

01-11-25a Ecclesiastes

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of the Holy Spirit as we look together at the truth of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying your Word together. We pray that we will find the truth that is contained in your Word, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts and we'll understand it aright.

We pray that these words that were written so long ago will yet convey their truth to us in a way that is meaningful and that produces within us better priorities and better application so that we can make the most of the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We resume our study tonight in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. This, I will confess, has been some rough sledding in terms of translation because the translations that have gone before have already drawn a lot of conclusions by this time. By now, whoever is translating the book has formulated an opinion of what it says and we find our literal translation can be quite different than what you find in your English. And so I'd like to review here by reading the first few verses of chapter 7 to you.

This chapter begins by talking about the value of a name. It says a name is better than good ointment. And this could be a salve or it could be a pleasing aroma type of ointment.

But in either case, a name is better than good ointment and the day of death than the day of birth. Better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting in which itself is the end of all mankind and the living will set it upon his heart. So at the outset of this section, we have a contrast set up between things that seem beneficial and that seem to be causes for happiness and celebration and things that put us into despair or into depression.

Things that are not good. We have things we say, well, this was a good day or this was a bad day. Well, Solomon says, your bad days are better than your good days, which is kind of a shocking thing.

It seems like so much of the Bible says that good is what we're looking for. We're looking for prosperity and blessing. And in this context, we're looking at a particular point of view.

Obviously, the Bible promises us blessing. It's a part of our hope. There's nothing wrong with having good days or having prosperity.

But Solomon's subject in Ecclesiastes is, do you really want to find the prophet? Do you want to lay hold of something permanent as a result of living this life? And if you do, with that in view, it's not such a bad thing to have bad days. It's not a bad thing to be sobered and to be stopped short in the course of life. He says it's better to go or walk.

This is our verb halak, which has been used so often. And it reminds us of the cycle of things that was spoken of in Chapter 1. Halak was used of the wind and the rivers and everything traveling in cycles. Well, Solomon says it's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting.

Why? Well, in the house of feasting, that's the end of all mankind. Anybody can make that their goal. Everybody wants to celebrate.

Everybody's looking for a good time. They have these programs on television late at night. Sometimes when I'm studying, the good programs will scroll off the screen and something else will come on.

And I look up and I see they have a whole series of dating programs. They're all produced by a guy named Harley Tatt. And he's got Blind Date and Elimidate and The Fifth Wheel.

All three of them come right on in a row. And you would think, well, there's totally no value in watching those. But what surprises me is that in each case, there will be someone that is trying to hook up for romance.

And in Blind Date, they just take two people and just stick them together and say, go out on a date and let's see if you hit it off or not. And it's entertaining because sometimes they fall madly in love and other times they can't even finish the date because they just repel each other so badly. Then in The Fifth Wheel, they put in two girls and two guys and they let them socialize and talk to each other and kind of start getting interested in one another.

Then they throw in a fifth person and see if they can break up these emerging couples. And I can't quite figure that out. Then they have Elimidate where they have maybe one man and they'll have four women.

And they'll all go do these common things. And then every so often, he has to kick one of them out of the squad until there's only one left. And so he eliminates all the competition and winds up with one.

But what strikes me, and the whole reason it came up in this context, is that all of these people, they interview them and you're supposed to get to know them so that you have some interest in the program. Almost all of them, I guess the reason they're on the program, is they're looking for a good time. I saw an Elimidate where there was a young guy.

He looked clean cut. He had a haircut that could have passed inspection in the Marine Corps. Athletic looking guy.

And I thought, well, this will be interesting. Here's a guy that looks like he's got something on the ball. He said, he had a southern accent, but he said, you know, I'm just looking for a girl that can

party.

And he was just out. He said, I'm not looking for commitment. I don't want a relationship.

I just want somebody that can keep up with me when I'm partying. And he wound up going through these four gals. They had mud wrassling and all kinds of things.

And he found somebody that was just his. And there was a song on the radio, it's been 10 or 15 years ago now, where they say, girls just want to have fun. You know, and the young people are coming, starting into their adult life.

