk about traumatic experiences they’ve had. While we might debate about how effective these human efforts to secure our safety actually

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SCRIPTURE commentary

are, they illustrate something important about human nature—we all want to feel safe and secure. In Ecclesiastes 7:11-14, the Teacher says that both wisdom and money can provide protection for us, but he goes on to point out how wisdom provides a superior form of protection.

Wisdom refers to the right application of knowledge. True wisdom is found only in God. We become more wise when we look to God for the direction, guidance, and strength we need to face various situations and circumstances. This is why wisdom provides a superior form of protection—the wisdom God gives His children provides them direction and hope in any and every circumstance life might throw at us.

.03 Why is it important that we seek guidance from God both in times of both prosperity and in times of adversity?

While none of us want to go through times of poverty or difficulty, as followers of Jesus there are lessons for us to gain from such times. Trials can help us mature and develop character (Jas. 1:2-4). If we look to God for strength and direction, adversity can strengthen our faith and even our joy in God (1 Pet. 1:6-9). Difficult times force us to consider what (or who) our ultimate source of hope, joy, and security is. It's in these moments that we learn to rest in the ultimate and eternal source of safety—Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:35-39).

ECCLESIASTES 7:11-14

7:11-12. Even the wise prefer prosperity to poverty. Those who possess both money and wisdom are under the protection of both. The superiority of wisdom, however, is that it guides one through difficult times and thus preserves life. Money, to the contrary, often vanishes in hard times.

7:13-14. Verse 13 harkens back to the unsolvable problem of 1:15. Here, however, the point is that God is in control of the times, and nothing can be done to resist His will. Verse 14 clarifies that this is to be understood in an economic context. God brings both prosperity and recession. When times are good, one should enjoy the prosperity; when times are bad, one should reflect on the fact that this too is from God's hand. God does not allow us to know whether tomorrow will bring unexpected wealth or sudden calamity, but we can find peace if we accept all as from God (see Lam. 3:38). However, we must emphasize the biblical truth that God is never the agent of evil (Eccl. 7:29; compare with Gen. 6:12; Job 1:6-12; Jas. 1:17).



CONVERSATION questions

READ ECCLESIASTES 7:15-18.

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.04 What has the Teacher seen? What do we stand to gain from being aware of these realities?



CONTEXT| How can someone be “overrighteous”? Is that really something we should avoid?

The warning in verse 16 to not be “overrighteous” is not an encouragement to do a little sinning. Nor is the Teacher discouraging his readers from making every effort to obey God. In context, the Teacher is objecting to the idea that living a strictly religious life will result in living a wealthy, happy life. A more modern translation might be “don’t be a fanatic.” The Teacher is warning against buying into the false notion that obeying God makes Him owe us a good, rich, or happy life. Additionally, verse 17, “do not be overwicked,” does not counsel that some sin is acceptable. Rather, it implies that while some sin in everyone’s life is inevitable, those who embrace evil as a way of life are destroyed by it. These verses call us to look to God for guidance and turn away from both sin and self-righteousness.

.05 What is promised to those who fear God (v. 18)? While we might not like this, why might we need this reminder?

Solomon called for God’s people to approach life with a wise realism, avoiding both extremes of moral self-righteousness and foolishness. He emphasized that we should not view ourselves as being righteous apart from God. We all have a tendency to think that if we make every effort to obey God, He will reward us accordingly.

Part of the Teacher’s concern here is to point out that this way of thinking just doesn’t square up with the reality of life in the broken world in which we live. Remember Job’s three friends? They were convinced that if you obey all the rules, you will be safe and God will give you a comfortable life. While it is true that God will reward all who truly trust in Him (Heb. 11:6), we need to recognize that our reward may not come this side of eternity. Furthermore, the Teacher seems to be implying that those who assume life works like this are prone to self-righteousness—they are more likely to think that they can earn God’s love, when in reality God’s love is an undeserved gift. When we think this way, we are putting our trust in ourselves rather than our good, loving, and all powerful God who can actually take care of us and save us.

Challenge your students to consider the dangers of assuming that obedience to God results in a happy, fulfilled life. If you think this way, how will you respond when tragedy strikes? In such moments, we will either fall into despair or question our faith altogether. The Teacher’s point is that those who think this way don’t ever find the security they think their “righteous” lifestyle deserves. People who fear God will experience joys and triumphs in life as well as tragedy and hardship. The difference between those who fear God and those who don’t is that the one who fears God has a hope that sustains them in any and every situation (1 Thes. 4:13-18).



LEADER PACK

ITEM 7 | Remind students of the various seasons we are likely to experience in life, and how God can and will sustain us in each of these times, by pointing them to the “**There is a Time to . . .**” poster.

ECCLESIASTES 7:15-18

7:15-18. These verses seem to say that a little sinning is acceptable. That is not the point; the passage is about an extreme zeal for religious duties that makes life unbearably harsh (an example would be constant fasting). In this context, *overrighteous* refers to being unreasonably demanding on yourself about moral or religious duties.

7:15. These words remind us of Asaph’s famous words in Psalm 73. Many times the *righteous* suffer while the *wicked* prosper. This kind of inequity can cause us to lose heart.

