



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Walking the Tightrope

THE GOOD LIFE

Ecclesiastes 8

Tim Badal | November 13, 2022



About five years ago, the city of Chicago was fixed with rapt attention to the skies. They were about to witness a man doing the unthinkable, the unimaginable. A man was going to walk a tightrope. Nik Wallenda had done it before, as generations of his family had. He had gone over Niagara Falls. He had gone over the Grand Canyon. But now he was going to climb up 700 feet so he could traverse a wire that was two inches wide, in spite of all the winds a Chicago autumn brings.

Nik is a God-fearing Christian man who gives all the glory and honor to God. But I thought such a feat should just be talked about. It needs to be seen with our own eyes. So let's go back five years to the city of Chicago, and let's watch Nik do his thing.

[Video link](#)

Pretty amazing, huh? Seven hundred feet in the air. His wife and kids were watching. Why? Because what he was endeavoring to do was a life-or-death situation. There were no cables. There were no safety nets. Seven hundred feet. One misstep, one gust of wind and that would have changed everything.

Why did I show that video? It's a pretty amazing video. But the reason I showed it is that what I think Solomon is telling us today, and what he's told us throughout this series in Ecclesiastes, is that life is like walking a tightrope. It's a delicate endeavor. One decision, one mistake, can have harrowing consequences. Sometimes circumstances, like a gust of wind, can change what was intended to be a victory into utter defeat.

We need to realize that life is a lot like this. We are traversing this very difficult thing called life and any one decision can knock us back, knock us down, or even take us out of the game altogether. I want this word picture to come to life for you and think it will help you in the days to come.

Did you notice the pole Nic Wallenda had? It's about 39 feet long and weighed over 30 pounds. This is way beyond my understanding, but scientists say this has to do with the process of inertia. It takes your instability and spreads it out, so that, even though you're unstable on your own, that bar brings stability.

I want you to realize that Solomon was telling us as Christ followers that we need God's wisdom as our stabilizing bar. We're walking this thing called life and at times it will be difficult. We're going to make mistakes. We're going to face challenges.

When Nik traversed the Grand Canyon, the winds got so bad that he stopped and knelt down on the wire. He just sat there. He said, "I have to wait until it's safe to continue." There are times in life when things will be difficult and can even require life-or-death decisions. There are serious implications.

God has given His wisdom to Solomon, and in the same way, we can walk the tightrope of life by bringing wisdom into our circumstances and decisions. This wisdom will stabilize us when we're unsteady. Some of us may even feel that life is like walking a tightrope and we're about to lose control.

God is telling us He has wisdom for us. Solomon writes in Proverbs 9:10, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* God wants us to know that if we want a stabilizing force in our lives, we need to know Him and fear Him. As we've seen in this series, this describes the good life. The good life is lived with the wisdom that comes from the God Who is bigger and greater than anything in this world. Foolishness is looking at the world from our perspective. God says

if we fear Him, we will begin to transcend all of the details of our lives. We'll be able to see it from a drone's perspective, from heaven's perspective. But far too many of us are trying to walk this tightrope as fools, without any weighted bar. That's why many of us find ourselves wobbling and sometimes even falling into difficulties and struggles.

Many of you might be thinking, "I could use more wisdom." The Bible tells us in James 1:5, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*" God wants to give you this stabilizer so you will be able to weather every moment of life.

With that in mind, with understanding why we need wisdom in our hands in order to accomplish all God calls us to in our lives, we'll see in our text today two reasons why wisdom is essential.

Wisdom is essential when dealing with authority.

Let's look at Ecclesiastes 8:

¹ Who is like the wise?
And who knows the interpretation of a thing?
A man's wisdom makes his face shine,
and the hardness of his face is changed.

² I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. ³ Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. ⁴ For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" ⁵ Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. ⁶ For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him.

The first place we need wisdom as a stabilizing bar is in dealing with those whom God has placed in authority over us. Solomon says we need to "*keep the king's command.*" How appropriate, right? How ironic that the king himself is telling us, "Keep my commands."