So many people, it's like Animal House. Let's just party. Let's have a good time.

Well, Solomon says in verse 2, that is the goal. That's the end of all mankind. And it's the end in more ways than one.

If that's all you do is just say, I want to get through this life and have a good time. And there's an emphatic pronoun here. He says, in which itself, the house of feasting, in that itself is the end of all mankind.

That's what everybody starts out looking for. And you've got to get past that. If you live in the house of feasting, you're going to end up with vapor at the setting of the sun.

So he says, the living will set it upon his heart. The living is going to take this to heart and say, you know what? I've got to get beyond this party mentality, this seeking happiness as an end in itself. So he says in verse 3, better aggravation than laughter.

For in distress of the face, the heart is made good. Well, there's all kinds of examples of that. And when we covered this verse in detail, we talked about them.

It is under pressure. It's pushing against resistance that we build strength. It's the distress of the face that enables us to make our heart good.

It's pretty hard to develop a good heart when you have no reason to think otherwise. You don't have to endure under suffering. You don't have to persevere in the face of challenge.

You don't have to develop strength in the face of adversity. Everything is smooth. It's a funny thing.

I think I've had as much challenge as anybody, but I've had people come up to me and say, you know, boy, you really all set. You had kind of the silver spoon in your mouth mentality. You went to the Naval Academy and you went to Dallas Seminary and, boy, the road has just been paved for you.

You've really had a charmed life. And I think, well, I wish you could come back and travel down

some of those roads. Let's go back to the Naval Academy the first year and let's slog through DTS and do a four-year degree in 11 years and see how much you think it was a charmed life.

But it is in distress of the face that the heart is made good. God puts these things in our path because we need them. Why does He leave us in a fallen world after our salvation? Because in distress of the face, the heart is made good.

So it should give us the ability to take a second look when adversity comes. Our first look at adversity is always a frown. We always think, well, this is a bad deal, but it's there for a reason.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of gladness. You know, in the New Testament, Jesus said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. He also said in Matthew chapter 5, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they who mourn.

They are the ones who will be comforted. The ones who hunger and thirst are the ones who are going to be filled. Well, hunger and thirst are not considered part of the house of feasting.

Hunger and thirst is part of the broken spirit, the poor in spirit. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. The heart of fools is in the house of gladness.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than for a man to listen to the song of fools. For like the sound of nettles under the kettle, thus is the laughter of the fool, and this also is vapor. All of the laughter, all of the jokes, all of the hail fellow well met, all of the glasses raised in the parties, all of the happy hours, it's just a flash fire.

It burns briefly, not even long enough to heat the stew, and it's gone. The next verse, beginning in verse 7, says, Ill-gotten gain will make foolish the wise. And that verb make foolish, as I mentioned, is from Hallel, which in its Kal stem, the normal stem, means to praise.

Hallelujah, praise Yahweh. But in the Peal, which you have here, or a form of the Peal, it means to push that to an extreme. It's like hysteria, or boasting, or babbling.

And it takes the wise and makes them foolish. It pushes them over the edge of reason. Well, what about the ill-gotten gain? How does that follow from verse 6? How can you start out being in the house of mourning and avoiding the song of the fools and the laughter of the fools? Well, ill-gotten gain means more than just possessions.

It means the advantage that you think you have gained. It's illicit for someone who is seeking a profit that will survive the passing of this life. What is given will make a ruin of the heart.

If you latch on to things that only exist under the sun, you'll be a babbling fool at the end, and you'll have nothing in your hand. So he goes on to say in verse 8, the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. We start out in this life, but this is not where we end, is it? Where are we

going to end up after this life is over? It's the outcome that is the measure.

The outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. And then literally it says, a long spirit is better than a tall spirit. It's very graphic in Hebrew, but it has the idea that an enduring spirit, this word is sometimes translated slow, a slow spirit, being slow to anger.

An enduring spirit is better than a tall or proud spirit. What you do at the beginning, all your boasting words are not what count. It's where you end up.

