



Living with the End in Mind

7 – Growing in Wisdom Through Good Times and Bad

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We're in this series called *Living With The End In Mind*. Today, the goal of the whole message is that we would not get to the end of our lives and die fools. That we would not run this race and in the end, and all along the way, live foolishly. We want to gain a heart of wisdom. Today, we are going to see that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Ecclesiastes 7 for Part 7. We're talking about growing in wisdom through good times and bad. After last week's services, I got in the car with my son, daughter, and son-in-law. My son in law drove us to Broken Arrow, Oklahoma for an event at Alex Himaya's church. And it gets me every time. I'm not prepared for it. I've been going there 15 years, but five miles from Himaya's church is the last known exact change only tollbooth left in the country, as far as I know. And guess what? I don't carry coins. But watch this. How many of you can come up with, \$1.15 in exact change, right now? I want to see the hands of those who carry coins. What's your plan today? I just have to know why you need the change. You can't get a soda for \$1.15. You need ten quarters to get a diet coke out of a pop machine now.

Thankfully, I'm in the car because I'm old enough I can still scrounge some change. I have to tell you all. If you're living in a place where your like, "The next generation doesn't need me." Oh, they need you. I found that out at the exact change tollbooth in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Once I got the \$1.15, I handed it to my son in law and I kid you not, he goes, "Do I just throw it in the funnel thing?" His first time at an exact change toll booth. Let me tell you, old people, your grandchildren need you. They need your wisdom and your change. Give me an amen on that one right there. They need coins.

How many of you, if you didn't have exact change, and there were no instructions on what to do if you didn't have exact change, would still be sitting there now, a week later? You can't drive through it. Drive through it and you'll get a bill in the mail for \$1.15. And if you drive through it and they pull you over, say, "My pastor told me to drive through that thing; I didn't have any change."

I just want to remind everybody of the year. It's 2023. Let's at least get some change machines out there for us.

All of that to say Proverbs 16: 31 - ***Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.*** But here's what we know about Proverbs. This is not a guarantee. Gray hair is a sign of age and experience. You've lived a few years, you've been through some toll booths, but it does not guarantee wisdom and maturity.

Every person in here knows at least one old person who is a fool. You know age is not a guarantee of wisdom. You've known plenty of people that lived their lives, got to the end and you would say of that person, "They were into expressing their own opinions, but they weren't people of understanding, they were into answering before listening." All of these are what the Proverbs describe as foolish living. So, you know a fool. Today, I want to lean into that voice of wisdom - the person who has lived a life, learned some things, in good times and in bad times. That's how you really begin to understand because in good times, you're going to meet wise and foolish people, in bad times, you're going to meet wise and foolish people.

Here's what I think we learn a little bit as we age, and the gray hair start to set in. I go to some churches every year and every time I show up, they're like your beard is getting more gray." I love it. I'm not going to start dying it; I'm keeping it. I want just white. I want to be Santa Claus in my 60s and 70s. I've got the body type; I just need the hair. My retirement gig in Branson is Bass Pro Santa. But when you're 20 years old, you tend to care what everyone thinks. It's how you dress, what you drive, where you go. You care too much what people think. In your 40's... Some of you have heard the expression, "You give a dang break." You stop caring what people think. But by the time you hit 60, you realize no one was really ever thinking about you in the first place. That's called wisdom and that's where we are going to start.

This is a long chapter in Ecclesiastes. We cannot cover every verse, but we are going to start in Verse 11 and go through Verse 14 to get the theme of this chapter. And then we will come back to Verse 1. Again, we can't cover all of this chapter, but we are going to hit wisdom.

Here's what we read in Ecclesiastes 7: 11 – 14 **11 Wisdom, like an inheritance...** I love that because I do plan on passing on a couple of bucks to my children, but more than that, I want to pass on wisdom. I want to get to the end of my life and at my funeral, my kids can say, "He lived a wise life. My dad didn't die a fool." **...is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.** Most agree that's just another expression of living life under the sun that we've read plenty in Ecclesiastes – life upon this earth.

12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it. It goes with them, all through life. **13 Consider what God has done...** now this is important. God, in good times and in bad times. God over bad times. We take one with the other. **Who can straighten what he has made crooked?** **14 When times are good, be happy** (celebrate); **but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.**

Here's the temptation we have in both good times and bad times. During good times, we may become arrogant and forget God. This is prosperity. This is what prosperity can do to us. We can begin to pat ourselves on the back. We can see what has been done before us and we can begin to take credit for it and move away from God. Here's the other temptation. During bad times, we may become angry and blame God. And the scripture is going to give us this wisdom and it's going to start with a funeral.