We also run into the fact that we don't have kings. Our only king is King Jesus. Is this Scripture not appropriate for us at all? Well, we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. What we read here in Ecclesiastes is reaffirmed in Romans 13 where it says that we who are under the rule of King Jesus are also to be "*subject to the governing authorities.*" So who are our governing authorities? For a child, it's Mom and Dad. For a student, it's the teacher, principal or the administration at the school. For us, it's our employers and those who are in government over us. In the church it's the elders who lead and shepherd the flock of God. We have numerous authorities.

You might leave today, and because Pastor Tim went too long, you'll be late for lunch. You'll zoom out on Bliss Road, and Sugar Grove's finest, with the governing authority they have, will pull you over. We have a lot of authorities in our lives, a lot of people who get to tell us what to do. Solomon realizes that we're going to need wisdom in how we deal with these people, because they're not always the nicest of people. They're not always going to be the wisest of people. They're not always going to be the most righteous of people. What do we do, especially when dealing with difficult governing authorities around us? Solomon says we must deal with them wisely, not like a fool. He then gives us three ways a fool deals with the authorities who are over him, then three ways the wise deal with them.

Fools push off the commands of the authority.

Verse two says, "*Keep the king's commands...*" Some of us this morning can look back and see where we've pushed off the commands of those in authority over us again and again and again.

Young person, you told your parents you weren't going to do what they wanted you to do. You told your teachers you weren't going to do the assignment they told you to finish. As an employee, you've told your boss you weren't going to do something. "I know it's in my job description, but I'm still not going to do it. I'm going to go against what you've asked me to do."

The Bible says this is a foolish way to live. Why? It's "*because of God's oath to him.*" In other words, God put the king in charge. He was the one who gave him his governing authority. We know there is not a single person placed in authority—whether or not we like them, whether we voted for them or not, whether we give them high marks or not, whether we believe in their cause or not. God has put each of them where they are for such a time as this.

So they're there where God placed them. Therefore, for a Christ-follower to refuse to do what the people God have ordained as authorities in our lives is not only to say no to them, but it's also to say no to the God Who is over them. They're just middle management.

Fools allow their passions to get the best of them.

Solomon continues in verse three, *"Do not be hasty."* The command is given from the king, the person hears it, but their response is, "I don't want to do it, so I'm not going to do it. For that matter, I'm going to tell you what I think of you. You're a no good, rotten, dumb boss. I don't like you. And to be honest, I should be in your role, because I'm way smarter than you. I can lead this thing way better than you can."

Maybe you don't say that with your words, but it might be your attitude and how you act. You storm off and feel better about yourself. But the Bible still says you're a fool. Again we read in James 1:19, *"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."*

Let's be honest: it's really easy to bad-mouth those in authority. Kids, it's easy to bad-mouth your parents. Students, it's easy to bad-mouth your teachers. Employees, it's easy to bad-mouth your employers. Citizens, it's easy to bad-mouth your government. It's easy to do. They're incompetent. They are corrupt. We can come up with all manner of things against those in authority over us. We can tell them what we think and where we think they should go. But we do it to our own demise. Don't let your passions get the best of you. How many of us have said something in a hasty way, only to regret it later? These are the fools who speak before they think.

Fools participate in ungodly rebellion.

Verse three goes on, *"Do not take your stand in an evil cause."* You don't like what the king has said, you don't like what the governing authorities have said, so you start conspiring with others. "Well, I don't like this—do you?" "No, I don't either." "Let's form a committee. Let's talk about this. Let's compare notes on what we don't like about them. Let's talk about what we think should be done, then we'll put together a task force and make it happen."

Right away I've added a precursor to the word "rebellion." Do not participate in ungodly rebellion. For me to say there's no place for rebellion reaches out with three strikes. First, our forefathers—the disciples—rebelled against the commands and mandates of men. They said, "We're going to preach Christ; if you tell us we can't, we choose to follow Him. That means we're going to rebel against you."

In a far more limited way, we as Americans are the children of the Revolution. This country was founded on a rebellion, caused in part by the issue of taxation without representation. We now enjoy this American experience and need to remember that there was a moment when we chose to rebel.

