

WISDOM & LIMITATION, ECCL.8

Something Worth Living For #7

- **Intro:** This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us." --Western Union internal memo, 1876.
 - "Who the @#!\$ wants to hear actors talk?" --H.M. Warner, Warner Brothers, 1927.
 - "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers." -- Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943
 - "Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons." -- Popular Mechanics, forecasting the relentless march of science, 1949.
 - "Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value." --Marechal Ferdinand Foch, Professor of Strategy.
 - "The concept is interesting and well-formed, but in order to earn better than a 'C,' the idea must be feasible." --A Yale University management professor in response to Fred Smith's paper proposing reliable overnight delivery service. (Smith went on to found Federal Express Corp.)
- ◆ Clearly through wisdom, people have done seemingly impossible things. At the same time, the wisdom we think we have at any given time can be hopelessly inadequate. As you know from our study of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher is searching through life, and through the world looking for meaning, and something worth living for. He's evaluated pleasure, accomplishments, time, notoriety, endless cycles, death, morality and the like. In this chapter he ponders wisdom, which is equal to but more than

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“education.” This too can easily become someone’s idol to which we look for all our answers; more education, more learning! Wisdom has limitations, but still it is worth finding especially for those of us who find ourselves acting unwisely at times.

◆1. I need to be open to wisdom and learning while humbly assessing myself.

◆**A.** There is great value in finding wisdom. I’m defining wisdom as transferable truth or insight for better living. For example, we don’t all have to invent the wheel every year. It’s been done. We need only learn and accept the wisdom of others. We don’t have to conquer flight. That wisdom has been found and established. We can use it to tremendous advantage. Psychologists tell us, if you want to avoid fights and hard feelings when you are upset with someone, use “I” messages, and avoid “You” messages.

◆[So instead of saying “You drive me nuts. You’re so offensive. You’re always telling me what to do...” We try “I am so terribly frustrated right now. My feelings are hurt by all this. I want to do this without being directed as though I’m just a kid.” -See?]

◆So there is wisdom to be learned. We benefit from the wisdom of others. Our author addresses wisdom repeatedly in the book of Ecclesiastes, sometimes finding it meaningless for its lack of ability, and sometimes finding it a better option. In chapter 8 he uses the example of being a servant to a powerful king to show the value of learning and maturing. **[Read 2-6]**

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◆ Here wisdom is an answer for human powerlessness. In the chapter the king's word is *supreme* (v4 "power"), no man has "power" over the wind, no man has "power" over death (v8), and some folk *lord it* over others (v9 "over-power", pull rank.) So in the face of things stacked against us, the author commends wisdom in our behavior. Jesus said the same thing to his followers.

◆ *Matthew 10:16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves (no power of your own). Therefore be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves.*

◆ A foolish person says whatever he feels like at the time, but a wise person handles working even with a powerful, perhaps unpredictable King (or person in high position) because he knows what to say, and when and how to say it.

◆ I've never forgotten the wisdom my mother taught us in Makakilo, HA, where a neighborhood bully was constantly badgering us as the new kids on the block. She quoted Proverbs 15:1 *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* "Go out there and find a way to say something nice to that boy!" she said. So we sat on the curb waiting for his inevitable skateboard to roll by, and we politely complimented him on his apparent skill. He never bothered us again after that. It was my first experience of an actual miracle!

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- ◆ Sidney Greidanus comments that we run into people with a lack of wisdom all the time. A baseball coach yells in the referee's face until he is thrown out of the game. A lady traveler gives the customs agent at the border a hard time; she is held up for hours while her car and luggage are carefully searched. A driver stopped by a policeman for speeding starts yelling and threatening him; he ends up in a holding cell.
- ◆ Perhaps the obvious application of this truth about wisdom is one of humility: be a person who can learn wisdom, who is open to being taught, or discovering from others.
 - ◆ Proverbs 15:12 A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise.
 - ◆ Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
 - ◆ *Proverbs 15:31 He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise*
- ◆ By the way, God's Word is full of wisdom just sitting there waiting for us to read it! It's wisdom has been around for thousands of years. Want a simple practice? Every day, read the chapter in Proverbs that matches the day of the month. There are 31 chapters. Easy reading plan.
- ◆ Can I put it like this? Doubt yourself a little bit more. I don't mean feel bad about yourself. I'm not trying to bust your self-esteem. But your confidence does not necessarily match your

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ability! As grandparents we clearly see potential and necessary actions our kids ought to be taking when dealing with their kids, also known as OUR grandchildren! Sometimes after giving some advice my son will say, "Don't worry, Dad, I would never let anything like that happen." I know he means it. But I also know that after raising 4 sons, I meant it too, but my ability often did not measure up to my confidence. I have made enough mistakes over the years now that I never meant to make. Once I was mad and backed angrily out of the driveway, ...and road over my 10-speed bike. Then it occurred to me that it could have been one of my boys! I added a healthy amount of doubt about myself that day. Do you see what I'm saying? We need to be open to wisdom and learning while humbly doubtful of ourselves.

