

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: Susan and I have a grandnephew named Griffin. He's 7. His mom, Lindsey, posted on Facebook last Monday. She said that every night Griffin comes into their bed so stealthily and so still that they don't usually even wake up. She wrote, "This morning, very early, I roll over to find him there, and he says to me, '*If I could ask God for anything, it would be for wisdom to do the right thing.*'" I just laid there with my arms around him, in awe of what God is doing in this little boy's heart." ***If I could ask God for anything, it would be for wisdom to do the right thing.***
- B. We're studying Ecclesiastes where we learn that finding wisdom is not so easy. Ecclesiastes is what we call *wisdom literature* and our wisdom is its goal. But the Teacher in this book has discovered that wisdom hides in unusual places and walks among us in disguise.
- C. People are fond of saying in some perplexing or difficult situation, "*Well, there's a reason for everything.*" That's what this Teacher set out to find—the reason. And he keeps telling us about all the dead ends he ran into. "*Actually,*" he says to us, "*there isn't. At least not a reason we can find. It's all meaningless. The only way to make sense of life is to fear God. To revere him, trust him, obey him.*" He insists that wisdom won't actually help you figure life out. But wisdom *will* help us not waste the life we have. Bad things don't happen just to make us wise, but wisdom waits at the door of all life's struggles. Wisdom *will* teach us what matters in the wispy smoke of this world. And Griffin, age 7, hit the nail on the head: "***If I could ask God for anything, it would be for wisdom to do the right thing.***"
- D. **Turn to Eccl. 7.** As I said, wisdom hides in unusual places and often walks among us in disguise. This chapter goes, "*Pssst. I can tell you where to find wisdom.*" But here's the catch:

## I. WISDOM HIDES IN THE LAST PLACES WE WANT TO SEARCH

A. V.1 starts well enough: “*A good name is better than fine perfume.*” And that’s saying something in an ancient culture of sweat and dust, where any sweet fragrance was a luxury. But then he throws us a curveball. Let me rephrase it just a bit: *As surely as a good name is better than fine perfume so the day of death is better than the day of birth.*”

Wait! What?? Oh, there’s more! **V.2:**

*It is better to go to a house of mourning  
than to go to a house of feasting,  
for death is the destiny of everyone;  
the living should take this to heart.*

Well, what’s so great about “the day of death” and “a house of mourning”? *Illus.:* My brother-in-law Jerry is a lifelong pastor. He, like some of my other pastor friends, really likes officiating at funerals. Can you guess why? He says, “*At a wedding no one is listening to the sermonette. It is extraneous to everyone there. But at a funeral people are usually more aware of mortality, including their own. They are perhaps open to listening to God’s perspective. Mourning can be superficial and a charade, but it normally is more real than frivolity is.*”

**Dave Gibson** explains that the Teacher is saying, “*Let me tell you this: I put my life in order when I went to the funeral home. When I went, death said to me, ‘Come in and stay a while. Have a seat and stop and think.’ And I listened to what death said to me.*” [Living Life Backward] **Moses** had the same idea when he wrote in **Ps. 90,**

*You turn people back to dust,  
saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”  
Our days may come to seventy years,  
or eighty, if our strength endures;*

*yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*

*Teach us to number our days,*

*that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* [90:3,10,12]

*Illus.:* My dad died suddenly when he was 63. He was shaving for church and just collapsed. After I turned 63 I would wonder what day I would actually have lived longer than dad did. I'd lay in bed and try to calculate it out but invariably I'd fall asleep before I nailed it down. Then one morning I awoke about 4 and decided to try again. "Let's see. His birthday was March 12 and he died on June ,1" and I tried to calculate how many days that was and then how many days I'd add to my own birthday, Jan. 17, to find the day. When I finally worked it out, well, it was the day just ended. It was 4 a.m. the next morning. I was stunned. I thought about all the plans I had just for that day, let alone the months and years to follow, and tried to imagine they all stopped. I began think about my own mortality in a whole new way, and what I still want to make of my life. That's what the Teacher meant, I think, when he said, "Death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart."

- B. Wisdom has other hiding places, too. **V.3**, "*Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.*" One of wisdom's hiding places is angry frustration. Why do you think that is? **Frustration is packed full of fist-pounding, heart-breaking 'whys'**. Questions begging for sensible answers which God may not supply. Job asked God *why* 16 times and he never got a straight answer. **God may not answer our whys because he is making us wise.** Ironically, when answers aren't forthcoming wisdom is at the door because our only option is trust in God.

- C. **V.5** reveals one more hiding place: “*It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools.*” I personally don’t like *any* rebukes, no matter who they’re from. I get so defensive! Rebukes from the wise are wisdom in disguise.
- D. There is usually an alternative, if you prefer it. *A party. Happy songs. Lotsa laughs.* Not that those are things we should never enjoy, but when that’s how we ignore the voice of wisdom we’ve made a foolish choice. Nothing but smoke. Illus.: **William Kent Krueger** begins his novel, *Ordinary Grace*, by referring to the sad death of young boy and the lasting effect it had upon the narrator of this story, which it turns out, is a murder mystery.

It was a summer in which death, in visitation, assumed many forms. Accident. Nature. Suicide. Murder. You might think I remember that summer as tragic and I do but not completely so. My father used to quote the Greek playwright Aeschylus. “He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain, which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.” [*Ordinary Grace: A Novel* (p. 2)]

There’s another disconcerting thing about wisdom in vv. **7-12**. This is about patience. **If the *whys* don’t get you, the *waits* will.**

## **II. WISDOM HIDES IN LIFE’S WAITING ROOMS (7:7-12)**

- A. **V.7** again, says, “*Extortion [oppression] turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.*” What would possess a wise person to get rich quick through extortion or oppression of others? Perhaps impatience, and a desire to dodge difficulties.

