

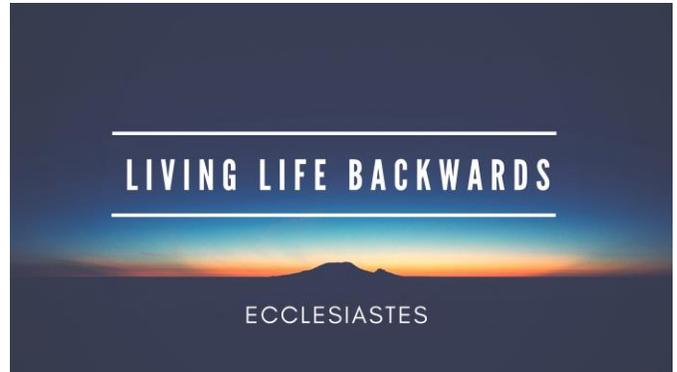
Embrace Life's Limitations

Ecclesiastes 5:8-8:17

Living Life Backwards, Part 7

David Sunday

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Today we'll be in a large portion in the middle of Ecclesiastes, but I'm first going to read Ecclesiastes 7:11-14. Let's give our full attention to the reading of God's holy, inspired, inerrant Word, which will abide forever.

¹¹ Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. ¹² For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. ¹³ Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? ¹⁴ 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.

This is God's Word. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we need You now. We pray, by Your Spirit, through the preaching of Your Word that...

...what we know not, You would teach us

...what we have not, You would give us

...and what we are not yet, You would make us

...until we are fully conformed to the image of Your radiant, pure, holy, mighty Son, Jesus, in Whose name we now pray with thanksgiving. Amen.

We're going to take a bird's eye view at a large section of Ecclesiastes today and at first glance it might seem like there are a lot of different things happening in this section. But there is a thread that keeps running through these verses. It's about the limitations of life under the sun—all the hardships, the frustrations, the enigmas we experience in this fallen world. You might think you've got a handle on things and you've got your life under control. But Ecclesiastes reminds us that no one has their life under control. Life under the sun eludes our control.

So as we read these different verses, imagine there's a Bob Dylan track running in the background and he's singing:

Broken lines, broken strings
Broken threads, broken springs
Broken idols, broken heads
People sleeping in broken beds
Ain't no use jiving
Ain't no use joking
Everything is broken

Broken bottles, broken plates
Broken switches, broken gates
Broken dishes, broken parts
Streets are filled with broken hearts
Broken words never meant to be spoken
Everything is broken

Seem like every time you stop and turn around
Something else just hit the ground
Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin'
Everything is broken

[From "Everything Is Broken" by Bob Dylan]

The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "That's true. Dylan actually got it right, but there is a way to live wisely in this broken world." We saw it in verse 11, "*Wisdom is good...*" Wisdom is an advantage to those who see the sun. Verse 12 says wisdom offers protection and preserves the lives of those who have it. So seek wisdom and know that there is wisdom to be found in the Word of God that will help you find contentment and joy in this broken, messed up world.

But realize this: even wisdom has its limits. Wisdom will help you a lot, but it won't fix everything that's broken in your life or in this world. Here's the surprising thing about wisdom, in the words of David Gibson: "The wisest thing you can do is realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know." There are limits to wisdom.

Verse 13 presents us with one of these limits: "*Consider the work of God...*" That's beyond our ability to grasp. "*Who can make straight what he has made crooked?*" What does it mean that God has made things crooked? Well, it doesn't mean that God is the Author of evil. It doesn't mean that God is doing morally suspicious things. But it means this, in the words of the Puritan Thomas Boston: "Everyone's lot in life has some crook in it." There's a crook—a bend—in the lot of everyone's life.

Each of us has some trouble or difficulty in life that we wish we could change, but we cannot alter it, and no amount of wisdom or knowledge is going to fix it. Physical health limitations that

are beyond your ability to change. Financial setbacks—you planned so well, then boom, look what happened and you can't get it back. Relational breakdowns with family members or friends that you cannot fix it. We've all got something like that, something we wish we didn't have, or we lack something we wish we did have. If you live long enough in this broken world, you're going to find that there are some crooked lines in your life that you just can't figure out. Only God can do that. God can draw straight with crooked lines, but we can't.

