



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Insights For Living: The Ultimate How-To Passage

THE GOOD LIFE

Ecclesiastes 7:1–14

Tim Badal | October 30, 2022



We're continuing our series on Ecclesiastes, this Old Testament book written by King Solomon. He is giving us the answer to the question all of us are asking, "Where do we find the good life?" Solomon is writing at the end of his life. He's an aged man and has gone through all the highs and lows of life. Now at the end of his life, he's asking, "What is the meaning and purpose of living on this earth?" He has experienced all the things any of us could ever hope to imagine, from a human perspective. As the king of Israel, he had riches, power, and fame.

Now at the end of his life, he realizes that none of the things he searched after as a young man were enough to satisfy him. There was a longing in his heart that said there was something more to his existence than just the accumulation of things. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote a book that would impact lives for centuries to come. We're picking up this ancient book to look for the answer to finding the good life, to find our ultimate purpose and meaning.

Like Solomon, many today—probably some of you here today—find themselves on the same trajectory he was on. We're trying to fill our hearts and longings with the things of this world. We accumulate stuff. We seek promotions and prestige. We pursue all manner of pleasure. But as a rebuke to that kind of living, Solomon tells us that a fool lives that way. Those pursuits are meaningless. They're vanity and chasing after the wind.

I'm so thankful for the teachings of this book so far. I want you to know this has impacted both young and old alike. I've had more young people come to me and say, "This series has been life changing. These are some of the questions I've been asking." I'm so encouraged by that. If you start to glean wisdom at a younger age, just think of the foolish mistakes that can be avoided. So as a group of older people, let's be praying for the ones behind us, that they wouldn't fall prey to the temptations we did. Now that we're older we, like Solomon, are remorseful, regretting our missed opportunities or detours that took us places we never wanted to go.

Today we come to Ecclesiastes 7, the hinge chapter of the entire book. We're 111 verses into this series and we have 111 verses to go. We are smack dab in the middle of this. What we'll find in our passage this morning is a change. In the first chapters Solomon has spoken of the vanity and meaninglessness of life apart from God. He's said if we live life solely under the sun, we will not find the contentment and fulfillment we long for. We need to engage with God and embrace Him in this journey. Until we do, everything we do will keep us from truly knowing the good life God has for us.

So the fundamental question of the day is found at the end of the passage we looked at last week. Look at Ecclesiastes 6:12: "*For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life?*" You and I are asking what is good for us? What is it that will bring purpose and meaning to our lives? The answer is found at the end of our passage today, in Ecclesiastes 7:14. He says, "*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.*" Solomon is saying, "If you want to find all that is good, it begins with these things. In the day of prosperity, be filled with joy. In the day of adversity, consider that God has made one as well as the other." That's what we're going to focus our attention on this morning, looking at these pithy statements, these proverbs.

In some ways, Ecclesiastes 7 looks a lot more like another book Solomon wrote, the book of Proverbs. It has these little truths—these simple statements—that get us thinking. The topics are going to bounce all over the place, but they fall into three headings:

1. We are to enjoy life.
2. We are to examine life.
3. We are to embrace God.

In doing these three things, we are on the right path to wisdom, the path that leads to the good life God has for us.

The YouTube website is where lots of people go to watch funny videos, clips of movies or sports highlights. But for your pastor, YouTube is where I go when anything breaks. It might be something in my car, or something in my house. I can't tell you the thousands of dollars I've saved by simply going to YouTube and writing, "Here's my problem." Recently my son's car's passenger seatbelt broke. I talked with a mechanic who said, "Man, it's going to cost this ungodly amount of money." My wife said, "Well, nobody can ride with your son anymore, because the seatbelt doesn't work." So I finally did what I normally do and went to YouTube.

Wouldn't you know it? I typed in "2005 Dodge Durango seatbelt doesn't work" and there was a video! Some guy had run into the same problem I had, and he showed me, step by step, how to fix the problem. It was awesome. I could play it over and over again. What did he say? How did he do that? I could pause it and look at how he was working on it. The seatbelt wasn't fitting right in there when I put it back in, but step by step, moment by moment, my son now has a passenger seatbelt that works. Amen.