◆ But now we must step back. Because human wisdom is never enough. We aren't as smart as we think. We will not solve all things with education. We have not become more morally upright just because we live in a scientifically advanced age. Even though we know stuff, we still live in contradiction with what we know! So where do we turn.

◆ **2. There is a transcendent source of wisdom available to all!** Ruth Barton writes,

◆ " The first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the Creator. God is the one who is infinite; I on the other hand, must learn to live within the physical limits of time and space, and the human limits of my own strength and energy. There are

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limits to my relational, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities. I am not God. God is the only one who can be all things to all people. God is the only one who can be two places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. I am not. We can't remind ourselves of this enough. This is pretty basic stuff, but many of us live as though we don't know it." (Strengthening, p.123)

◆A. This I think, is what the Teacher is getting at in chapter 8. You and I will never understand it all. Human wisdom has limitations. We can't change another person. We cannot know all that God is doing in this world, but we can know God. No one knows the future (v7). The meteorologists have not the slightest control of the wind, or of what the weather will be (v8). Even when we know a hurricane like Ida is heading toward the coast, we can't do a thing about it. Three times in the final verse (17) the author states that no one can mentally grasp/"comprehend" what God does in the world.

◆(Have you ever wondered why the "Weather" is so important to us? People got to see the weather! Oh don't turn the TV off yet. I wanna see the weather!" They even put the full report at the end of all the news because they know we'll stay until we get it. Why? Perhaps because it gives us a sense of control to *know the future*. A false sense but a sense nonetheless.

◆Yet we live as though if we get up earlier, and work longer, we will solve our problems (v16 *man's labor on earth -his eyes not*

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seeing sleep day or night-). My wisdom will protect me! We live as though if we worry more, remind more, argue our case more -we will keep all the things we don't want to happen from happening. Maybe if we wear 3 masks and never leave the house we'll stay healthy. It's a fools errand to think this way. Know what happens in reality? Good people lose and bad people become civic leaders! (v14). Careful people can get sick while the wreckless survive (12). Listen, you cannot be careful enough to insure you don't get COVID. Do your best but don't over react. Listen, you cannot insure that your portfolio/stocks will be there when you retire. Do your best, save, invest and all that, but don't live under that pressure! It's doing you no good. On the other hand,

◆A. (application) Seek the wisdom of the God who is there. Are you really seeking him. This is the lightbulb in the Teacher's analysis! There is a God who determines the times (ch.3!) God is the one who gives you your days under the sun (v15). Life always goes better when we look for God's ways.

◆verse 12: Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God.

◆ What are you doing in your life to seek God? This is something worth living for! The Teacher points at church-attenders who while admired by those around, really have zero connection with

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God. But at their funeral everyone says "He's in a better place now." But is he really?

◆verse 10: Then too, I saw the wicked buried—those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.

◆ I would venture that most people today that call themselves Christian almost never sit still for 30 minutes to wait on God for wisdom in prayer. That most folk in our country who say they believe in Jesus rarely take their current situation, and scan a Bible concordance for every place God's Word addresses their topic. Perhaps it's true for someone here today that the only time you even think about, much less seek God is here on Sunday. Don't get me wrong. There is immense value in public worship. God can splash over on you here! But that alone will never fill your soul. God will show you things, but you will need to routinely invite him to search you, know you, and lead you.

◆B. Surrender to the wisdom of God when you find it. Did you know you can surrender without fully understanding? We call that trust. We can live in surrender to God's instructions because there is a wisdom higher than us. And verse 12-13 are true! Jesus said it too.

◆*John 5:26-29 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all*

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who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

◆**Conclusion:** There's plenty of wisdom to be had in this world. Here's some more...

◆When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.

◆Light travels faster than sound. That's why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.

◆He who laughs last, thinks slowest.

◆Human wisdom can be pretty silly. But is there a reliable source? Is there a "go to" for dependable wisdom. The answer is yes there is. Proverbs 8 personifies Wisdom. Here are some things it says.

◆Proverbs 8:23-36

◆Guess what the NT says about Jesus in John1? He was in the beginning. All things were created through him. In him is life. He came in the flesh and lived here with us to bring us God's truth.

◆The wisdom by which the world is rightly navigated is also the wisdom by which the world exists. His personal name is Jesus.

Play song: Before the Mountains