And then in verse 9 he says, do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. What's the response when things don't go well? When you're being led into the house of mourning, when calamity strikes. A lot of times our reaction is anger.

We want to look for someone to blame. Remember the big emotional reaction after September 11th. There's anger that wants to be directed somewhere.

We need a target. We need an outlet. And it comes from being troubled.

It's the troubled spirit that is going to suffer the temptation to be angry. And Solomon says, do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. And if you want to avoid anger, you've got to put the trouble to rest.

It's pretty tough to wrestle anger back into its place once it has ignited in our soul. And we have to attack it at its source, and that is being troubled. Here comes calamity.

Here comes that which sobers us or makes us mourn, which challenges us, takes away our party mood. Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. Anger rests in the bosom of fools.

The Qaslim are those who laugh, and it's meaningless. They're the ones who sing songs, and they're meaningless. Verse 10, do not say, why is it that the former days, the beginning days, were better than these? These days are not as good.

I'm under pressure. Things are on a downhill trend. It's not like the good old days.

He says, don't say that. This is one of the ways you get troubled, and anger takes root. Do not say, why is it that the beginning days were better than these? It is not from wisdom that you inquire about this.

Then verse 11, and I want to give you a slightly amended translation from what I gave last time, because the word order here in verse 11, the first word in verse 11 is tovah. And if you've made it through the first six and a half chapters of Ecclesiastes, you know what tov is. T-O-V is the word good.

Tovah is the feminine form of that. Good is chakma. Chakma is wisdom.

C-H-A-K-M-A-H. So literally, they turn this around and say, wisdom is good with an inheritance. But the word order in Hebrew says, tovah chakma im nakhalah.

Good is wisdom with permanent possession. Often translated inheritance, but nakhalah means that which you gain and you don't lose. That which you own that can't be taken away from you.

You can certainly gain those things by inheritance. You can see the synonym in Israel where tribal land was a permanent possession of the tribe. Good, real good, is wisdom with permanent possession.

Where your wisdom leads to something that lasts beyond the grave. Not just wisdom as an end in itself. And this is important because Solomon introduces this up in verse 10.

But where we're going tonight, we need to remember what he says here in verse 11. Good is wisdom with permanent possession. Nakhalah.

N-A-C-H-A-L-A-H. Nakhalah. And you can see the A-H ending is also feminine.

And this speaks a lot of times feminine. When you take a concrete noun in Hebrew and put a feminine ending on it, it abstracts it. It makes it more in the realm of principle.

Oftentimes tovah, when you find it by itself, is translated prosperity. Because it takes the idea of good in the concrete and you put the feminine ending on it and it means good in the abstract. Prosperity.

We're going to see that just on down in a few verses. So good is wisdom with permanent possession. And it is profitable to the ones seeing the sun.

And guess what the word profitable is there? Very same word that the book began with. It's from the same root as Yitron. Remember Yitron? What profit is there to a man? Well, this is Yotair.

And Yotair, whenever you see the O-E vowel form, what they call an infix, that's like putting I-N-G on an English word. It's profiting those who are under the sun. It yields this permanent possession in the future and it also is profiting you while you're still under the sun.

Good is wisdom with permanent possession and it is profiting the ones seeing the sun. Then in verse 12, and this is what we covered last time, it says in a lot of the English translations something along the lines of wisdom is protection just as money is protection or wisdom is a defense just as money is a defense. But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

Or in the New American Standard it says wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. Well, literally the word here that's translated protection or defense in verse 12 is Tsel, T-S-E-L. And Tsel means shadow.

You have the Tsel Hamoet over in Psalm 23, the valley of the shadow of death. Tsel is the word used there, shadow. It's used for shade.

It's used over in Jonah talking about the shade that the gourd plant cast and how when he lost the shade he was all upset. But the root idea of Tsel is shade. And you can see where someone would infer protection or defense because we saw in Psalm 91 he who abides in the shadow of the Almighty talking about his protection.

But look at the context here. We haven't been talking about the presence of God or the mighty rock or any such thing. If you just translate this in a woodenly literal form it says for in shade is wisdom or for in shadow is wisdom.