I love YouTube. I have fixed my furnace and many other things in my house because I have come to realize that YouTube has the insights for my living. It has the answers to the problems that affect me.

The book of Ecclesiastes, especially chapter seven, has insights for living. It is the ultimate how-to passage. It tells us how to live the good life, how to enjoy life. We need someone to say to us, "I ran into this problem as well, and here's where I found the answer to the problem that plagued me." Solomon says, "I've been there." So we'll log in, if you will, this morning, and type into that search box, "How can I experience the good life?" And here comes the words from Solomon: "This is how you do it."

Enjoy life. Don't take the good for granted.

Ecclesiastes 7 includes all aspects of life. We need this passage because there are three things that come into our lives:

1. The world says the things here are not true and that we don't have to live according to these proverbs. "Those are just Solomon's perspective on reality, but nothing more than his opinions."
2. We need a passage like this because as we seek to enjoy life, our lives are busy. We forget that each moment has significance because God has created us for lives of significance.
3. We can't simply adhere to these things on our own. We can't just declare, "I'm going to enjoy life, I'm going to examine life, then I'll embrace God. If I do these like one plus one plus one, it will inevitably equal three."

However, Solomon says these are things we must live out every single day. Notice verse 14 again: "In the days of prosperity, be joyful." As we've read through this book, we've seen that Solomon has a pretty negative view of life. It's easy to look at him and say, "He's Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. His outlook is always pessimistic." It's easy for us to conclude he has no optimism or any thought of good regarding the comings and goings of our days. But that isn't the case. He's building a case against the meaninglessness of life apart from God, saying life should fill us with joy. In fact, no less than five times in the passage last week, he talked about enjoying life and being filled with joy. Thirty times in another book—the book of Proverbs—he talks about the joy of living life. He knows there are moments of great joy, but we will never experience that joy apart from a real and true relationship with God Who is over the sun.

Notice the things we are to enjoy in our passage.

¹ A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.

² It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,

and the living will lay it to heart.

³Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

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

⁵It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.

⁶For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.

There are things he speaks about in this passage that are good. A good name. The day of one's birth. Feasting. Laughter. Words of flattery. New beginnings. Later in the text he'll say the good old days. Receiving an inheritance. Having knowledge and wisdom. All of these things are good. We are called to enjoy all of these things. He will then contrast these with things he thinks are better, but that doesn't change the implication that these are moments we should enjoy.

So, church, in the midst of our search for meaning, let us not lose sight of the truth that God has created real and true moments for us to enjoy. These are the moments we love and want to last forever. They're the special occasions. They're the holidays that are coming up. These are marked with celebrating with friends, family, and food. These are the moments you are proud of. They're milestones and achievements. They involve you and those closest to you in the experiences you share. These are the mountaintop moments of life. These are the birthdays, the weddings, the graduations, the promotions, the vacations. These are the moments in life we wish could last forever. Solomon says to us, "Enjoy them. Really enjoy them."

Here's the reason why. We need to enjoy these moments because we are not guaranteed to have them forever. That's what makes them great moments. They are the respite between the monotonous and mundane moments of life. It's what we look forward to. For many of us, there is something on our calendar that allows us to get up and do another Monday.

This next week my wife and I are going to get away for a couple days and I've been looking forward to that. I keep thinking, "I've just got to get through this, because on Tuesday, it's time away with my bride." I'm looking forward to that. Getting away is prompting me to get all my work done.

Some of you are looking forward to the holiday season. It's the best time of the year. For the student, it's graduation day. "I'll work hard, because that day is approaching." For the young couple, it's, "The day we get married and get to go on our honeymoon." Those are moments we never want to forget.

Those moments of prosperity, Solomon says; they are good and should be enjoyed. But here's the problem: we don't learn much from those moments. Those moments don't teach us all that much. Maybe it's because we like them too much. Maybe because they are a recess from the monotony of life. We go on vacation, we celebrate the holidays, by shutting everything down. We sit back and enjoy the moment. Maybe that's what we're supposed to do. Maybe God has created those moments for us to enjoy, while recognizing they're the exception to the rule. But herein lies a problem for us. For many of us, one of the reasons we struggle with finding the good life is we have created hindrances or hurdles to these good times. Let me explain, just very practically.

