

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Ecclesiastes
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A Wise Perspective in Problems

Ecclesiastes 7

Wisdom

**A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of death better than the day of birth.**

**2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of everyone;
the living should take this to heart.**

**3 Frustration is better than laughter,
because a sad face is good for the heart.**

**4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.**

**5 It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person
than to listen to the song of fools.**

**6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot,
so is the laughter of fools.
This too is meaningless.**

**7 Extortion turns a wise person into a fool,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.**

**8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.**

**9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.**

**10 Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?”
For it is not wise to ask such questions.**

**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.**

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 over righteous,
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.

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.

23 All this I tested by wisdom and I said,

“I am determined to be wise”—

but this was beyond me.

24 Whatever exists is far off and most profound—

who can discover it?

25 So I turned my mind to understand,

to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things

and to understand the stupidity of wickedness

and the madness of folly.

26 I find more bitter than death

the woman who is a snare,

whose heart is a trap

and whose hands are chains.

The man who pleases God will escape her,

but the sinner she will ensnare.

27 “Look,” says the Teacher, “this is what I have discovered:

“Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—

28 while I was still searching

but not finding—

I found one upright man among a thousand,

but not one upright woman among them all.

29 This only have I found:

God created mankind upright,

but they have gone in search of many schemes.”

Morning, Church! How’s everybody’s day going? Okay, so not great. Awesome. Love it. Glad you’re here. Welcome! You ever have a bad day? Anybody ever had a bad day? Yeah, you’ve had a bad day. Things haven’t gone well. You know, maybe it’s marriages challenge. Just, you know, break ups. Maybe it’s work, school. Maybe it’s a bad season. It’s a hard season. Things going on. Right? How do we respond in the midst of those challenges?

I’ll just kind of go back to my professional career again. I told you some of this last week, but between Abercrombie & Fitch and AT&T, I was working for smaller telecom companies doing door to door sales, business to business sales, cold calling if you will.

I was the guy that would walk in and say, “Hey, may I speak with whoever makes decisions on your telecommunications” and it was a real grind, honestly. There were times when it was not very much fun being that guy. So, I was on Industrial Blvd. This is in Dallas, so this is a part of Dallas at the time, a little rough part. I’m in a wool suit. Okay, I don’t know why because it’s August in Texas and it was about 108 degrees on this particular day, true story. Triple digits, record highs, and I’m doing door to door sales and a lot of people are telling me no on this day.

“No”.

“No, get out.”

“No.”

Right? And I’m walking in,

“May I speak with whoever makes decisions about your telecommunications?”

“No.”

And so, I just have sweat kind of running down my face and there’s this one door that has this all caps NO SOLICITING sign on the front but, that’s okay because I’m a trained professional. So, I go in.

There’s this older lady behind the desk and I’m like, “Hi! How are you? I’m here to speak with whoever makes decisions on your telecommunications.”

She goes, “Get out!”

“I understand that you feel that way, but I would like…”

“Get out!”

“Yes ma’am. I will, but before I do…”

“Get out! Get out! Get out!”

I don’t have to take this, I’m leaving.

And so, I leave and I’m just completely beat down. Like I’m at the end of my rope and I’m angry and I just have been tossed out of this building, and so I’m angry walking. You know, I’m doing just heavy steps. I’m staring at the concrete and I’m just mad. I’m just going and I’m walking fast and because I’m staring at the concrete, I don’t see the window unit protruding, AC unit protruding out of the side of a building at about 6 feet 5 inches tall. And as I’m angry walking it catches me right here on my temple somehow and it felt like Mike Tyson just “pshh” (hit me) you know. And it spun me around and brought me to my knees right here on the sidewalk. And I’m like I am done. The curve is right here, and I think I can roll over into oncoming traffic, it might make my day better. Literally, I’m looking at the concrete and I begin to see my reflection in my own blood. That sounds like pastor embellishment I know, but it’s real, and I look up and I see this Burger King across the street, and it has like this beam of light shining down on it from heaven. I think that’s where I’ll go.