Then third, our church tradition also includes instances of rebellion. We're Protestants, which means our ancestors protested against an authority. In 1517, Martin Luther got tired of watching the Catholic church tell people they could buy their way out of hell. He couldn't go along with it anymore. So instead of standing idly by and allowing that travesty to continue, he nailed a list of 95 grievances to the church door. He said, "Enough is enough."

So what does our text tell us? Is there a time to rebel? Maybe. But make sure that in your rebellion you're as godly as possible. Make sure you have the right cause and that you're using the right means to accomplish it. That means you can't slander. You can't backbite or gossip. You can't scheme in sinful ways.

When we're unhappy with someone who has authority over us, we tend to think that because our cause is right, we can say or do whatever we want in order to gain what we think is right. But the Bible says that's not the way it's done. That's the way of a fool. We need to understand that in a time of rebellion, things are usually not black and white. In those situations, there are some Christians who will agree with you about what needs to be done, others will not. There really isn't a textbook that tells us, "This is when Christians should rebel."

As an example, in Nazi Germany, there were two individuals who were most listened to on the radio before World War II. You know the first one, who was of course Adolf Hitler. The second was a pietistic Lutheran pastor name Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was known for his incredible love for the Lord. His books are some of my favorite books I've ever read. Bonhoeffer made a decision

that would be questioned by Christians ever since that time. He actually took part in a plot to assassinate Hitler—and he was a pastor. But he saw the great evil Hitler was doing and believed the most godly thing to do would be to end that man's life.

We need to realize that when we take a stand on some of these hard questions, not every Christian will agree with our position. It involves both a matter of conscience and a matter of wisdom. But there's no question that we need wisdom in decisions like this. Before you lose your cool and rebel, before you storm out or make a scene, consider the way of the wise.

Wise people pursue uprightness and obedience.

Solomon tells us first and foremost that we should pursue uprightness and obedience. There is a right way. Verse four says, *"For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'"* Verse five continues, *"Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way."*

Wisdom, that weighted pull when authorities are lording it over you, is there for you to acknowledge this. "As far as it depends on me, my first job is to be the best subject under their authority." First Thessalonians 4:10-12 tells us to live quiet lives. We're not to be known as rabble rousers or disobedient, riotous people. We are to live quietly so that God's name may be glorified. That the world may see that we are about the change of hearts. The reason that's important is that if you do what you're told and are compliant, if you are as far as you can be at peace with the authorities over you, when you do cry, "Foul!" now it means something. But if you are constantly complaining and bickering, no one's going to listen to you. That means kids, you are to be the best kids you can be for your parents. Students, be the best student you can be in the classroom. Employees, be the best employee in the workplace.

We need to decide, "As best as I can, I'm going to obey the rules that govern me." Solomon says that will allow us to *"know no evil thing."* In other words, our consciences will be clear so that we are the best follower or subject of the authority who is over us. Or are there ways we can do this better?

Wise people pick their battles carefully.

So you have a governing authority in your life and they're wreaking havoc. What should you do? Number two, if you're wise, you'll pick your battles carefully. Verse five tells us we can know *"the proper time and the just way."* Verse six continues, *"For there is a time and a way for everything."*

This harkens back to Ecclesiastes 3. There's a time for war and there's a time for peace. There's a time to break down and there's a time to build up. We need wisdom to know what time it is to help us decide which battles we need to fight. Let's face it, the battles are more difficult in our day. Some of us have more battles to deal with than others. Those who are in corporate America are seeing an increase in these battles. Those who work in the public sector, in municipalities and public education—you have many new struggles.

I was talking with one of our educators here who told me it's getting harder and harder to choose the right battles to fight. He said, "There are a lot of definitions that are being forced upon us that go against our consciences. I have to ask myself: is this the line I should draw? Is this where I need to take a stand?" He has to think through these things, asking God for wisdom.