Far too many of us are task oriented, moving from one project to the next, never enjoying a completed task, never reveling in the joy of knowing, "I have accomplished something." Still others of us are perfectionists. This especially hits us as parents. We watch our kids but we never enjoy them, because we see them as projects that need to be perfect instead of as humans. This is the reason we don't enjoy the rise and fall of their lives. We don't enjoy the good times, and yes, the difficult times. We're too busy posturing for a group of people whose opinions we care more about than our children's wellbeing.

Others of us are just too busy. We're too busy doing life that we aren't enjoying life. For some in this place, your marriages are so busy that you no longer live in partnership with the spouse God has given you. You're just two ships passing in the night. As we'll learn later, you're not enjoying the spouse of your youth. Then one day, one of us is going to say goodbye to the other—and they'll be gone. Those moments that could have been enjoyed will be over.

Finally, there are some of us who can't enjoy life because we allow anxiety and worry to fill our hearts. Even when the good things come, we're so worried about everything else we can't enjoy the family that's right in front of us. We're too worried about the food

or the table or the house. Then before we know it, the kids have come and gone and our holiday season becomes filled with dread. We didn't stop to enjoy the ones who were closest to us.

Listen to me very carefully. God has given you good times to enjoy. It sounds elementary, but this should be something we do really well as Christians. When the world sees us, they should say, "Boy, those Christians know how to enjoy life." That should be one of the greatest tools of evangelism we have in this world. "Those people love life. What is it about them that makes them that way?" Our response should be, "It's because we have a God Who is our heavenly Father and Who gives great gifts to His children." We love receiving gifts from our Father. As a Christian, every day should be like Christmas day, just opening the gifts God has given us. When we walk into work or into school or walk around our neighborhoods, there should be this inexpressible joy in us. We realize, "I've been given another day and God's mercies once again are brand new. Great is His faithfulness! Great is His goodness to me." We have to learn to enjoy life. But that's just part of it. You see, our world has got this down. Life is here, enjoy as much of life as you can, then die. So it's not simply enough just to enjoy the good times in life.

Examine your life. Let the bad make you better.

Notice verse 14, says, "*In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider.*" Right away you're thinking, "Wait a minute. I like the days of prosperity, but now you're saying there's something for me to do when bad days happen, when hardships come. That seems like pretty messed up thinking." It's one thing to enjoy the good days, but now in essence what Solomon is saying is, "There is great opportunity when adversity comes." What he's saying is countercultural. He's going to tell us that a bad day is better than a good day. He will tell us that trials are better than triumphs. He will say there are things about adversity that have inherent value that prosperity doesn't have. He will tell us over and over that the difficult moments of life are better.

In your small groups you discussed the places where bad is better. We talked about things like attending funerals and receiving rebukes, looking at the good that comes in these situations.

So what are we to do with this? I love how one translation puts this passage: "*In the days of adversity, open your eyes and learn*" (Jubilee Bible). So yes, when good things happen, enjoy them. But what happens on that random Tuesday when your world falls apart? What are you to do. Solomon says, "Examine your life, letting the bad make you better." So we learn that the good times are going to come and we should enjoy them as much as possible. But then when the difficult moments come, we have a decision to make.

Let's go back to an Old Testament biography and consider Job's life. We're told there wasn't a more righteous man in all the land. Job was living the good life. He had wealth. He had peace and tranquility. He had family around him. It seemed that God blessed everything he did—and Job enjoyed that. He saw this as a gift from God.

Then the world caved in on him. The good times came to an end. It wasn't that one bad thing happened; it snowballed. Everything he had was touched with tribulation. His wife sat down with him and said, "What are we going to do about all these trials?" Then she said, "There's only option. We much curse God and die." When some of us get in this situation, we get angry with God. We ask Him why in a belly-aching way, not in a teachable way. We begin to shake our fists at Him and say, "God, I don't like this lot You've given me. You are at fault." But here's what Solomon says: "God has given times of both prosperity and adversity for a reason." He tells us that the times of adversity are for us to "consider." That word literally means to examine, to stop and reflect.