So what you do in the face of this brokenness—how you respond to what's broken in your life and in this world—is what makes the difference between frustration or contentment, misery or joy, atheism or faith. Think about it. Most of us know someone, or we've read about someone, who once seemed to be a really sincere follower of Jesus, a real Christian. But now they say, "I don't believe at all." They've abandoned Christ and the gospel. This might be someone really close to you. It might actually be you today. You might be teetering on the verge of unbelief. You're starting to think, "I don't know if I really believe in Christ and if this gospel is true." You're considering walking away from it.

Everyone's story is different. We're all unique, but I would suggest that there are three similar themes you will find in the stories of people who once embraced Christianity but now reject it. You'll find one or more of these three themes: 1) disobedience, 2) disappointment, or 3) disillusionment.

Disobedience is the first reason many people reject Christianity. We reject the faith because it demands from us a way of living that we find hard to embrace. We don't want to obey God's commands. Tim Keller said that when he encounters a person who says to him, "I don't believe in Jesus anymore," sometimes he just looks the person in the eye and asks him, "Who are you sleeping with?" Because the sexual ethic that Jesus demands of His followers is not popular. Sometimes we reject Jesus simply because we want to sleep with whomever we want to sleep with, and we want to do whatever it is that we want to do. So to conveniently get our way, we say, "I don't believe in that stuff anymore." Disobedience.

Then there's disappointment. You've prayed and prayed, "God, please heal my mother," but she dies. You've hoped that following God would bring about a change in your circumstances, but life has gotten harder, not easier. In the face of that, people sometimes say, "Christianity doesn't work for me." Disappointment.

Then disillusionment. "Just look at all the evil and oppression and suffering in this world. How could a good God rule over this?" We don't see as much of it in the Fox Valley, do we? But it's there behind closed doors. "If God is all-powerful, why does He let innocent children suffer?" There's no glib answer to that question. There's no easy way to just say, "Oh, that's not a problem."

These are things we wrestle with. “Why the holocaust? Why is the world and our own nation today full of human trafficking? Why doesn’t God stop that?” Disillusionment.

Here’s where Ecclesiastes can help us. It doesn’t paint a rosy picture of life in this fallen world. It doesn’t pretend that if you just believe in God, everything is going to start going easy for you. It faces these stark realities head on and it says, “If we face these facts of life in a fallen world, it is possible to find real contentment, lasting joy and abiding faith.” The fear of the Lord will be a reality for those who listen to the wisdom God gives us here about life in a fallen world. So let’s look at some of these facts of life in a fallen world.

Fact of Life #1: Prosperity is not always a blessing.

We’d love prosperity if we had it, but it’s not always a blessing. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:14 again. This verse will be the paradigm for our sermon today: *“In the day of prosperity be joyful...”* So if God prospers you, receive His gifts with gratitude and rejoice in His generosity to you. Rejoice in it, but remember, do not find your joy in possessions. Find your joy in God, not in your wealth or in your possessions, because prosperity is not always a blessing.

Let’s look back at Ecclesiastes 5, starting at verse ten: *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”* This is one of these things you can never get your arms around in this life. It’s fleeting and transient. Can you remember a time when you prayed, “God, please give me a job that makes \$30,000 a year? I would be so satisfied.” Now maybe you’re making three times that much and you’re thinking, “I don’t have enough. I need more.” The more you have, the more you will want.

Verse 11: *“When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?”* In other words, prosperity attracts leeches. If you notice, whenever your kids find out you’ve gotten some extra money, all of a sudden you hear, “Mom, Dad...?” The more you make, the government is going to come and say, “We’d like more of that.” It’s like trying to hold a grizzly bear by the ears. The more you amass, the less you are able to control it all. It can even rob you of your sleep(verse 12): *“Sweet is the sleep of a laborer...”*—just an ordinary, common job, check in in the morning, check out at night, go home, go to bed, and sleep like a baby—*“whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep”* Maybe this is why Henry Ford confessed later in his life, “I was happier doing a mechanic’s job.”

The more you have, the more you stand to lose. Look at verses 13-14: *“There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches*

were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand." This guy is not been able to sleep because he's worried about all his stuff. He hoards his wealth, not wanting to let one penny disappear, then suddenly there's a downturn and it all vanishes—and he has nothing. His children have nothing.