So, I get up and I walk over to the Burger King, and I go in the restroom, begin to doctor my wounds, get some paper towels, some water, and I’m trying to clean myself up and as I walk out of the bathroom, the seasonal offering at the time was this brownie, a chocolate brownie, and I’m like yes I will. So I go to the cashier, go up to the guy, and I just say,

“Yeah”, I’m holding my napkin or my paper towel to my forehead, “I’d like that brownie and I’d love for you to put some ice cream on top.”

And he’s like “Sir, we don’t do that.”

I was like, “Ice cream! On the brownie, now!” you know.

I was like “This is Burger King, I want it my way!”

So, he gives me a brownie and I just sit down, right, and I’m just reconsidering. I’m done. I’m thinking about major life decisions at this moment. I am toast. Then I sit down at this table for two and I look up and there’s this older gentleman sitting at my table, and I’m like, wow, that’s weird.

And he says, “You having a bad day?”

Like, man, you don’t understand. He begins to talk to me. He begins to talk me off the ledge. He begins to share some wisdom with me. He’s experienced more things than I have. To this day, this guy who’s name I don’t know who just felt prompted to sit down at the table of a complete and total stranger who was having a rough day and he began to counsel me and give me wisdom that honestly was life altering. I mean it changed things for me.

So, I don’t know if that’s ever happened to you, where you sit down with somebody who is older, wiser, a little bit more experienced than you and all of a sudden you start to feel small, a you kind of have the pen and the paper and you lean forward and you start writing down because you sense the Lord may have something for you to learn in that moment. Maybe you’re talking to somebody and you realize they fought a war, they were in World War II. They’ve seen some things. They carried their friend back across from enemy lines. Or maybe they came home from Vietnam, not to parades, but to protesters. They lived some things. Or maybe she had a child in a cabin with no epidural or electricity, and all of the sudden your head doesn’t hurt anymore. And you’re like, “You’ve seen some things. You’ve done some things. I think that I can get some wisdom from this moment.” And they begin to instruct you, as he did me, that maybe there’s a purpose to my problems. Maybe God has a purpose in my pain. There’s something that He wants to do in and through it.

So, we’re back in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 today. If you want to turn there, if you have your Bibles, I hope you do, turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. In this chapter that’s what I hope we accomplish, that we would have a wise perspective in problems. In the problems under the sun that we would have a wise perspective in them. This is how Solomon is going to instruct us. I think for so many of us we see our problems and our pain as bad instead of our teachers, instead of some of the greatest opportunities for us to learn from.

I’ll tell you there is a gap in the church. I’ve seen it every now and then, I’ll hear here at Harris Creek. “It’s a really young church, does it have a place for me? I’m older, I’m in a different season of life.” Here’s the reality, yes, we have a thousand college students that will go to this church today, and that is incredible. I’ll tell you the only way we can minister to those thousand college students is if older people who have experienced more of life stick around and have the patience to sit with them. Not to think I don’t understand them, I don’t think how they dress, they’re always on their phones, they talk weird, but to say, hey, can I invest in you?

To my younger friends I tell you one of your greatest offerings of this church is people who are older than you and wiser than you that you can sit with and ask questions. Show up with a pen

and pad and a pencil or a pen and have your questions ahead of time. Know what you're going to ask, ask them and listen a lot. They've experienced things you haven't experienced. They've learned things and seen things you haven't seen. Let me tell you something, that is called discipleship. That is what discipleship is. That you would sit under the teachings or at the feet of another believer who's experienced more than you and you'd learn from them, and we must do this.

If you're here, the truth is, don't let the enemy fool you, the truth is we have hundreds of people, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who are members of this church who are part of this church, over the age of 65, over the age of 70, and we're glad you're here. We have something to learn from you. Teach us. I try to learn all I can in those situations.

In Ecclesiastes, in case you're joining us for the first time, just a quick recap. Solomon who's the richest man that has ever lived. He had this weird kind of make a wish opportunity with God, where God says, what do you want, and instead of asking for riches, wealth, instead of asking for power or God to deliver his enemies to him, he asks for wisdom to rule his people. God says because you asked for wisdom, I'm going to give you wisdom, but I'm going to give you wealth and power as well and Ecclesiastes is this poetical experiment where Solomon is searching for meaning under the sun.