There's something about times of tribulation that stop us in our tracks. When we're in the party, we're just enjoying it, but when times of adversity come, we stop and begin to think, "Maybe there's some recalibrating that needs to be done. Maybe there are some changes that need to be made." Solomon gives us these pithy proverbs in three areas of evaluation.

When bad times come, we need to examine our aspirations.

What are we saying is important in life? What are we pursuing? Solomon says the most important thing is our reputation. Verse one, "*A good name is better than precious ointment.*"

There's a play on words here in the Hebrew. Solomon is using the same word for two things. *Shem* means name, and *shemen* means ointment. He says *shem* is better than *shemen*. This is an image that captures the mind of the reader, saying one thing is better than another.

So why is a good name better than perfume, or ointment? It isn't that those two things are even in the same universe. A good name and a perfume you put on your body to smell different? Scholars think this may be referring to the longevity of these two things. We put on perfume, but after a little while that aroma will fade. There's a temporality to it. But when it comes to a good name, a man or woman should seek to have a good name, not only in their family, but also in their workplace, community or church. The New Testament speaks of elders having a good reputation with those who are outside the faith. When we have a good name that speaks of our good character and integrity, this is a picture of Christlikeness in our daily activities—and that leaves a legacy. It's not temporal but will last even after we're gone.

When bad times come, we need to examine our activities.

Moving on past our aspirations, Solomon also points to our activities in life. In verses one through four, he says there are some things that are "better." He says it's better to be at the day of your death than the day of your birth. That seems backwards. The potential that's there the day you're born brings great joy, but when you die, there's great sadness.

Solomon then doubles down in verse two: *"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting."* In verses three and four, he says, *"Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth"*—meaning the house that parties. This is a weird, countercultural view of life, so we need to think through what he's saying here. It's not that being born is a bad thing, or that laughter is a bad thing. But there is something better, and that's your approach to life. David Gibson, who wrote on the book of Ecclesiastes, called it "living life backwards." That describes the book of Ecclesiastes: living life backwards. Solomon says, "If you want to be wise and find the good life, then start with the end and work your way back." That is, get in your mind what your funeral will be like and the rest of your life will figure itself out.

As I've gotten older and have attended more funerals, a common approach I have at funerals or wakes is to ask a question. As I'm waiting in line, or as I'm sitting in the service, I ask myself, "What's my funeral going to be like?" Now, I'm not talking about what songs are going to be sung or who might attend. What I want to know is, "What will people say about me? What will they say mattered to Tim the most?" One of the things I do in funerals is give opportunities for people in the audience to stand up and share a testimony. My question is, "When people stand up and talk about me, will they talk about things that are going to pass away, or are they going to talk about things that will last into eternity?"

I encourage you to do the same as well, asking what your funeral will be like. What is the legacy you're going to leave? The unbelieving world gives no thought to their funerals. They live the life Jesus terms in Luke 12 as the life of a "rich fool." The rich fool has everything going for him. He has all the food he needs. All the siloes are jam-packed. He has all the money he needs. He says to himself, "I have ample goods laid up for many years, so I can relax. I can eat, drink and be merry." The crazy thing is this is a play on the very words of Ecclesiastes 8, which we'll look at next week. He's saying, "I don't have to worry about anything." But Jesus says, "You fool. Do you not know that tonight your soul will be demanded of you?"

As Christians, if we want to live a wise life, we begin with our funerals. But can I go even a step farther? The Bible says it is appointed for man to die once, then comes judgment. Every one of our activities done in the present have that future judgment in sight. Ask yourself, "What am I doing now, in the body, that glorifies and brings honor to my heavenly Father? Are there things in my life that will be very difficult to explain when I stand before the holy Son of God?" If we want to live wisely, if we want the good life, it begins with us going from judgment backwards. We're going to live differently.

When bad times come, we need to examine our attitude.