And in shadow or shade is silver. And of course silver, they take this to mean money. But think about this.

What have we just seen? What's the last noun we had in the previous verse? Profitable to the ones seeing the sun. Well, when it's overcast, we've had some overcast days here recently, you don't really get much in the way of shadows and shade, do you? It's when you've got a bright sun shining that you have shadow cast, when you have shade. And people think, well, I've got to enjoy the sun.

They've had songs on the radio talking about the sunshiny day. Oh, live in the sunshine. Have you ever heard that song? Just live in the sunshine and I'll be on my way.

That is the most pathetic song. If you listen to the words, it's kind of coming in no commitment, kind of coming and going, well, happy-go-lucky, live for now, have a good time and then blow away and leave the person moping in your wake. But people think, well, you know, make hay while the sun shines is another expression.

But what Solomon says in verse 12, he says, look, if you want to have permanent possession, the real good is wisdom that yields a permanent possession. And it's profitable to the one seeing the sun because in the shade is wisdom. In the shade is silver.

We think, well, the light and the brightness and the health is all in the sunshine. And there's some cases where that might be true. But here he says it's an irony.

It's ironic that when the sun is shining and everybody's looking for the sunshine, it's in the shade, it's in the shelter from the sun where you're going to find the value. In shade is where you're going to find the wisdom. It's not right out there with the sun glinting off of it.

It's in the shade. You've got to look in the crevices. You've got to look in those places that are not immediately evident.

In the shade, it literally says word for word, for in shade is wisdom. Or for in shadow is wisdom. In

shadow is the silver.

You know, all that glitters is not gold. You see a lot of things that are bright and shiny and appealing in the sunshine, but the silver, that which is of intrinsic value, something shiny that lasts, is in the shade. It's not in the sunshine.

And then the last part of verse 12 says, and prophet, this is Yitron once again, that which is left over, that which survives, prophet is knowing that wisdom gives life to her owner. We've seen, you can go to the Proverbs where it talks about that riches are in her right hand, talking about wisdom. You go to Proverbs chapter 3 and 4 and the personification of wisdom calling out in the gates and talking about all of the benefits in this life.

But beyond riches, and beyond even long life under the sun, there is eternal life in wisdom. There is life that transcends the setting of the sun. There is Yitron.

Prophet is knowing that wisdom gives life to her possessor or to her owner. The word translated owner there is from the same word where we get Baal, or Baal, which means Lord. Quite a fascinating use of words, but this is Baaliyah, and the A-H again is feminine, and it's her owner, her Baal.

The one who masters wisdom is going to lay hold of life is the idea. So now we resume in verse 13, but it's important to establish that context because it's the place where you don't expect it, where profit, where good of intrinsic value, where the good that is beautiful is going to be found. Everyone wants to go to the house of feasting, but it's in the house of mourning where you're going to find what is really valuable.

The wise are going to be in the house of mourning. It's not the bright fire of thorns under the kettle that's going to heat your stew. You need something more lasting, something more permanent.

It's not the tall spirit boasting proud words at the beginning. It's the one that endures. So he says in verse 13, look at the work of God, for who is able to straighten that which he has made crooked? We think, how does this follow out of the preceding? Well, when you look at the work of God, Solomon says, if you look around at the work of God, you find crooked things.

God has made difficulties in life. We have to remember the call in Isaiah to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a straight path for him, because the paths are crooked. The valleys have got to be filled in and the mountains have got to be made low because there are obstructions everywhere.

Life is full of obstacles. God has designed life to be crooked. This does not mean that God perverts justice.

You go to Job chapter 8 and verse 3. In the dialogues there, you have Bildad the Shuhite responding to Job once they finally get to speaking after a week. And he says, does God subvert judgment? Does the Almighty pervert justice? Of course not, is the implied response. God does

not... This is not some kind of crookedness that implies evil or unrighteousness.

But something crooked is difficult. Same thing in Psalm 146 and verse 9. The Lord watches over strangers. He relieves the fatherless and widow, but the way of the wicked he makes crooked.