If you've been to a funeral at Woodland Hills Family Church or you've been to a funeral that I have officiated over, you know this is where I start every funeral at our church – Ecclesiastes 7: 1-4.

And it is where we're going to go, to the end of life to discuss this wisdom. And then we are going to unpack it. Because it's at a funeral that you begin to ask all the right question. Funerals are recalibrating events, or they should be. Funerals tend to change everything about your priorities. We've had several close family members in this church who lost loved ones this week. It's always something to me when you wake up and get that news and you know a phone call needs to be made, but you had your priorities for the day. You had what you thought was going to be important all planned out and when you make that phone call, you're like *everything I had planned today, just doesn't matter as much*. It's just not as important. That's what the house of mourning does. That's what a funeral does. A funeral begins to recalibrate the way we look at life, the way we look at our lives as we take to heart the death of a loved one, a family member, a friend.

Let's begin in Chapter 7: 1 - ***A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting...*** It's better to go to a funeral than to go to a party. Is there anything wrong with a party? Is there anything wrong with a feast? No. But parties don't teach us. I love doing comedy. If you go and listen to comedy... I don't ever walk out of comedy going "that changed my life. I'm never going to be the same." But you should leave a funeral that way. You should most definitely leave a funeral changed and asking the most important questions in life .

...for death is the destiny of everyone... And that's what happens when you sit at a funeral, saying "If the Lord does not return, this will one day be me." People will be here taking to heart my death and that should change the questions you ask, and it should change the way you live as you take to heart the death of a loved one. ***...the living should take this to heart.*** That's what a funeral is – taking to heart the death of a loved one and bringing into perspective the reality of my own life.

3 Frustration is better than laughter... Again, nothing wrong with laughter, but laughter is not a teacher. As Proverbs describes, a cheerful heart is good medicine, but it doesn't teach us. Frustration can teach us because ***...because a sad face is good for the heart.*** He's saying it's in these times that we lean into wisdom. And any of the folly in our life, the foolishness that we've been running toward or the foolish people we've been hanging out with, that all should start to fade away. We should realize, "I'm not hanging out with the right people." "I'm not making the right decisions." "I'm not living the life I know I'm called to live." Those are all perspectives that we should take out of a house of mourning.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning... I just add this because many of us were talking about it after the last service. It's happening today with funerals and weddings, but everybody want's everything to be fast. I get this when I prepare for a wedding. "How long do you want your wedding to be?" "Twelve minutes." "That's fast. You're paying a lot; let's slow this bad boy down. Let's spend a little time at it." I think we do the same with funerals. I'm not telling you what to do right here, I'm just asking you to consider it because I think it can be application of this text. The next time someone you know, you love, you spend time with and you're mourning a death of – a family member or friend – take time off work. Travel to that funeral. For families that are considering even having a funeral for a loved one, have the funeral. Go to the house of mourning. Mourn with those who are mourning. Grieve with those in your family and your friends that need you to grieve. And I'm just going to add this as a pastor who has seen this time and time again, don't rush it.

The scripture says ***the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.*** We don't need to rush through this. This is very important with what we do as a church. To spend time in the house of mourning. ***...but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.***

So now, as we go through the rest of this great chapter, we're just going to get some great wisdom on how you and I should live, in good times and in bad times. And how you and I should continue to trust the sovereignty of God when we go through prosperity and through adversity. Young people, we're not to Chapter 12 yet, but Chapter 12 of this great book says, ***12 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them..."*** Young people in your 20's and 30's with no change in your pocket, lean in. Lean into this wisdom. Lean in to this wisdom and take it with you your whole life.

It starts with this great thought in the next verse, Verse 5 ***Turn up substance and mute and noise.*** In our life right now, your devices right now, you have so much noise coming at you. And don't just turn it down, mute it altogether, and find the voices, find the wise people in your life. They are just men and women of substance. That when you talk to them, everything they, speak you just hang on their words. Find those people because bad company corrupts good character. Leaning into substance.

5 It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools. And then he describes the son of fools. You'll get this word picture. ***6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot...*** It's a fast burn, it's flashy and makes a splash or it makes a noise, but it makes a big poof and then it's gone. We would understand it here in the Ozarks with the burning of cedar trees.