So bad times are affected by our aspirations, by our activities and by our attitude. Solomon says in verse five that a rebuke is better than flattery. The idea here is that we need correction. From time to time, we're going to get this thing all messed up, so we need wise and godly individuals to give us a rebuke—a forceful word of correction. They need to tell us, "Hey, your aspirations or your activities are all messed up. You're not living the life I know you have dedicated yourself to live." Solomon says these words are better than the flowery words of flattery.

There have been moments in my life when dear friends have gotten in my face and told me in no uncertain terms, "What you did was dumb." That didn't just happen when I was a teenager; it has happened by some of you since I've been your pastor and I'm indebted to you for that. It makes us better.

Solomon also says the fool gets angry. It says in verse nine that he will be “*quick in [his] spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.*” When someone critiques you, receive it. Here’s why. Solomon says flattery comes and goes. Again, what matters is the longevity of something. He says in verse six, “*As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools.*”

Flattery is like the leaves and grass we throw on the fire in the fall. It’s burned up very, very quickly. Big splash, then it’s gone. By contrast, the words of rebuke from a dear friend last forever. So he warns us to be careful not to become angry.

One of the ways we can become angry is found in verse ten: “*Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.*” This is foolish, and here’s why. We look back to the Andy Griffith days and the Leave it to Beaver days (The young people have no idea what I’m talking about.), and we say, “Those were the good old days.” But here’s the thing—Barney and Andy and Ward and June look back to the previous generation, and they say those were the good old days. And the generation that living right now will look back thirty years from now will tell the generation of the future that we right now are living in the good old days. Do you see the chasing after the wind? It’s a myth. There are no good old days. Back then, prices were high, taxes were bad, politicians lied, and they do it today. They had bad times back then. They buried people; they dealt with horrific issues.

With every generation comes a new set of challenges. We look at them and say, “We didn’t have those problems back then.” I love telling my children this truth: Never once did my parents have to ground me from my cellphone. Ever. Never. (My youngest son said, “Wow! You must have been really good.”) Why? We didn’t have cellphones back then. It wasn’t a problem. So, yes, with every generation comes a new set of problems, but I want to remind you of this: No matter how hard today is, notice what we need to do—embrace our Lord. Embrace our Lord, being comforted that He is always in control. Acts 17 tells us that God has sovereignly placed us in this moment, in this place, at this time. Remember, God is the Creator. He said, “Alright, it’s Badal’s time. He’s going to be born to Bill and Michelle; they’re going to live in Hinckley; his time frame is going to be 1976....” I don’t know when it’s going to end. It could be on the way home from church today, which would make for a **powerful** illustration. I don’t know. But this is what I do know: God has said I will experience good and bad. And from my birth date to my death date, in the good and the bad, here’s what I should do—consider God. Embrace God. Grab hold of God.

Do you want to make your moments of joy even more joyful? Grab hold of God. Do you want to make the moments that are hard into times of pure joy? Grab hold of God. Do you want to make sense of the generation you’re living in? Grab hold of God. Because when you do, God will give you the insights for living. We know that we are embracing God when we can do these two things:

1. Thank God for every moment. Job’s wife told him to curse God and die; it’s God’s fault. If you want to know if you’re embracing God, if you’re living the good life in the good and the bad, ask yourself if you’re thanking God. I saw this at fourteen years of age when my parents were burying my brother. They thanked God. Why? Because they know that God does all things for good, even the hard things. It doesn’t make it easier. But my family would say in one voice, “The best thing God ever did for our Christlikeness was taking Chris to go home to heaven. You ask how I can say that. I know looking back, without a shadow of a doubt, I would not be here now. In that fire was forged in me a faith that God would use to change a great many lives. And I needed that at fourteen, because the way I was going was not the way I needed to go. God arrested me in that moment. So look at your trials, and thank God in the good, the bad, and even the ugly in life. And when those trials come...
2. Trust God’s providence. God is in control. So in response to his wife, instead of cursing God and dying, Job says, “God gives and God takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” If you want to enjoy life, then grab hold of that truth. Embrace that truth and that Savior, that Lord who has life all figured out. Then you will enjoy the good time and the bad times. You’ll know God has a plan and He works all things out for the good of those He loves and are called according to His purpose. So grab hold of that and you will live the good life that God has for you.