- B. **V.8** brings us back to the ideas we just looked at—that we need to consider the end of things: “The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.” **We can’t rush wisdom.** When life requires us to wait and wait and wait, wisdom is brewing.
- C. Therefore, (**v.9**), *“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.”* Impatient anger is common in life’s waiting rooms but that impatience is a bomb in your lap. *What’s taking so long!?!* The Teacher says, *“Cool it. I’m teaching you how to live.”*
- D. Next he seems to point to another ‘out’ for those too impatient for wisdom. **V.10**, *“Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.”* This one is for us old people. *Why can’t it be like the good old days!!* When God makes us wait, don’t live in the past. Live *now*, wisely and faithfully.
- E. So that brings the Teacher to a conclusion in **vv.11-12**:  
*Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing  
and benefits those who see the sun.  
Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter,  
but the advantage of knowledge is this:  
Wisdom preserves those who have it.*  
The idea of patience is there in the word *inheritance*,  
which, like wisdom, is a treasure worth waiting for. But wisdom is a better inheritance than money because it provides a much better covering. Wisdom gives us the kind of resources we can live on which money can’t. We won’t necessarily understand life’s heartaches at a greater distance, but the wise learn better how to live life now.  
**So, trust and wisdom grow in life’s waiting rooms.**

Now the Teacher switches gears a little in **vv.13-24**.

### III. WISDOM HIDES IN OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (7:13-24)

- A. I *don't* mean that it is wise to be unrighteous but I'll explain what I mean in a moment. This section has a lot to say about righteousness. **Vv.13-14...** I think the Teacher's line of reasoning works like this: **We may not be able to figure out the twists and turns of God's plan, but what we can do is think wisely about righteousness.**
- B. **V.15...** We can't pursue righteousness as a life insurance policy. God doesn't work like that. It *seems* like he *should* but that is beyond our understanding.
- C. **V.16** sounds just plain wrong:

*Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—  
why destroy yourself?*

*Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—  
why die before your time?*

I think he means, *don't be a goody-two-shoes, someone who is 'holier than thou.'* *Don't be a moral smart aleck. But don't go looking for trouble either or be a fool who has no time for God. Either path will be your downfall.*

Illus.: In one of his novels about Montana's early settlers **Ivan Doig** has a character who is wary of the overly pious, churchy Scotch Presbyterians,

*Orthodox, orthodox  
who believe in John Knox.*

*Their sighing canting grace-proud faces  
their three-mile prayers and half-mile graces.*

There's an example of being *overrighteous*.

The right path is in the last line of v.18, "Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes." The fear of the Lord will produce people who take seriously the boundaries of human righteousness and sin.

D. **V.19...** God-fearing wisdom equips people with more strength than the whole city council. And one thing strong, wise people know is this: v.20, “Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.” That, of course, is a key doctrine in the Bible, running counter to the cavalier attitude of the world toward sin. “*All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.*” Then he wryly cites a case in point: **vv.21-22...**

*Do not pay attention to every word people say,  
or you may hear your servant cursing you—  
for you know in your heart  
that many times you yourself have cursed others.*

Wise, God-fearing people recognize how inconsistent we all are. The wise know that our unrighteousness drives us to fear God. Neither the overrighteous nor the overwicked are good candidates for God’s grace, because they are not inclined to reverence God alone. So that’s why I say that we grow wise when we consider our own unrighteousness.

E. And that brings him back to the imponderables: **vv.23-24,**

*All this I tested by wisdom and I said,  
“I am determined to be wise”—  
but this was beyond me.*

*Whatever exists is far off and most profound—  
who can discover it?*

Finally, the Teacher tells how he looked for wisdom in the most unlikely of places: **vv.25-29...**

#### **IV. WISDOM HIDES IN “THE STUPIDITY OF WICKEDNESS AND THE MADNESS OF FOLLY.” (7:25-29)**

A. Again, I don’t mean that we can be both wicked and wise, but there is wisdom to be gained from considering “*the stupidity of wickedness.*” Exhibit A is sexual sin, which is

rich coming from a guy who had 1000 wives and concubines! Men were the main audience for both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, so that's why this warning is male-oriented. **Promiscuity is a fate worse than death.** It disintegrates people, pulling us apart at the seams. Later the Teacher tells us, "*Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love.*" Here he says, if you want to be wise consider carefully the stupidity of illicit relationships. It is deadly folly to sleep around. Though you won't hear this in our culture, to sleep with your girlfriend or boyfriend is flat out dumb, because there is damage happening that you can't see. The wise look and learn.

- B. But finally, in his quest to seek wisdom in unlikely places he comes to this conclusion in v.29, "*This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes.*" That's the story of Genesis 2 and 3. And if you don't realize that waywardness of mankind you can't ever be wise, nor can you find God's grace.

## CONCLUSION

Everything people scheme to find, every pursuit of mankind, is ultimately meaningless; just so much smoke. **Except this: fear God.** Pascal said, "*Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair.*" The fear of God is the only ground wisdom will grow in. And the fear of God—the realization that God is real and that he is sovereign over all things—leads us first to our knowledge of our unrighteousness and then to God's glorious revelation of Jesus Christ, "*who has become for us the wisdom of God*" [1 Cor 1:30]

Griffin is just 7 but we can all learn life's greatest lesson from his desire: "*If I could ask God for anything, it would be for wisdom to do the right thing.*"