What does under the sun mean? We've talked about this every week, what does under the sun mean? (Someone from the audience answers inaudibly) What? (They answer again) Apart from God. Under the sun means disconnected from the creator, apart from God. So, as we see that under the sun, he's trying to find meaning disconnected from the creator and he's coming up empty. So, he's looking in these boxes. He's looked in power. He's searched in wealth. He's looked in rebellion, in possession, in pleasures. He's trying to find meaning under the sun in these things and he's coming up empty and we said the most ridiculous thing that any of us could do is walk through those doors in a moment and begin to look for meaning in the same places Solomon already has, and he's done it in a greater way than we could, but some of us, because the enemy is real and he's crafty and he's good, will leave here and we will look for meaning in those same places and we will come up empty just like he did. In his last days, he is despairing.

I told you I would call this book the musings of the miserable. That is Solomon. He's like, man, I should be happier. I've got 2.1 trillion dollars in the bank. I should have more joy. I've got 700 wives, 300 prostitutes. I've got things, stuff, trinkets, treasures and ultimately, I'm left with this underlying feeling of despair. What's wrong with me? Why can't I find meaning under the sun? Don't look in the same places Solomon has already told you, it's not found there. You're not going to find it there. Today, he's going to pull up a chair for you. He's going to say, "Hey sit down, let me share some wisdom with you."

So, this is the ADD chapter. Well, you're like, they've all been that way. I know, he's very circular in his teaching, but today, he's just going to rapid fire some advice at you. I've done the best I can to kind of group this wisdom into three sections and summarize them for you into points that are very applicable to us where we're at today. As we move through chapter 7, we're going to see:

1. Do not be quick to move on from pain. Let it teach you.
2. Be patient in problems
3. What it looks like to surrender to God's sovereignty.

Alright, chapter 7.

He says, **“A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.”** He says, **“a good name”**, that's your reputation, right? And perfume was of great value. He says it's better to have earned a good reputation. Everybody knows that person in this town that everybody trusts because they're going to do you right. Be that person. He says you don't really know the sum of someone's life until they leave. That's who they really are. When they're leaving and they're gone, and we see their good days and their bad days. We see it all together. That's who someone really is.

“It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.” The living should take this to heart. Here's what he's saying. It's just so easy to forget your mortality. We think we're going to live forever. You're going to die soon. We're all going to die soon, relatively speaking, very, very soon. Some of you, sooner than others.

“Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.” Where he says frustration, that's not like, man the copy machine is on fire. That's like it is vexation. It's a sorrowful frustration. It's grief with sadness, with frustration. He says, hey, it's good to be reflective. Sober reflection in this life is good.

He says, **“The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.”** He says a wise person sees the reality of mortality while a fool tries to escape it.

“It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the songs of fools.” I'm telling you guys you want people in your life who will tell you the truth. Especially in this day and age because there's lots of people that will tell you don't worry, be happy. There's lots of people that are going to pat you on the back, they're going to coddle you, they're going to try to make you feel better, but if you have a friend who will tell you the truth, that is valuable. What people do is they'll put a melody to it, and they'll sing it to you. The foolishness of songs, and that's who instructs us. It's crazy who we let instruct us. We're like, “Hey Taylor Swift give me some relationship advice.” She's still filling a blank space with bad blood. Right? It's true though. We'll go to Bruno Mars. “Will you teach me?” He's been locked out of heaven, why are we going to listen to him? Why are we going there for relationship advice? “Hey Miley, will you tell me something good?” She's saying, “Hey I can't stop, because my life's been torn apart by a wrecking ball.” How about you, Olivia Rodrigo? You got something for me? She barely has her driver's license. Why are you going to listen to her? Missy Elliot? It's your fiffid ifid if wendt. Man, I don't know. I don't know. Some of you are really lost right now. Ask a friend. I don't

know what the fox says either. That's the reality, but these are the people that we're saying, "Hey, will you instruct me? Will you teach me how I'm supposed to live my life? Will you tell me something good?" Amy Winehouse is telling you don't need to go to rehab, which is sobering because she's no longer here, because she didn't go to rehab. Be careful where you listen. Be careful who you take advice from.

"Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless." Like thorns, they burn fast, and they make a loud noise. At this time, you would cook your food under the kindling and if there were thorns in there they would burn fast and they would make this noise. He's saying that's what fools do. They just laugh things off. Oh no, it's not a big deal, it's going to be fine. Your marriage has been a train wreck for fifteen years, you're just un-divorced. It's not fine.

Now remember, right after I got married, we watched this community group on stage and they were talking about how they had cared for someone. The person said, "Our marriage was on fire, and we just pulled down the shades. They came to knock on our door but we just pulled down the shades." His friends would talk about how he was sarcastic. Hey man, how you doing loving your wife? Haha I love my wife just fine, hahaha. No bro, you're on fire, your house is burning down. You need to be screaming for help. Not these sarcastic platitudes. Your help me is, hahahaha it's fine... Stop it. How long are you going to do that?

1. Learn from pain before you leave it.

I'm not sure how you feel about the Enneagram. I'll tell you how I feel about it. It's a helpful tool like DISC, like Myer Briggs, like StrengthsFinder. Anything that helps us understand how we think, our personality, how we can empathize with others. It has a place. I don't make too much of it. Some of you I realize might think it's witchcraft with essential oils and such. There's a place for you, we're glad you're here. We can still worship together and no big deal. I am the enneagram number, or my enneagram number is a seven. What is true about sevens, or people with the enneagram number of seven is that we try to escape pain. This is what it will say. If something is hard you want to try to avoid it. So, the downfall of someone with a personality type as a seven is the no pain no gain. So, you won't have a lot of gain because you try to avoid pain and I see this in my life and disciplines. This is what Solomon is warning us about.

So, my father died a year ago. That night he died, I drove down to Austin by myself, I got on the 130 and I had a good breakdown. I mean I cried. I'm talking ugly snot cried. I mean I had a good "uhh" (JP pulls his arms to his chest). Then I stopped, and then I kept going. I said, great, okay, that's behind me, all good. Then we moved on. I comforted my mom. We did the funeral months later because of COVID and moved on with life. People said grief comes in waves and I thought yeah, every now and then I miss dad, I think about him, and I feel sorrow. Okay, grief comes in waves.

Well, this Monday, something happened. We're building a house and we just closed on something, and we were looking at a survey. My dad was a surveyor all of his life and I was looking at this and I got really excited to call him. I'm going to call dad and tell him. I picked up my phone to call him and I was excited to talk to him and I went to call his number and I thought, oh, he's not there. It all hit me, okay. Dad is not there. So, I'm driving down 84 and I'm not talking like my eyes are watering, I'm talking about I'm hyperventilating in my truck. My dad's not there, and I got through it, and I thought you know what, I need to tell somebody that.

So, I texted my guys and said, hey, I just want you to know what just happened. I'm okay, I don't need your sympathy, no need to respond, just FYI. Then we met as a group, normal community time and they said, "Hey about that. How are you doing?" I said, "I'm good, that was weird, it hit me out of nowhere, that was weird." I go, "I hope that doesn't happen again." They said, "well why?" I said, "because it wasn't fun, I don't want to experience grief." They said, "maybe you should." "Why? Why would I want to experience grief?" Maybe God wants to teach you something in it. Maybe He's doing something. Maybe He's shaping you.

Did you know that in the Jewish culture, in the Hebrew culture, they had something called shiva which is a time for mourning. So, for seven days after the funeral those impacted by the death of the person would take seven days. What they would do is, they would sit in sackcloth, sometimes on ashes, meaning they would just make themselves, literally really uncomfortable, and they would sit by themselves and grieve for seven days. They set that time aside to do that. They're like, this is what we're here to do and they did it. We don't have time for that, it's too busy, the next meeting, we have to go. Life comes at you fast. Hey sorry, okay, move on. I don't have time to feel this way. This is what he's saying. Don't try to hit the fast forward button through the painful moments of life. Sit in them and ask God what are you teaching me? What do you want me to learn in this? What are you trying to show me?

I think so often we try to numb it with alcohol or coping mechanisms. That just takes your problems and grows them and gives them back to you. It's not just grief problems. Pain can come in work, in marriage. It can come through children, school, through sickness, mental health. Slowdown in those things. Ask what are you teaching me?