I moved to the Ozarks over 20 years ago and I didn't know at first, as we started taking down cedars, like we did things in Illinois. We just kind of piled them all into one big pile. Now I know why they have small piles in the yards to burn a little at a time. But we just brushed all these cedars together and then again, being from Illinois, we had to use an accelerant to get our brush fires going. But guess what? If you are new to the Ozarks... If you moved here in the last year, would you raise your hand. This is just extra, bonus material right here. You don't need accelerant on your cedar piles. We threw a little gas on that thing and then I thought it would be fun to let my eight-year-old start this fire.

No, I didn't do that. I didn't know what was coming. All I remember was it just going up... and I mean the flames were 30 to 50 feet in the air. Doris Tillis comes walking out her back door screaming. She calls the fire department. The fire department shows up and there is nothing left. It was just me standing there with a hose, face beet red, no eye brows, going, "I got it, guys."

What Solomon is saying is that's a fool. They're loud, they make a big flash, but there's nothing left. Don't spend your life with those people. Don't hang around with the fool who loves expressing his opinion, who just loves answering and never listening. A person of understanding is a wise person.

6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. So now what happens when you hit the bad times. He's going to continue in Verse 9, ***Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.*** That's wisdom. That comes with age and experience. Wisdom can be learned.

Age and experience... After you've lived maybe 60 or 70 years under the sun, you've had moments where something hits you and you go, "That kind of reminds me of the time..." You survived that. You saw God work in those days. You're seeing God work in these days. We talk a lot about unresolved in this church. Unresolved anger is like drinking poison expecting the other person to get sick. You never bury anger dead; you always bury it alive. And you know what we're dealing with in our country and in our churches right now? A lot of angry people who have a lot of buried alive anger. And every day, you get up to figure out what you need to be mad about today. That's anger. What does the scripture say? ***Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit.*** You hear something and if your immediate response is anger, that's a quickly provoked spirit. Somebody says something that you don't agree with. A healthy person isn't threatened by the opinions and feelings of other people. A healthy person doesn't see the opinions and feelings of other people as an attack on theirs. You don't need to be so quickly provoked.

That's where we are at today. Everybody is mad and we turn on the television or we scroll our social media to find out who we should be mad at today. The pastors, kind of the circles that I run in, it's like... I can't think of one pastor of a large church that hasn't been attacked in the last couple of years. They are just all on the chopping block. And I know they have weeks where it's like, *nobody is coming after me this week, but you just wait.* You say that one line and we're coming after you. You're done. You see where I'm at?

Okay. Let me just share some things with you. Every single one of us in here has at least one bad moment in life that you are not proud of. And the older generation in here, you are blessed because that bad moment wasn't during the internet season of life. You didn't have phones when you lost it. Every single one of us in here has at least one bad moment in life that had it been recorded and broadcast, you'd be canceled, you'd be done, you'd be fired, you'd be gone. Let's keep that in mind this week as we see people targeted on social media, because that's all it is. It's just a bunch of angry people finding a new target. And that is foolishness. That is the laugh of a fool. And I get sucked into it just like you do. I have like two people in my life that I can send stuff to that I'm like... I'm not going to cuss out loud on this one, I promise you. But I can send it to them. One of my friends, all he sends back is, "Don't take the bait. That's good. That's the rebuke of the wise person in my life."

In Verse 10, seniors, if we haven't stepped on your toes yet, here we come. This is going to be good. **Resist the temptation to exaggerate the past.**

Every generation does this. We live in a time where we are trying to rewrite history, trying to erase history. I believe we are called to learn from it. Every generation, when going through adversity, wants to point to the times in the good ole days. What do we do? We compare bad times with good times. That's a terrible way to try to process what we are going through. ***10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.***

Every single generation in here can look back on good times. My senior friends in here, you're looking back on a time of work ethic and patriotism, but you don't talk about some of the other issues of those days. I just want to remind all my millennial friends and Gen Z, you're one day going to have offspring. The difference between your generation and your grandparent's generation is you and all your friends had mobile devices.

I've thought about this. My grandkids going back and looking at my social medial feed from 20 years ago. Every generation can look back on the past and exaggerate the times. I found this picture of my parents on their way to school. (meme of skiers going up a big, snowy hill). Now that's my parents on the way to school. I actually this week found a picture of them on their way home (same meme). Uphill both ways.

