



# Wisdom for the Good Life

## Introduction

**Ecclesiastes 7:15-29**

If there is one problem in life that demands a mature perspective, it is “Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?” The good die young, while the wicked seem to enjoy long lives, and this seems contrary to the justice of God and the Word of God. Didn’t God tell the people that the obedient would live long (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 4:40) and the disobedient would perish (Deut. 4:25–26; Ps. 55:23)?

Two facts must be noted. Yes, God did promise to bless Israel in their land if they obeyed His law, but He has not given those same promises to believers today under the new covenant. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote, “Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New.” Our Lord’s opening words in the Sermon on the Mount were not “Blessed are the rich in substance,” but “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3; see Luke 6:20).

Second, the wicked appear to prosper only if you take the short view of things. This was the lesson Asaph recorded in Psalm 73 and that Paul reinforced in Romans 8:18 and 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. “They have their reward” (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), and that reward is all they will ever get. They may gain the whole world, but they lose their own souls. This is the fate of all who follow their example and sacrifice the eternal for the temporal.<sup>1</sup>

## Open It

1. **What is your favorite form of entertainment?**

## Read It

**Ecclesiastes 7:15–29**

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Satisfied (Ecclesiastes): Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life: OT Commentary: Ecclesiastes (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 106). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

## Explore It

2. What has Solomon observed of the wise man and the wicked man?
3. What cautions does Solomon give us?
4. What did Solomon find of his grasp on wisdom?
5. What did Solomon find in his pursuit of “wisdom and the scheme of all things”?

## Apply It

In the Hebrew text, the verbs in verse 16 carry the idea of reflexive action. Solomon said to the people, “Don’t claim to be righteous and don’t claim to be wise.” In other words, he was warning them against self-righteousness and the pride that comes when we think we have “arrived” and know it all. Solomon made it clear in verse 20 that there are no righteous people, so he cannot be referring to true righteousness. He was condemning the self-righteousness of the hypocrite and the false wisdom of the proud, and he warned that these sins led to destruction and death.<sup>2</sup>

6. It may seem like Solomon’s words simply mean to, “Be a good person, but also live a little.” What is your take on Solomon’s thoughts in verses 16-17?

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Satisfied (Ecclesiastes): Looking for the Answer to the Meaning of Life: OT Commentary: Ecclesiastes (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 107). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

7. **What are some distinguishing characteristics between godly righteousness and godly wisdom and self-righteousness and false wisdom?**

The two case studies present us with a paradox, and Qohelet surely wanted his listener/reader to be shocked by what he said. He saw the righteous perishing and the wicked living long. This is the polar opposite of what some strands of biblical teaching indicate. For instance, certain legal portions of the Bible teach that observation of the law prolongs life (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 4:40), and the wisdom teachers instructed that righteousness led to life (Prov. 3:1-2), while the wicked suffered and died early (Ps. 1).<sup>3</sup>

8. **How should “the one who fears God” deal appropriately with these two things?**

9. **How can self-righteousness and false wisdom bring a person to ruin?**

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<sup>3</sup> Longman, Tremper. The Book of Ecclesiastes (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (p. 194). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

Wisdom can actually be dangerous. A little wisdom can go a long way, or a little wisdom can be enough to hang yourself with if you forget that the world is twisted by sin and every heart is affected, and so we can't fully explain everything. Wisdom can never achieve the kind of control over your life and destiny that you seek. It can help you with your money, with impatience, with anger, and with nostalgia. It can help you not to be too upset when you listen at the door and hear something you wished you hadn't (v. 21), because if you're wise, you'll realize that you often say those sorts of things about others. Wisdom can help you like that.

But never forget that it is God who controls the times. It is God who rules the universe. And so although you can live well, and die well, and know some things truly, you cannot know all things completely.

But God does. So trust him—and do not make an idol out of wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

**10. People may try to “control” the circumstances of their lives in many ways. What are some of the ways that you have seen people try to bring control to their lives?**

**11. Describe a time in your life when you realized just how little control you really have? What effect did that have on you? Did it cause you to strive harder to take greater control over what you can? Did it lead you to a new place of humility and dependence?**

**12. Read Proverbs 30:8-9. How prevalent do you think this reality is in our nation today? How can we as Christ-followers set an example in this?**

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<sup>4</sup> Gibson, David. Living Life Backward (p. 104). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Simply stated, wisdom was beyond his human reach. That which is (mah-šehāyâ) refers to all things, “reality” ... Qohelet intensifies the idea of inaccessible knowledge with a second spatial metaphor—deepness. Here his statement reminds us of Job 28, a moving poem that describes wisdom as more difficult to attain than the precious metals buried deep within the ground. ... Qohelet has embarked on a quest for something hard to find...<sup>5</sup>

If Qohelet could discover the sum of things, he would be at the end of his quest. But he never achieves this object of his search, and thus we have his harsh conclusion that everything is “meaningless” (hebel).<sup>6</sup>

**13. Kids can be the champions of the question “why,” but if we’re honest, we ask that question to God all the time. When is a time that God didn’t give you a “why”? How did you deal with that situation?**

**14. God has kept some things “above your paygrade” and that’s a good thing! When did you last find yourself in awe of something you couldn’t fully wrap your mind around?**

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<sup>5</sup> Longman, Tremper. The Book of Ecclesiastes (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (pp. 200-201). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Longman, Tremper. The Book of Ecclesiastes (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament) (pp. 202-203). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

Why could he not find a woman and only a single man out of a thousand (v. 28)? The answer in the present verse is that, though God made the human race upright, they have all gone astray.

The verse is an obvious reflection on the first few chapters of Genesis, though the vocabulary is different. For instance, as God completed his acts of creation, including the creation of humanity, he pronounced the results “very good”; there were no problems with the work of his hands. This, I would argue, relates to Qohelet’s statement that humanity was created “upright,” and the connection with the creation lends strong support to the usual understanding that upright here is a moral and not an intellectual characteristic. However, while God created humanity without moral blemish, men and women sought out many devices.<sup>7</sup>

He traces up all the streams of actual transgression to the fountain. It is clear that man is corrupted and revolted, and not as he was made. It is lamentable that man, whom God made upright, has found out so many ways to render himself wicked and miserable. Let us bless Him for Jesus Christ, and seek his grace, that we may be numbered with his chosen people.<sup>8</sup>

**15. Solomon doesn’t seem to have a super positive view on the morality of man. He basically says even the good ones aren’t so good. How should we as Christians deal with Solomon’s conclusions in relationship to the wicked and fallen world we live in?**

**16. How do the “many schemes” of man corrupt the character and morality of man?**

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<sup>7</sup> Longman, Tremper. *The Book of Ecclesiastes (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)* (p. 207). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Henry, Matthew. "Concise Commentary on Ecclesiastes 7". "Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mhn/ecclesiastes-7.html>. 1706.

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