Pain can also be instruction. That's what it says in verse five. **"Heed the rebuke of the wise."** All of us want to do what we want to do. Nobody here really wants to be told what to do. I don't want the constraint of someone in my life telling me how to spend my money, where I can go, what I can do for fun, how I can talk, what I need to do in my mornings. I want to do what I want to do. There are parts of all of us that are that way. We're not submissive. It's like, man I want to be my own.... Don't tell me what to...! That's different in the Christian life. That we would take our lives and we would submit it to the care of others surrendered to the Holy Spirit and say, you know what, I don't always know what's best for me. No matter how old I am, how many letters behind my name, how many degrees I have, where I've been, what I've experienced. The truth about me and you and all of us is that we don't always know what's best for us, and you really

shouldn't pick and choose when and from whom you take counsel. You want to have that wise counsel in your life. Surrender to the Holy Spirit with knowledge of this book instructing you.

Let's go, verse seven. **"Extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart."** Where it says extortion, it could be oppression. I believe better translated, oppression. In many versions of the Bible that's what it says. **"Oppression turns a wise person into a fool."** He's saying don't sell out for money. We talked about this last week. You trading wealth for wisdom, that's a bad trade because you won't have the wisdom to make sure you don't lose the wealth. So, better to have wisdom than to have wealth.

Verse eight, **"The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride."** He's saying it's not how you start but how you finish. It's better to finish well than to finish fast. You see this in dating. When I'm pursuing Monica, it's a lot easier to woo her on that first date than it is seventeen years into marriage with three children and 5:30am basketball practice. Life gets hectic. It gets hard, it gets weary, it gets heavy, and it's not how you start, it's how you finish. The first day on the job, got my new suit, my white shirt, my power tie, life is good! Where's my desk? Oh, this is my desk? This is my stapler? Let's go! But then, when you're cold calling on Industrial Blvd. and you take an AC unit to the forehead, all of the sudden you're like, I don't know if I really like this job. It's not how you start, but how you finish.

"Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools." That's a word for some of you. James 1:19 says **"be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for a person's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires."** Some of you have an anger problem and my question for you is, how long are you going to have an anger problem? How long are you going to do that?

"Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?'" For it is not wise to ask such questions. Stop looking back to when you were single. Life was easier before we had kids. Life was easier before I had responsibility and the weight of my world on my shoulders. For some of us it's like, man, was it really that bad before I was a Christian? Was the partying and those things, am I sure there wasn't life there? Do I want to go back to that?

This is what Paul says in Philippians chapter 3. **"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** Let me tell you something, as a follower of Jesus Christ hope is always in front of you. The only hope that is behind you is a cross and an empty tomb. Hope is always in front of you. That purchased your eternal hope. Look ahead and in the problems of this world, hold fast to the hope you have received through Jesus Christ. Constantly renew your mind of what you've gained in and through Him, and the hope you have from Him.

He says, verse 11, **“Wisdom, like an inheritance,”** I think it could be translated or should be translated with an inheritance, **“Wisdom, with an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.”** He’s just saying if you have money that comes fast but not wisdom to manage it, you’ll lose it.

“Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it.” He’s saying money cannot cause you to live forever. In fact, those who have lived the longest, if you look at the world record, a lot of people who have lived the longest on this earth, they were poor. They didn’t even have the money to go to buy the really expensive organic, grass fed, all the things, food. And somehow their life was prolonged. So, money can’t preserve your life, but wisdom can, because wisdom can say, don’t step there, don’t eat that, don’t jump off that cliff, don’t hang with those people. It’s going to shorten your life.

So, here’s how I would summarize this section.

2. *Be patient in problems before you’re provoked.*

He says this. **“Oppression provokes a wise person and makes them a fool. A bribe provokes corruption”** verse 7. Verse 8, **“Be patient when you feel pride, not provoked.”** in verse 9 **“Do not respond in anger but be patient.** In verse 10, **“Do not respond by looking back, stay in the present with wisdom”** and then verses 11 and 12, **“Do not be provoked by wealth without wisdom.”** Be careful what provokes you.