You live in these days. You go through good and bad times in these days. We have to guard our hearts to make sure that we're not shining a spot light on the good times 40 years ago, neglecting the bad times... We don't want to talk about these bad times, and comparing those to the bad times of today. It's just not wisdom. It's foolishness.

Don't count on your good behavior to secure good times. Scripture is going to call it over righteous. you'd probably use the term self-righteous.

15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these:

the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. A lot of times, this passage is brought up... Every pastor I know, every church I know has had some version of this sermon. Why do bad things happen to good people? Years ago, Pat Kershaw's mom, Muriel Blair... She's been with the Lord for many years now. In her 90s, if I ever hinted to that in a sermon, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" And try to explain it, she would walk up to me in her 90s, just as serious as can be, and she would just say, "Who's good?" and walk away. That's good theology. But this is what, in good times and bad times, we start to say, "Well, we have these bad times because of this, and we have these good times because this. This is probably the most misinterpreted, misunderstood passage in all of Ecclesiastes. We'll say what it's not saying first and then come back to what it is actually teaching us. ***16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time?*** This is not saying, "Go out and sin a little. Just bring a little sin in your life to find some balance." That's not at all what this is talking about.

What this is talking about is that showy worship. Our best example of it is when Jesus went after the Pharisees in Matthew 23. He was very clear. It's that Pharisee mindset that's being dealt with here. This idea that "I have a list..." Many of you grew up with a list. And the list came out of the scripture but then it became a tradition. We started adding other things to the list. These are the dos and the don'ts. If you want to walk with Christ and you want to be a part of this church, here are all the dos and don'ts. Some churches had it, but then denominations had it. You looked at this list from this denomination and you put it with this denomination. There were some things similar but then they added a few or deleted a few.

Many of you were trying to figure out church, trying to figure out the denominations. It's exhausting. You can't keep up with the list. I'm telling you, then don't then, keep up with Jesus. This is where we are going and the priority because the problem is the list becomes everything. And this is what he's driving at here. You can see I'm starting to get a little worked up because this is what I spent 20 years in. I spent 20 years in tithe and be here Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Never allow your hair to touch the top of your ear. Some of you all are a mess right now, as I look around. Dress this way. Don't smoke, don't drink, don't chew, don't date girls that do. That was a sermon title in the

church I grew up in. Don't go to movies, don't play cards. And then we had the big thing of Can we play Uno? "Well we'll have to meet with the elders about it." We had our list. In 20 years, I knew the list and I lived by the list. God loves me because I'm keeping this list. But you know, I can't think of one message in 20 years on racism in the church I grew up in. Not one.

What does Jesus say in Mathew 23: 23? First of all, he says, "You hypocrites and you blind guides." He says, "You tithe your mint and your dill, but you leave out the weighty and important issues. Big ones like justice and mercy." For many of you that grew up with the list – over righteous... I know people that have just said, "I can't do the list." Let me tell you that the list does not bring you in a right relationship with God. Jesus brings you into a right relationship with God.

I have a list of things I do and things I don't do, but a lot of it is nonessential and I'm not going to debate another Christian on all this stuff we want to do. We couldn't go to movies, and then Block Buster came out. We were like, "Can rent them; is that okay?" "Okay, you can rent them, but you can't go to them." You could see, when you're 10 years old, trying to figure all this out. You're, like, "This seems hypocritical. You got people addicted to porn in this church but yet they are here Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night." This is the problem and when people choose to live this way... Listen, whatever list you may have, it should be the overflow of your salvation, not the source of it. There is nothing you can do, as Philip Yancy says, to make God love you more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less.

What Solomon is talking about here is **don't be legalistic**. Avoid it. For some of you, you did avoid it, you went completely the other direction. "I tore the list up and it's party hard!" No. don't do that either. That will get more silence at 11:30.

18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. What is the sum of all of it when you get to Ecclesiastes 12? What's the sum of everything we've learned in Ecclesiastes? Fear God and keep his commandments. **Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.**

I've always loved the word *balance*. I have friends that tell me they hate that word. I love the word. I don't want to become the Christian that has a list and shows it to everybody and pats themselves on the back and becomes self righteous where I'm doing all of the things, but then neglecting these. I'm not going to do that. And I don't want my relationship with the Lord to be like, I can do whatever I want because I have grace." I don't want to move toward legalism or a licentious lifestyle.

19 Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city. Get what he's teaching us here today. **20 Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.** And that is why we need Jesus.