He puts obstacles in their path. He tries to slow them down and show them the error of their ways. And that's really what is going on in this life.

You can go back to chapter 1 of this book. Chapter 1 verse 15, where Solomon observes that what is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be filled in. This is the evil answer that God has given the sons of men.

He has given us that which puts distress on our face in order to make our heart good. So Solomon is saying, look, if you want to lay hold of something permanent, you need to recognize that adversity is not as bad as it looks. In the shadow, even the shadow of death, is where you're going to find the silver.

In the shadow is where you're going to find the benefit of wisdom. So when you get to verse 14, he says, you're going to have some good days and you're going to have some bad days. In the day of benefit, and this is our same word tova that we had up above.

In the day of tova, be, literally it says be in tov. The preposition be, which means in or with, is prefixed to the word tov. So in the day of tova, and then you have the future or the imperative mood of the verb to be, haya.

He says, when the day is good, then jump in there with the good. Be with the good. I did a very interesting study because in recent years they've determined the scope of some of the Hebrew prepositions is wider than was once thought.

And the preposition be or ba actually has a wider range of meaning. We always were taught it's in, by, or with. And I kept thinking, well, how can you be in the good or with the good? But it also has the sense of for it.

Because you're with it and you're in it, you support it. You're for it. You're on board with good.

So in the day of good, seize the good. Seize the good for what it is. You've got a day of prosperity, tova, again as a feminine and an abstract.

You've got a prosperous day. Well, don't lose sight of the good. Be just right there with it.

Be in it. And he says, in the day of calamity, what do you think the word for calamity is? It's ra, the evil one. The same one we had when it said God gave an evil answer to the sons of men, an answer that makes one frown.

It's unsatisfactory. We don't like it. Well, this is rah, r-a-a-h, spelled with an ion.

In the day of calamity, look also at this. And the word look is also rah-ah, but this is with the good letter, with the aleph. And so we have a wordplay.

In the first part he says, in the day of tovah, be for tov. In the day of rah, well, rah at this. Look at this.

Don't just be concentrating on the evil. Look at this. Well, what is this? Then we have a tricky piece of Hebrew.

And you'll see in your English there that it says something along the lines of God has made one as well as the other. It says, in the day of prosperity, be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider. Surely God has appointed the one.

There is no word for appointed. There's not one as well as the other. None of that is in here.

The most literal translation you can make here is this. In the day of benefit, be for good. Or in the day of good, be with, for, be in the good.

In the day of calamity, look also at this. Don't just look at the calamity, but look at something else. Corresponding to this, and you have the word zeh, which a lot of times when it says behold in the Old Testament, it's saying rah-ah-zeh.

Look at this. Corresponding to this, God works, and this is our old friend asah, which means to do or to make or to work, all through Ecclesiastes. Every time you see the word work, it's asah.

Corresponding to this, what is this that we're corresponding to? The day of calamity. Corresponding to this, God works in a manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after it. Oh my goodness.

You read it again. Corresponding to this day of calamity, God works. God is at work in the day of calamity.

If you don't get anything else out of this verse, get that. In the day of calamity, God is at work. Calamity is a part of that answer that God gives the sons of men.

Why do we have calamity? What has Solomon been talking about in the first part of this chapter? He's been talking about the fact that we need adversity. We need the day of mourning. We need distress of the face to make our heart good.

You're going to have some good days, and when they're there, lay hold of the good. Be right in there with the good. But in the day of calamity, look at this.

Look at what we've been talking about, Solomon says. Corresponding to this day of calamity,

God works in a manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after it. You think, now wait a minute.

I thought God was working in calamity so that I would get a hold of the prophet and have something in my hand to lay hold of. Well, Solomon is back one step from that. He says, look, a lot of times the day of calamity comes because we're not laying hold of what we should.

We don't have anything in our hand. We're living the life of vapor. We're singing the song of fools.

We're in the house of feasting. God brings a day of calamity, and God is at work in that day of calamity to show us that there's nothing in our hand. God is at work in that day, and He's working in a manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after it.