In BC days, so before I was a Jesus follower, I would get in a lot of fights, and I wasn’t very good at that thing. I wasn’t very good at fighting so I got beat up a lot, but all it really taught me is to not fear the punch, if you will. I got in a lot of fights paired with I had an anger problem, so I was easily provoked. Constantly thinking, oh no no no, you’re not going to get the best of me, oh no no no.

When recently, Weston and I, my son, I had a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, and it was on his ninth birthday. So, I just took him with me and said “Hey you come with me, we’re going to make some memories.” So, we stayed in this hotel. Across the street is a go kart place. I’m like let’s go, you’re going to ride go karts. So, we go do the go kart thing. It was fun because he could drive. He could drive (JP laughs). He was behind the wheel of a car, a go kart.

Afterwards we’re leaving, we made a memory, great time, we’re leaving, I’m walking to the car and there’s this guy across the parking lot who is shouting profanity, telling me what he wants to do to me from across the parking lot. You’re saying what did you do to him. Here’s the answer, absolutely nothing. Okay, never seen the guy before in my life, no idea what was going on. I think he just tried to find some person that he could show off in front of his girlfriend.

So, she's holding him back, and he's saying what he wants to do to me, and Weston's like, hey dad that guy wants to talk to you, I was like get in the car son, get in the car. Maybe Weston lapped him on the go kart. I don't know. I don't know what happened. Here's the deal, I'm going to meet Jesus face to face and never know what was going on there because we get in the car and I'm just like, okay Lord, what do you want me to do. I'm thinking like maybe I go share the gospel with him. He just needs his day brightened. I can do that. You want me to engage the guy? Lord, what would you have me do? To the best of my ability, I sensed from Holy Spirit, leave, and so we did. We drove down the road and my heart was just racing, my heart was just pounding. We stopped. We pulled over and Weston and I got to pray for him. I don't know what's going on, but I was really glad. I took a moment. I said, Lord, thank you. That would've gone really different, like I'd probably be in the hospital if that happened, you know, twenty years ago and I'm grateful. I'm grateful for your grace in my life. Thank you just for prevailing wisdom.

So, in those moments, slow down, because here's why. All of you, all of you, are going to be provoked outside those doors. Like something is not going to go your way and it's going to be so unfair. I mean, it's going to be something you deserve that is going to be taken from you, right in front of you, and then they're going to laugh at you and punk you. How are you going to do? Is that your moment? Are you ready? Ready to show them how smart you are, how strong you are, how fast you are, how good you are with your mouth, put them down. What are you going to do in that situation? Do you need to get the upper hand, or is that your greatest moment to show the faith you have in a God who's in control? I think we're so afraid of getting ripped off and taken advantage of. We're so afraid. Not me! Uh Uh! In my little time in my life, I'm going to show you don't you DARE mess with me! I don't know, I'm not trying to cause you to be pacifist, but I am saying you should be instructed by wisdom, not provoked to anger. This is what I see in the scriptures.

So, before you lash out, look inward. Search your heart. What I would recast vision for, is from the series Decisions, go back on the Harris Creek app and listen to it if you missed it. But the way when we don't know what to do and we don't know where to go we turn to our GPS. Let me give it to you right now. You can write it down if you missed it there. Our GPS is: We Gather our group; we Persist in prayer; and we Search the scriptures. That's our GPS. We gather our group; we persist in prayer; and we search the scriptures.

So, I have to make a big decision. I'm buying a house, I'm buying a car, I'm thinking about moving, changing school for the kids, I don't know what to do. "Hey, can you guys meet up today, in my living room tonight, I know it's last minute. Is there any way you can do it? I've got a big decision that I have to make." You gather the group. Lord, would you please speak through these people that you have placed in my life, they're collective wisdom. You're not calling your wise uncle. You're not doing one off phone calls. You're getting everybody in the same room,

hearing the same things, at the same time, and even benefiting from each others counsel. Sixteen times the Proverbs say wisdom comes from the counsel of many. Many.

So, you want your people there. Hey this is what's going on. You tell them. You sit on your hands. You listen a lot. You speak a little. You listen a lot. You ask good questions. You pray that God would move through that. You pray with those people. You pray after. Pray before, pray during, pray after. Then you say, do you have a scripture that backs that up? Does God's word speak into that? Does anybody know any scriptures that speak into this situation that you could use to help instruct me in this really difficult situation? You gather your group; you persist in prayer; and you search the scriptures.