What is this telling us? Financial security is a mirage. Financial security is false security. You can't insure your own happiness through building your own portfolio. Are you holding the things of this world loosely? Are you willing for God to make you poorer than you are? And when He does, will you still praise Him for it? Because one day it's all going to be taken away from you.

Look at verse 15. This will be true for every one of us. *"As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?"*

This is partly why John Wesley made it his goal to die with nothing in his name. And he pretty much succeeded. He gave it all away before he died. Once he toured an estate with a proud owner. After riding on horses for several hours, they had only seen a fraction of this rich man's property. So the rich man brought him back to his house and sat him down for dinner. He proudly asked Mr. Wesley, "What do you think of all my stuff?" Wesley replied, "I think you're going to have a hard time leaving all of this—and leave it you will." We can't take it with us.

So wealth can be a great good, but it's a horrible god. If it's ruling your life, it will make you miserable. Behind closed doors, the lives of many of the rich and famous look like verse 17: *"Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger."* Those three words—vexation, sickness and anger—describe many of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. So if God prospers you, rejoice. But don't make prosperity your god.

Look at verses 18-20: *"Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart."*

This reminds of these lyrics by Stuart Townend: "Life is but a fleeting breath, a sigh too brief to measure..."

What is the preacher hinting at here? He's starting to hint at something he wants us to notice and it's in that phrase: *"...and power to enjoy them."* What he's saying is, "If you make

prosperity your god, you may find that God actually gives you prosperity. He gives you what you want, but He withholds from you the power to enjoy what you've been given." Like one man said, "God may give a man a can of peaches, but hide the can opener." That's what the preacher is lamenting at the beginning of chapter six. He says, *"There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind."*

In other words, you don't have to look far to find this. This does not require much power of observation. This is something that's lying heavy on mankind. Wherever you look, you're going to find this oppressiveness. *"A man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil."*

So he argues in Ecclesiastes 6:3-9 that a person who has lots of appetites that can never be satisfied is actually someone who would have been better off never even being born in the first place. That's what he's saying.

Then he brings us to verse ten: "There's nothing you can do to create a perfect world that's going to satisfy every desire. You cannot break out of this brokenness all around you and within you. We need to recognize that we live under the sovereign hand of God and the more we wrestle with Him, the more frustrating our lives are going to be. God is the One Who has named all things, he says in verse ten, so He has authority over all things. It's foolish for a human being to dispute with a God Who is stronger than we are. The more words we use to argue with God, the more vanity there is.

But here's the conclusion of Fact of Life #1: *"In the day of prosperity, be joyful,"* but remember Who gave you these gifts. You, my friend, are not a self-made person. You did not earn or deserve all that you have received. God was gracious to you. God prospered you. And you are not able to secure your own happiness or enjoyment. You cannot ensure your future prosperity. You cannot satisfy your longings with money or a new boat or a second home or a well-padded IRA.

Riches will come; riches will go. Don't set your heart upon them. The fields of hope in which we sow are harvested in heaven,

Though riches come and riches go,
Don't set your heart upon them;
The fields of hope in which I sow
Are harvested in heaven...[above the sun]

[From "My Soul Finds Rest in God Alone" by Stuart Townend]

God is the One Who gives the power to enjoy. If we forget Him in the midst of all the gifts He gives us, He may keep giving the gifts, but take away the power to enjoy them. In that case, prosperity is no longer a blessing—it is a curse. That's Fact of Life #1.

Fact of Life #2: Adversity is not always a curse; it may ultimately become a means of great blessing.

This fact is the converse of Fact #1. Adversity is not always a curse; it may ultimately become a means of great blessing in your life. Let's look back at Ecclesiastes 7:14, our paradigm verse: *"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."*

What we have here in chapter seven is a cluster of proverbs in the first 11 verses prior to our primary text. It's a bunch of proverbs that are designed to provide at least a partial answer to what is good for man while he's living in this fleeting, transient life? Where do we find good? Notice how often these proverbs cluster around the words "good" or "better." Pay attention to that.