This brings to mind the time when the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. There were certain young who were among the captives; we know them by the names Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They had to go through extreme cultural changes. They watched so much that was important to them being tossed aside as nothing. Still, they found a way to navigate that, until one day when they chose to pick their battle. There came a point when they couldn't go with the new culture. When Nebuchadnezzar created a statue and commanded the people to worship it as god, the three Hebrew boys drew the line. They couldn't worship something that wasn't their God. It was a bridge too far.

Brothers and sisters, there may come a time and place when we too come upon a bridge too far. We may have to stand alone, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did long ago, and as Martin Luther said years later, "Here I stand. I can do no other." When this time comes, we have to let the consequences fall where they will.

We know that the Hebrew boys were thrown into a fire as a result of their decision, but we also know the rest of the story. That fire did not consume them. We need to realize this won't always be the case. If you take a stand for what is right, it doesn't guarantee that Jesus will show up and you're not going to burn. Most of the time over history, the martyrs burned. All of this reminds us that we need to be very careful when choosing our battles.

Wise people look for the God-given processes to address their issue.

If you don't like how something is going, notice that it says in verse five that we must protest in a just way. There's a right way to do this. Joseph did it right when he dealt with his brothers in Egypt. Nathan did it right when he confronted King David about his adultery. Nehemiah did it right before a king during a time of captivity. There's a right way to protest and there's a right way to be heard. Maybe you have some issues. Have you exhausted all the God-given processes to address your grievance? Find them and utilize them, over and over. In this, you will find wisdom.

So who are you struggling with today? Who do you need to say no to? Instead of getting angry and storming off, there's a wise way to deal with those in authority over you. In our country, God has given us a lot of leverage. There are a lot of services and people in greater authority that we can appeal to, even within our government system. How do we get rid of people whom we don't want to lead us? It's called an election. There's another one coming in two years. They're already getting ready for it and we haven't even finished counting this recent one. We have ways to make a difference, so be wise in addressing the issues you have with those in authority. You need God's wisdom and I pray that He will give it to you in your hour of need.

Wisdom is essential for understanding the anomalies of life.

Second, we need God's wisdom to understand the anomalies of life, that is, the mysteries and inconsistencies of life. Let's pick up in Ecclesiastes 8:7:

⁷For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death. There is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it. ⁹All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.

¹⁰Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. ¹¹Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

¹²Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. ¹³But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

¹⁴There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

What in the world is Solomon talking about? It becomes crystal clear to us when we realize he's admitting about life, "I don't get it. I look at life and think I have wisdom, but there are inconsistencies and inequities in life that just don't seem to make sense." He mentions four specific things.

Death doesn't make sense.

First, death doesn't make any sense to those of us who are alive. That's because we don't know when we're going to die and we don't know how we're going to die. Think right now where you're sitting about when you're going to die. Then think about how you're going to die. I tell you, there's a really good chance you'll be wrong on both counts. You really have no earthly idea about these things. That's what makes death so scary. It comes upon us usually without warning. We need to realize we have 100% chance of dying, but we don't know how or when. What do we do with this reality?

Difficulties don't make sense.

Verse nine speaks of the times when "*man had power over man to his hurt.*" We don't have control over our trials. So maybe today everything seems to be going well, but we're a big enough church that something this week will become a very difficult thing for someone among us. There will be some trial, perhaps even some tragedy, that will come upon one of us and that person will be ill-prepared and in some ways ill-equipped for it. That's what makes difficulties difficult. Maybe it will be a relational situation. Maybe it will be a financial problem. Maybe there will be a physical issue, or even a spiritual issue. We have no way to know what's coming.

I'm very encouraged and know many of you are as well, to have heard that Jared Williamson is now home after a month in the hospital. For those who don't know him, Jared is a 40-year-old man in our church. He has a wonderful family and is a college football coach.. He may even be watching us online right now. He was coming home late Saturday night about a month ago from a college football game he had been participating in. He was looking forward to seeing his wife and kids, but then in the blink of

an eye, a drunk driver crushed his car. For the next month he was in intensive care, getting mended and learning again how to walk and use his arms. When that moment came, I can assure you that he had no idea it was coming.