Let's go back. Verse 13. **“Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what God has made crooked?”** That's just to say you cannot change what God has fixed.

“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.” You don't know. If I was to summarize that, I would say this. 4 words. You. Are. Not. God. You are not God. He's God, and there's good days and there's bad days, but they're all God's days. You can't see the future. Not one of you can. No one here knows what tomorrow will bring. The only thing consistent with my five-year plan is it's changed every five years. I mean, we're building a house right now but in 2014, we built our forever home, it was just in the wrong city. Then we moved to Waco. I didn't know that was coming. Lots of twists and turns in life. We don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. It's been well said, we don't know what tomorrow will hold but we know who holds tomorrow. It's trite. It's cliché, but man is it ever true.

So, we might as well turn to him. That's number three.

3. Surrender to God's sovereignty in bad situations.

Especially in bad situations, surrender to His sovereignty. He's sovereign over the bad days. I told you he writes in a very cyclical fashion. He touches on a topic, he comes back and expounds on it, writes some poetry on it. Then, he commentates on his own poetry. He's all over the place.

I told you in Ecclesiastes chapter 5, we were talking about the sovereignty of God, we'd come back to it. This is what it says in 5 verse 2. **“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”** He's saying stop telling God how to do His job. Everybody wants to tell God how to do His job. God, you really missed it here, right? Worry is being afraid He's going to get it wrong, and bitterness is believing He did. Stop telling God how to do His job.

Sometimes, especially on social media, atheists, it's their moment to shine. They want to tell you how smart they are. Just this week I saw these two back-to-back. I'm not going to follow a God who wiped out entire people groups. Had people kill women and children in the Old Testament.

I'm not going to follow that God. Then the next thing they said is, by the way I'm not going to follow a God that doesn't do anything about evil people in our world. Why doesn't he wipe them out?

You see, it's like God can't get it right in our minds. That's what we think. If he wipes out evil, well why did you wipe out evil? If evil is there, we're like why don't wipe out evil? We're always questioning God. We always want Him to do it our way. That's why one of my favorite questions to ask people is what would you do if you were god? How would you have done it? I'm just curious, what would you have done, because you seem to think the sovereign can't get it right.

It's not like you win. It's not like He's like, man, I really want that guy's wisdom so I'm going to go ahead and let him in heaven just so I can consult with him for eternity because clearly, I missed it on that one. So, you know what, no hell for you. You come up here with me and just instruct me the rest of my days. It's not like you win telling God how to do his job. That just tells you how not God you are. Like, His foolishness is wiser than your wisdom. His weakness is stronger than your strength. So why don't you let Him be God of your life and why don't you submit fully to His counsel.

In bad situations, surrender to His sovereignty. Life's a rollercoaster. There are ups, there are downs. You might as well enjoy the ride. You don't have to enjoy it, but you're not going to make it any less of a rollercoaster. There's still going to be ups and there's still going to be downs.

One of my favorite stories around this, I just want to confess upfront, it's an obscure one, in the scriptures, but for whatever reason it has brought me great peace in challenging seasons. It's the story of Solomon's dad, David. Not the time he fought the giant, but the time he sinned in a giant way. So, his men are at war, he's walking on the roof tops. He sees Bathsheba, another man's wife, Uriah's wife. He takes her. He sleeps with her. She gets pregnant, so then he moves her husband to the front lines, and he's murdered, killed, on David's hands and now Bathsheba is pregnant with David's child. So, God sends a harsh rebuke from a wise person named Nathan. Nathan comes to David and says what you've done is not good. He tells him that in creative ways to get his attention and he says there will be consequences. You're going to lose the child.

So, David goes and he weeps and he mourns and fasts. He doesn't eat anything for a week. He just pleads with God, don't take my boy. Don't take my boy! Don't take the child, God! The people around him, he's so stricken with grief, they think he's lost his mind. They're afraid to tell him. David sees them talking and he says is the boy gone? They say, yes, he died. He gets up, he dusts himself up, and he goes, and he eats, and they're confused.