This word lay hold of, the root meaning of it is to find. But not find in the sense of eureka. In fact, it's very interesting because in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, when they find this word, which is matzah, you would think that they would use heurisco, which is where we get eureka.

I have found it. I learned that when I was a little kid in California. It's on the California state flag.

Some explorer came out there, Balboa, or somebody came out and said, eureka, I have found the Pacific or found California or something. He wouldn't say that now if he found it. But heurisco means I have found it.

But that's not the word that they use. They use a different word, which means I have taken hold. In the passive, in the niph'al stem, this word means to be captured.

Someone has laid hold of you. It's the passive voice. Instead of laying hold of, you have been laid hold of.

You have been apprehended. So he says, God is at work in the day of calamity such that man is not going to apprehend anything after it. He's going to look in his hand and there's nothing there.

This idea of seizing something with the hand is important because we're going to be seeing the hand in just a couple more verses. But this causes us, this wasn't quite what we were expecting Solomon to say. At least I wasn't expecting him to say it.

I thought he was going to say, well, just remember, every cloud has a silver lining. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. In the day of calamity, just hang on.

Good things are coming. Solomon says, pay attention to this. In the day of calamity, look at this.

God is at work. And the whole idea is, when the calamity is over with, God is at work so that man doesn't lay hold of anything. He gets all through the calamity and says, well, what have I really got? Because, why? Why do the days of calamity come? Look back up in the beginning of the

chapter.

It is in the house of mourning that the wise are to be found. It is in distress of the face that the heart is made tov, is made good. Well, what is the first reaction to the day of calamity? There is no good going to come of this.

I am not... What happens? What is our first thought whenever we have calamity, when everything starts crumbling down around our ears? If we are believers, if we care anything about God, we start looking to our spiritual priorities, and we think, gracious sakes, have I transgressed? Have I gotten lackadaisical? Have I gotten apathetic? Have I taken things for granted? Have I sort of lost my fire? Is God waking me up? All of us think this. Whenever something bad happens, we think, well... Some believers say, well, the devil is after me. But most of us think, is God tapping me on the shoulders? Is He giving me a little whack on the behind here to... You know, and we have to go... The discipline... Suffering is not always for discipline.

But that is our first thought. It is always my first thought. Whenever I suffer, I think, well, this has got to be discipline.

I have screwed up somewhere. It is always my first thought. Well, this is a good thing.

Because we look in the day of calamity, and we wonder, am I laying hold of anything? God is at work in calamity to show us what we are not laying hold of, what we are not apprehending. That is where wisdom is to be found. Now, if you think this is a little tenuous, keep it in context.

Look down at verse 15. Solomon says, look, I have seen everything in... Literally it says, in the days of my vapor. I have seen everything in the days of my havel.

This is havel with the possessive. It doesn't say my days of vanity or however they translate it in English. He says, it is the days of my vapor.

I had days of emptiness, days of grasping nothing. I have seen it all. There is the righteous perishing in his righteousness.

Now, this righteous is the word tzedek. Tzedek is the great Old Testament word for righteous, used of God's righteousness. Solomon says, I have seen in my days, my vanishing days of vapor.

I have seen the righteous perishing in his righteousness. And there is the transgressor lasting or living long or prolonging his days in his transgression. I thought that the good would prosper and the evil would get snuffed out.

You can find all kinds of verses that say this. But Solomon says, look, even in my little transient time here on earth, I have seen the righteous perishing in righteousness. And I have seen transgressors surviving, lasting, prolonging in his transgression.

Well, what conclusion do we draw from this? He goes on to say in verse 16, Do not become excessively righteous and do not make yourself overly wise. Well, good heavens, it seems like we're going from bad to worse. Do not become excessively righteous? I thought righteousness was the whole goal of the Christian life.

And here's Solomon saying, do not be overly righteous or excessively righteous. This is our word harbe. Rabah means to multiply.

And harbe means to go over and above, to go to excess in something. It says, do not become excessively righteous and do not make yourself overly wise. And the word overly here is yoter.

It's from the same root that we get yotron. And that means overabundance. It means over and above.