This next thing came from my year spent in Dallas. I was there for three years and so that's where this next point comes from. **Get down off your high horse.** This is going to confront all of us. If we want to live lives of wisdom and get to the end as wise people rather than fools. We won't live that hypocritical lifestyle. **21 Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.** This is why I

wrestled for years. I had all sorts of insecurities early on in ministry, going, *Man, after a sermon, people go out in their cars and they talk about me*. That's what it's saying. Now, I'm great with that. You go out and talk about me all you want because I'll be talking about you. That's actually why we have staff meetings. We all gather to talk about all the people in the church. So, we just read ***Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.*** So, ***Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.*** I think wisdom understands... This is why Jesus says, "Don't judge because you need to first take the plank out of your eye, meaning I've got enough to worry about in my life and my walk with the Lord than to constantly be over yours, telling you how you're doing it wrong and doing it right."

And then when I want to point things out in you... We do this, right? We do this with the past, we do this with other people's lives. I may point something out in you and go, "I can't believe you struggle with that. You know why I'm able to say that? The same reason you are able to say that. It's because I don't struggle with that. But here's what I struggle with... And guess what? That person doesn't struggle with that. But we do this. I think we justify our sin because we are able to look at someone and go, "I can go ahead and participate in the sin over here a little bit that... I can do that because I'm not as bad as that guy. At least I'm not doing what he's doing. Can you believe what she said? Can you believe what he said? And all of this, in good times and in bad times, we'll want to blame other people, we'll hangout with the wrong people, we exaggerate the past, we'll point to our good behavior to try to secure good times.

And the scripture says this... before we close, I want to mention. Some of you right now... And this isn't a message on the consequences of your sin. The text is speaking of good times and bad times that fall on all of us. Some of you right now are living with consequences of your sin. This we talk about often and this is where a lot of working with individuals, one on one, comes in. But because of your sin, it's cost your family, cost your marriage greatly. It's cost you jobs, it's cost you finances. I don't know the consequences you're dealing with. Right now, you're trying to find a way to get out of these consequences. What we can offer you here and how we can encourage you here it's not necessarily getting you out of the season, stage, or the times that you're in or that you brought upon yourself, but we have hope in the name that is above every name. We know that when you call out on this name, we know that when you lean in to other people who are calling out this name, we know when you trust this name in good times and bad times, when you trust that he is working things out, when you trust in this name, when you call on this name, your sins are forgiven, your future is heaven.

Romans 8 puts it this way: ***We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.***

And some of you today, of all this wisdom that Solomon has been pouring out on us, your walkaway point today is crying out on the name of Jesus. Crying out to Jesus, seeking forgiveness for your sins, walking in humility, finding good voices that will help you along in that journey.

Romans 8 goes on in Verse 38 to say ***For I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything***

else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in that name and it is the name Christ Jesus, our Lord. And all God's people said... Amen

So today would be the day that you cry out to Jesus. Again, we're not a prosperity gospel preaching church. We don't believe you come to Christ and it's nothing but good times from here on out. How do you read the Bible and get that? You don't. What we do know is that whether it's prosperity or adversity, good times or bad times, Jesus is with you through it all, no matter what. That we can promise you. We can't promise you the times, we can't promise you the length of your life, but however long you live, I don't know about you, but I want to get to the end of my life as a wise person and not a fool. I want my kids and family and friends to gather around at my funeral. Three and Eight are my service times. As Tim Hawkins says, "I'm going to put the fun back in funeral." I want my family and friends gathered around.

And it's not about them saying... I think it's one of the biggest tragedy of a funeral that we wait until that day to speak words of high value over that person. Say it with the person you're with right now. Don't wait for the day of their death. Don't wait for the house of mourning. But all of that eulogy and everything, that's great. I want my kids and my family, and my friends gathered around, people who are walking with Jesus because I told them about Jesus. They watched me walk with Jesus, I want this for each mom and dad and grandma and grandpa in here that your children would watch you walk with Jesus and hear you talk of the Lord from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to sleep at night. And they, one day, will gather at your house of mourning and take to heart your death and they will say, "There is a wise man who walks with Jesus." "There is wise woman who walks with Jesus."

Father, we take all of this wisdom that we could just have more time to get through the whole chapter. That we would get to the end of our lives running our race, pleasing you, and leading people to you. There are many funerals in the days ahead for this church. There will be many people gathered in the house of mourning, that they would ask the right questions, that many people would come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, that they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead. And we know nothing will separate us from your love because of Jesus.

It's in that great name that we pray, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.