We'll start in verse one: *"A good name is better than precious ointment."* That's easy enough to understand. There's no point smelling like a bed of roses if every time you walk into the room, people race for the exit doors. "I don't want to be around that guy." Don't be the kind of person who makes people cringe. Even though you look and smell beautiful on the outside, it's your reputation, character and trustworthiness that are much more valuable than anything you can control. As Phil Ryken says, "Wear the cologne of good character." Let that be what you're known for.

So we get the first part of verse one, but what comes next is shocking: *"And the day of death [is better] than the day of birth."* Say what? Are you kidding me? Are you saying, preacher, if you have to choose between going to a birthday party or attending a funeral, it's better to go to the funeral? Maternity wards are happy places; hospice homes are not. Wouldn't you rather be in the maternity ward? Solomon says, "There's wisdom to be found in death that cannot be found at birth." Death is a good teacher.

Think of a believer like the Apostle Paul. What did he say? *"To live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). So as believers in Christ, we actually know that this is true. On the day we are born, the clock starts ticking. We have a limited number of days. On the day of our birth, we are born to die. But on the day of our death, we die in order to live forevermore. That's what's true for every believer.

We have hopes and dreams for our children when they're born, but we know that it's only as they trust in Christ and put their hope in the One Who's risen from the dead that they will have everlasting joy. We know it's not until the day a believer dies that he or she enters into the fullness of all the blessings Christ purchased for us at Calvary. So we say, "Yes, it's actually true. The day of our death is better than the day of our birth, if you're a believer in Jesus."

"Our dying day," said Thomas Boston, "is the day we enter a better world with higher perfection, greater purity, deeper rest, better company and better employment than the world we entered on the day we were born." I'm ready for that. It's our portal to glory. "It's the day," Spurgeon said, "when believers reach their port, all danger over, and come to their desired haven." Yes. I want to reach that port, with all danger over and come into that desired haven. That's what will happen on the day of my death.

Think about how this proverb corresponds to the life of Jesus. Is there any happier day than the day when the angels in heaven said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will to men, because here in Bethlehem a baby has been born"? Unto us a Savior is born. Happy day, right? Christmas Day is the happiest of days. And yet, Phil Ryken says, "That blessed day was not the best day of our Savior's life, because it is not the birth of our Savior that saves us. It's His death on the cross that saves us. It's not the manger alone that saves. It's the cross that saves."

That's why we call that day Good Friday. People say, "How can you call that good?" It's because the day of Christ's death was better than the day of His birth for those who trust in Him. That's why we sing, "What Child is this?... Nails, spears shall pierce Him through; the cross be born for me, for you." We see the shadow of the cross looming over the manger.

Friends, death is a better teacher than birth. We can say a lot about a person on the day of his death, but we can't say very much on the day of his birth. We haven't seen much yet. But on the day of his death, there's a whole track record. There's a lot to comment on. So a wise person does not try to avoid the reality of death. We listen, we lean in, we learn, we receive wisdom by letting death inform the way we live.

That's why verse two says, "*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*"—this is where we're all heading—"*and the living will lay it to heart.*" Let that sink in. This is wisdom. It's very possible to live many decades in the United States and never see a dead body. Secular society avoids that and sanitizes death. In the words of Susan Sontag, "Death is the obscene mystery, the ultimate affront, the thing that cannot be controlled. It can only be denied." That's secular wisdom.

When I was in Morocco visiting the Havens with Mike Jacoby and Ross Stern, we were on one of their public transport trains—kind of like the El in Chicago—going through the capital city of

Rabat. It was a nice, sunny day. On that train was a family who had brought their elderly father out of the hospital in a wheel chair. They were bringing him home. And in the 20 minutes that we were on that train, that man died—right in front of us. It was a clarifying moment. Death clarifies. It's better to face that head on.

In the wise counsel of Martin Luther, "It is good for us to invite death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move." In other words, pay attention. Pay attention, before death comes running after you with its jaws open and ready to consume you. Learn from the reality of death. Every funeral you attend is an anticipation of your own. No one is really ready to live until she's ready to die. So if you are wise, you will prepare to die. And friends, we will gain more wisdom at a good Christian funeral than you will at ten New Year's Eve parties. There's wisdom there.

Then verses three and four: *"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."* Friends, you cannot know the meaning of solid laughter until you also know how to mourn, how to weep.