They say, when the child was still here, why did you weep and mourn and plead with God, and fast, but now that he's gone you go back like everything is normal. He says this; **“While the**

child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

I don't know why but there's just always been something oddly comforting to me about that. I'm not God. So, when days are really good, I'm going to celebrate. Lord, thank you for the goodness you've allowed me to experience under the sun, and when days are really really, really, really bad, I'm going to trust Him. I will say, Lord, I know you're good. This doesn't feel good. I'm going to trust you're not done. I'm going to trust you. I'm going to feel all the things. I'm going to experience all the emotion, but at the end of the day God, I trust you. I am surrendered to your sovereignty.

If God gives me good, I'll celebrate. If what I experience under the sun is bad, I will cling to the hope I have in Jesus Christ, because didn't He do this perfectly? He's going to face the cross, a suffering none of us can even fathom. He's going to slowly die by asphyxiation with nails in His hands and His feet, a crown of thorns on His head. He's going to bleed out, be stabbed in the side on the side of a road naked. He's God by the way. He made the person with hammer hammering nails in His hands. He made him. He didn't want to do that, yet the scripture says for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross scorning in shame. Why would it be joy before Him? Because, He knew what God would be able to do through such a terrible situation, for you and for I. Didn't Jesus model this perfectly?

So, because of Christ, we can endure problems and we can endure pain, and we can learn from them. We can let them instruct us. Without Jesus, I might as well be up here reading to you fortune cookies. We'll open another one. Okay, you're going to have a hard day at work. Okay, next one. Without Jesus, under the sun, this is just tidbits of instruction that might as well be printed on pieces of paper inside a cookie at your favorite Chinese restaurant. But because of Jesus, because we're going to live forever, God in His kindness, tells us how to live under the sun.

In summary, learn from pain before you leave it; be patient in problems before you're provoked; and surrender to God's sovereignty in bad situations.

So, there I was, sitting at Burger King, bleeding from my forehead, holding a paper towel. A stranger sits down, and he just starts giving me wisdom, directing me. I'm hard to crack, in that moment, because I had a really bad day. I don't know man! Life is hard. It's bad. I just don't know what to do. He says let me ask you some questions.

Are you hiding sin? No, man, I'm not hiding sin. I meet with my guys. I confess regularly. He says, "How did you go about getting this job?" And I tell him all the things that happened to get me to that place that day, where I'd be sitting at that Burger King bleeding profusely from my forehead from a misplaced AC unit. He says, "I think I know what you're supposed to be doing."

I'm like, oh here we go, prophet man, word from the Lord, okay, go ahead and give it to me. That was my heart at the time. He says, "Yeah, I think I know what you're supposed to be doing." I'm like, "what is that?" He says, "exactly what you're doing." But it's hard! Doesn't mean it's wrong. But I don't like it! Doesn't mean you're not supposed to do it. Man, really? Yeah. God can be in it.

But my marriage is hard! Doesn't mean you're supposed to leave it. But my kids, the challenge of parenting is really difficult! Doesn't mean you're not supposed to push through it. But my job is so toiling! The world is fallen. All kinds of hard things under the sun. Genesis 3 says it's going to fight against you. Maybe that's exactly what you're supposed to be doing. That's your mission field. Maybe that's your greatest opportunity to be a light in a dark place. But my body is failing! One day God is going to fix it. But this is really, really tough! Doesn't mean it's really, really wrong. Right? Endure. Endure the hardships that have been set before us under the sun, until the Son comes back from beyond the sun to take us home. Let me pray you would.

God, would you fix our hearts and minds on reality. On what we need to know on truth. I thank you for your Word. I know that you had a purpose in preserving this book for thousands and thousands of years and I just pray that your Holy Spirit would help us to apply the right wisdom in the right place of our lives. The right places of our lives. Help us to know what to fight for and help us to know when to sit on our hands, keep our mouth shut, and listen. Help us to be instructed by those who've gone before us. Help us to hear what it is you want us to hear. Help us to know when we need to sit still. When we need to experience the grief. When we need to sit in the pain. When we need to not move forward in the problems and help us to learn all we can. In the name of Jesus, Amen.