That's the problem with those difficulties in life; we never know when they're coming. It's easy when they do come to ask, "Why is this happening, God? What is going on?" The answer is we don't know.

Deceptions don't make sense.

In verse ten, Solomon speaks of going to a funeral. Follow his logic. *"I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things."* Wait a minute. How could it be that a wicked person could be praised for all the good things he was doing in the church? The answer is: because he deceived everyone. He showed all kinds of righteousness, but underneath he was wicked.

Some of us have been deceived by people like this. We may even have been deceived by our spouse, by our boss or by a business partner. Maybe we have been deceived by a politician. God, help this not to happen here, but maybe we can be deceived by a pastor.

You believed one thing, but something else eventually was revealed as the truth. This can result in hurt and sorrow, so again we ask, "Why, God? Why did this happen?" The answer is we don't know.

Delays don't make sense.

So we can't make sense of death, of difficulties, of deceptions, and finally there are the delays of God. The decisions of God might be another way to say this. "Why, God, do you allow evil people to not be incarcerated? Why do you allow good men to die young and bad men to live forever?" The answer to "Why God?" is we don't know.

What does wisdom do when these questions come? What is that balancing bar? The answer is humility. "I don't know, God. I'm not smart enough. I'm not infinite like You are, so I'm going to humble myself and recognize that I don't get it."

Let me throw some quotes your way, and hopefully they'll be helpful.

- "Life comes as a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Life is hard. It doesn't make sense.
- William Durant said, "Our knowledge is a receding mirage in an expanding desert of ignorance." Again, we don't get it—and that's the purpose. We are finite and don't have all the answers.
- Finally, a Persian proverb puts it this way: "He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool. Shun him. He who knows not and knows he knows not is simple. Teach him. He who knows and knows not that he knows is asleep. Wake him. He who knows and knows he knows, he is wise. Follow him."

Focusing on that last statement, when you know what you know, and you know why you know it, you're wise. That's because you also know what you don't know. For young people, this is hard because you're know-it-alls. It's not just you; I was a know-it-all when I was younger, and my parents were know-it-alls when they were younger. It just comes with being young to think you know it all. But life comes in, we encounter these mysteries and anomalies, and they push against what we think we know. It makes us realize that in the end, we actually knew very little. When the mysteries and anomalies of life come our way, wisdom humbles us. "I'm finite; God, You're infinite. I am simple; You are complex. I am low; You are high. I am weak; You are strong." We can continue like this, "I am nothing; You are everything."

Wisdom is essential for living with the right attitude.

When we reach this place of humility, that's when we're walking in wisdom. So what do we do with the governing authorities and the anomalies of life? Solomon has told us what to do in order to walk this life without falling to our death. It's the bar that will balance us out. We see in verse 12 that we're called to fear God. We're to respect God, revere God and extol His greatness. We're called to put God first and foremost in our lives, making Him preeminent in all things. That's what it means to fear God and worship Him as God, because He's greater than us. We declare His greatness, realizing He is everything and we are nothing.

That means I choose to look at God's perspective on life, not my own. That means I allow God to set the priorities in life, rather than doing it myself. I'm acknowledging this God Who is greater, wiser, and more powerful than I ever will be. I say, "God, You're

everything, so I'm going to live life above the sun, from Your perspective. I'm going to do it Your way." Do you know what God says to those who choose to live life above the sun, that is, from His perspective and with His priorities?

Look at verse 15. Solomon says that person will have fun. They will be able to *"eat and drink and be joyful."* Why? Because you will realize that whatever issue you have with an authority, there is a higher authority. That higher authority has said that evil doesn't get away with it. "There will be a day coming," says the Lord, "when I will avenge and repay." So be patient and wait. When the mysteries, difficulties and anomalies of life come, you won't throw your hands up and say it's hopeless. Rather, you will hand those issues over to God and become hopeful, knowing, "God, You have this figured out. God, You have a plan and purpose. God, You have meaning for this, so I'm going to trust You. I'm going to believe in and rest in You." When we do that, we're able to eat and drink and be merry. We are able, my friends, to live the good life.

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