There was a Saturday night in January 2010 when Kate and I experienced a depth of sorrow and weeping we did not know we were capable of. We held in our hands the written copy of her CT scan. We read of the pervasiveness of her cancer throughout her abdomen and we knew it was dire. It didn't take a medical expert to see that.

At that point, Kate was barely able to speak, because a large tumor had suppressed her vocal cords. That Saturday night after we read that report, I joined her in her hospital bed and just held her in my arms, while a guttural, heart-wrenching sorrow demanded release, like lava in a volcano. It was in many ways the worst day of our lives.

Yet Kate and I would both say we would not trade that night for anything, not even for the difficult days that followed. We would never have chosen it, but what we learned more about our love for one another, about God's promises, mercy and His peace that truly does surpass any other—what we learned through that we could not have learned any other way.

Friends, you know the dear Learned family, Bob and Michal. That family has gone through sorrows like sea billows rolling. They told us about a wonderful book by Jerry Sittser called [A Grace Disguised](#) which I highly recommend. It's unlike anything I've ever read. One night in the fall of 1991, he was driving with his family through rural Idaho when a drunk driver struck their vehicle and in an instant stole the lives of his mother, his wife and his four-year-old daughter. Can you imagine that sorrow?

Eight years later he wrote that his rawness and utter bewilderment have given way to a contentment and deep gratitude. As strange as it might sound, he said, "I wish that every man could experience what I have, though without the acute suffering." Friends, listen to this. He writes in that book of a sickness of soul that can only be healed through suffering. Get that phrase. There are soul sicknesses that can only be healed through suffering.

I have tasted of some of that healing. I can tell you that there were sicknesses in my soul that God healed while walking with Kate through her suffering. I'm actually more vulnerable to those sicknesses when all seems to be going well than I am when the suffering is more intense. I also can tell you that this dear wife of mine is a remarkably contented and joyous woman. She is daily instructing her family on what it means to rejoice in God and His gifts. So sorrow is better than laughter.

How should this reality of death, this inevitable reality that we know is coming, inform our lives? How do we live life backwards in light of this? Let me just throw out a few things.

First, in verses five and six, you will choose godly rebuke over godless entertainment. If you recognize, "I'm going to die," you'll say, "The rebuke of the wise is better than the song of fools." Why? Because "*as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.*" In other words, if you had to choose between hearing a wise friend list all your faults, Blake, or going to a Taylor Swift concert, choose the friend who tells you your faults. It's better to hear rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. [Not that Taylor Swift is a fool. I don't know that.]

Verse seven. If you're living life backwards, you will guard your heart from corruption. Look at what he says here: "*Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.*" You'll say, "I don't want to be the kind of person who can be bought, because whatever extra cash I can get won't mean anything to me on the day I die. What am I going to do—line my coffin with dollar bills?" No. Guard your heart from corruption.

Verse eight. You'll be the type of person who values perseverance rather than novelty. "*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*" A foolish person starts lots of things and never finishes. A wise person says, "I've only got a finite number of days to live and I want to invest them wisely. So let me use the time and talents God has given me to accomplish something that will bear fruit for eternity." That takes patience. That takes perseverance. Pride is impetuous, concerned about appearances, willing to make compromises in order to look good. But the patient person says, "Let me only start what I will be able to finish, even if it means laboring in obscurity and forsaking man's empty praise."

Verse nine. You will be slow to anger. When Kate was very ill, we noticed that there are very few things worth getting angry about. When I'm lying on my death bed, I don't want to be ashamed of having blown my fuse and lost my temper over things that really don't matter.

Verse ten. You will live in the present and not dwell in the past. This is really wise. "Say not, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask this." Nostalgia is bitter sweet. You're longing for something that you can never get back. The truth is, if you really could go backwards, you'd realize those memories weren't as great as you thought they were. If you think things are getting worse and worse, maybe you're right. But they thought the same thing 500 years ago. Don't deny the reality of God's presence right now. Don't imagine that He's brought you to this point in life because He no longer loves you or He no longer has a bright future in store for you. Dwelling on the past makes you blind to the beauties and blessings of the present.

Do you see what he's saying to us here? He's saying, "If you want to find contentment, embrace life's limitations. Keep death in view. Live life backwards. Realize that in the cellar of affliction you can find the Lord's choicest wines. Embrace adversity. Find the blessing in it. That's Fact #2.