7:16. The Teacher is warning us that we should be careful not to believe we are righteous apart from God. Trying to be good in our own strength is not only exhausting; it is impossible. Furthermore, righteousness, even the godly variety, ought always to be in tandem with mercy and kindness.

7:17. Just because the wicked may prosper (see v. 15), this shouldn’t lead us to conclude that their lifestyle is preferable. This is a false deduction, which the Teacher seeks to address in the next verse.

7:18. We are not to view ourselves as righteous apart from God, and we should not to cave in to worldliness simply because it looks like an easier life. But how do we hold on to these two truths in any consistent way? The fear of God is cited as the answer. Fearing God keeps us from pride in our own righteousness, and it motivates us to stay away from wickedness.



CONVERSATION

questions

READ ECCLESIASTES 7:19-22.

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KEY QUESTION

.06 What makes someone truly strong? Why is this difficult for us to believe sometimes?

.07 What are some examples of things people say today that we shouldn't pay attention to (v. 21)?

We need to live with a constant awareness of our limited perspective as human beings. Remember that God is in heaven and we are on earth. He sees and understands all things, whereas we can often only see what is right in front of us. In other words, as human beings we have a tendency to fixate on our circumstances. Your students often think this way: If I could just get that person to like me, or if I could just make the team, or if I could just get more followers on social media, then life would be great. Such ideas are also examples of the kinds of things people say that the Teacher says we shouldn't pay attention to. We live in a culture that is constantly sending us the message that if we were just a little more influential, popular, or successful, our lives would be better. Followers of Jesus should know better because we know our worth is not dependent on any of these temporary things. Our worth is rooted in our renewed identity as children of God, and as such we should live to honor Him and build His kingdom.



BE VULNERABLE

Consider sharing about a time when you bought into worldly thinking about life. Maybe you thought a particular job, relationship, or new purchase would bring you joy. What lies were you listening to and buying into at the time? How did you come to realize your thinking was flawed? Did you seek wisdom in God's Word? Did you seek counsel from other believers? Share your story as a means of encouraging students to open up about the worldly ways of thinking that most tempt them.

KEY QUESTION**.08** What do verses 21-22 tell us about all people—including us? Why is this important to remember?

We must accept that all people are sinners and learn to deal with people as they are. This isn't to say that we should look down on other people—rather, we should be aware that all people have the same basic problem and the same basic need. We are all guilty of rebelling against God and our rebellion has clouded our thinking and judgment. We need God's guidance to reclaim our true purpose and a true sense of what it means to live well.

ECCLESIASTES 7:19-22

7:19-22. This text is structured as two teachings (vv. 19, 21), each of which has an attached explanation (vv. 20, 22). Verse 19 at first seems alien to this context, but verse 20 supplies the link: wise men are necessary in human society because human sin is universal (compare with Rom. 3:23). Rulers can try to curb evil by brute force; but because of all the pettiness, weakness, and ambition people bring into society, only the wise can maintain an equilibrium among them. Verses 21-22 are self-explanatory. The teaching of the whole text is that the reader must accept that all are sinners and learn to deal with people as they are.

7:19-20. Wisdom continues to have much value, but we must never forget that we are sinners (Rom. 3:23). The fear of God gives us the ability to grow in wisdom without becoming arrogant and self-sufficient.

7:21-22. In case there is a person who believes he is righteous apart from God's gracious work, the Teacher cuts through this unbiblical notion with these piercing words about the tongue. There is no one who is exempt from the vexing and destructive use of the tongue. All of us are prone to say things rashly (Prov. 12:18), to gossip (Prov. 18:8; 26:22), and to heap scorn on others by our words (Jas. 3:8-10). We ought to be more humble (and therefore accurate) in our self-assessment.



NOW What?

CENTRAL truth

Wise people admit their imperfections and seek God for guidance.

.09 Why is it important to be aware of our weaknesses? How might this help us grow?

.10 Why is it important to be aware of our limited perspective in comparison to God's? How might this lead to growth?

.11 What are some of the worldly ways of thinking that most tempt teenagers today? How can we pursue wisdom instead?

KEY QUESTION

.12 How might we support one another in our pursuit of wisdom? Why is this a worthy pursuit even if it doesn't result in a more comfortable life right now?



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DAILY devotions

The Bible is no ordinary book—it is God’s powerful Word and it is given to us for our good (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:13). So we should read the Bible more carefully and thoughtfully than any other book. This is where the 7 Arrows of Bible Reading come in—these 7 questions will train you and your students to get more out of your time in the Bible and experience its life-transforming power. Your students’ *Daily Discipleship Guide* (item 005646504) contains five days of Daily Devotions built on the 7 Arrows. Here is a summary of the texts they will be studying. We encourage you to follow along and use the 7 Arrows questions to guide your own study of God’s Word.

7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE reading



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about man?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

LEADER challenge

MEMORIZE

Ecclesiastes 7:20

CONNECT

Send a group email or group message to your students, encouraging them to complete their daily devotions. You might also consider sharing your own insights from the daily readings as a means of encouraging them.

DAY 1 ECCL. 7:11-14

DAY 2 ECCL. 7:15-18

DAY 3 ECCL. 7:19-22

DAY 4 PHIL. 4:11-13

DAY 5 ROMANS 12:3-5