Fact of Life #3: Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.

There's another fact in these verses that I'm not going to expound and it's this. Bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. He is troubled by that. In verse 15 he says, "*In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.*" The same theme is developed in Ecclesiastes 8. There are wicked people who are buried, sometimes with honors, but everyone knows they lived wickedly on this earth. But they're honored like they were great people in their death. Solomon says, "I cannot fathom this. Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?" That's a perplexing question that an unbeliever cannot even begin to answer.

Fact of Life #4: There really are no good people in this world.

There's one last fact that we need to grapple with. There really are no good people in this world. You can say with all this evil, all this suffering, "I don't believe in God." But think about it. If there was no God, how would you even know what evil is? If there was no God, what is justice?

The very idea of it is a cruel mirage. If there's no God, why do we care when the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? What does it matter? Shouldn't we just let the strong survive and the weak die off? I mean, if evil and suffering are a problem, it's because there must be a God Who is good and Who is just. Someone has said, "There at least has to be a God out there big enough for you to get mad at."

So what if there's another explanation for why everything is broken? What if God's not the one to blame? What if God's actually the reason we lament over the brokenness of everything, because He created a world that's beautiful and in our hearts there are echoes of Eden? We know we long for that beauty. What if God is the maker of all things, but not the breaker of all things? What if there's someone else to blame?

Solomon says there is. There really are no good people in this world. Verse 20: "*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.*" That's profound. Solomon found that out in his experience. People cannot be trusted. Sometimes you're going to hear your servant cursing you (verse 21). Don't let it get to you, because you have done the same thing yourself. Know your own heart, he says. If you say you're going to be better and you're going to be wiser than everyone else, you're going to find out that those resolutions fail (verses 23-24).

So Solomon searches around in verses 25-28. He looks at a thousand men and a thousand women, concluding, "I have not found but one man in that group of a thousand who is righteous. And among the women? None." That's not a misogynistic comment. That's just a reflection of the fact that there are none righteous (Romans 3:10). There is no one good but God alone.

Solomon comes to the conclusion of this chapter and makes the best point in verse 29, making sense of all this brokenness in the world around us. Look at what he says in verse 29: "*See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.*" So who's to blame for this broken world? Not God, but man. As Oswald J. Smith says, "The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart." God made a beautiful world. We've wrecked it. None of us is righteous.

So if you're running from God today because you're disappointed in Him, take another look into your own heart. Could you say today that Ecclesiastes is wrong, that there is one righteous person on earth who does good and never sins? Can you honestly say, "I am that person, so I deserve better from God than He has given me?" Friend, could it be that God has been far more merciful to you than your sins deserve? That's what the Bible says is true. And if you're rejecting God today because you're disillusioned with all the evil that's in the world and you can't figure out how God could let all this go on the way it is, would you consider another reason? What if God is slow to anger, abounding in love and patient with all, because He has a plan to make all wrongs

right and to make everything sad become untrue? What if God is patient with us today because He's waiting for you to come to repentance and faith in Jesus? What if God is not the cause of all that's broken in this world, but the Healer of all that's broken? Would you not want to love Him, trust Him, believe in Him and serve Him?

Friends, the problem in this world is not God's mismanagement—it's man's disobedience. There's not a righteous person on earth who does good and never sins. That was true when Ecclesiastes was written. That is true today. But today we celebrate that there is one exception to that rule—Jesus Christ. We have a High Priest Who was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). There is a righteous Person Who walked on this earth, Who did good and never sinned. And God made Him to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is a perfect Man and He will make a perfect world. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4) and you and I can know Him personally.

Let's pray together.

God, I pray for the one who's disappointed today, that we would realize You're not the cause of our disappointment, but the hope of a new beginning. I pray for those who are disillusioned with all the evil and suffering in our lives. I pray, Lord, that You would breathe hope into them; that in Jesus they can become a new creation and enter into a new world when He returns, when everything won't be broken, but healed and whole. I pray for those of us—all of us—who sin and disobey You, that we would learn to hate our sin and flee from it, as we see all the wreckage that follows in its wake. Help us embrace our Savior, our Deliverer, as our only hope. Thank You for the hope we have in Jesus. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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