Do not be over and above. This might be an excess of wisdom or a surplus of wisdom. It says, do not become excessively righteous.

Do not make yourself overly wise. Why make yourself desolate? This word translated desolate is usually used of things or places where after a cataclysm or an invasion or a plague of some sort, the land is left desolated. It's barren.

It's plundered and pillaged and there's nothing left. Solomon says, if you become excessively righteous or if you make yourself overly wise, you're going to make yourself desolate. Well, here's a head scratcher.

How can you possibly be excessively righteous? Well, let's stop and think. What is the point of wisdom? What is the point of righteousness? Is it an end in itself or is it the means to an end? Go back up in chapter 7. What is the great benefit of wisdom? Is it that the more you get, the better off you are? What does wisdom do for its baal? What does wisdom do for its owner? It gives life. Life is the goal.

Life is what we're after. We're not after wisdom for its own sake. We're not after righteousness for its own sake.

We're after life. We want something that survives the setting of the sun. We want to partake of the eternal.

We want something left in our hand after the human cycles of life are complete. Do not become excessively righteous. Now, I don't think any of us are in danger of being excessively righteous.

Are we? Where we become perfect and then more than perfect? What does it mean to become excessively righteous? What were the Pharisees obsessed with? What were the legalistic Jews obsessed with? Righteousness. What does Paul say about them over in Romans? Seeking their own righteousness. Not having accepted the righteousness of God, they were seeking their own

righteousness.

Overly righteous. Tithing the spices in the spice cabinet. Overly righteous.

Making righteousness an end in itself. Seeking to lay hold of righteousness itself as a possession. That's not what we're after.

If you seek righteousness for its own sake, you can take any good thing and make it a bad thing. Food is healthy. We need food to survive, but there's such a thing as gluttony.

Exercise is a good thing, but there's people that push exercise to an extreme and it's a bad thing. Social life is good, but you can make it bad. Religious life is good, but you can make it bad.

Bible study is good, but you can push it to an extreme and make it bad. And there are people that do. There are people who can't think about anything else.

They obsess. They carry their Bible to work. They use up all the spare time.

It's time that God has commanded us to use for other things. You've got to love your wife. You've got to honor your father and mother.

You've got to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If there's a man that just rushes home from work and does nothing but study the Bible all the rest of the time, seeking righteousness or seeking wisdom, he's going to desolate himself. He's going to wind up desolate.

You can take the very things that are necessary to lay hold of the eternal, and you can abuse them if you get them out of balance. Any good thing taken out of balance, anything to excess, the best things you can name. The ministry of God the Holy Spirit is a wonderful thing.

It's highly necessary. It's essential to us. But there are people who push cultivating the Spirit to an extreme, and they've turned it into an evil, and they are desolating themselves in the process.

There are people who take an academic approach to Bible study or wisdom for its own sake. Academic knowledge puffs up. They've done it at the expense of love.

That's what Solomon is talking about here. He says, look, I've seen everything in my days of vapor. I've pushed the envelope in all of these different areas, and I'm here to tell you that you can even pursue righteousness.

And if you do it to excess, you're going to desolate yourself. You can pursue wisdom, and if you do it to excess, you'll desolate yourself. Why make yourself desolate? So what's the natural reaction to that? Well, hey, if I'm not going to worry too much about righteousness, not going to worry too much about wisdom, well, then I'll slide off in the other extreme.

He says, no, do not transgress excessively. There are several Hebrew words for sin. This is the

one that means to miss the mark, to fall short, to fail, to achieve, or to cross over a boundary line, to transgress.

And so I translate this, do not transgress excessively and do not become a fool. Don't abandon righteousness. You can go to the opposite extreme.

These are people who say, well, it's all of grace. Christ died for all my sins. I don't need to worry about righteousness at all.

I was declared righteous at the cross. I don't even need to pursue it. He says, no, don't go the other direction either.

Don't transgress excessively and do not become a fool. Don't abandon wisdom. Just because we're not going to excess on it, doesn't mean to slack off on it either.

Why should you die in what is not your time? Is what it literally says. Why should you die in what is not your time? Now, verse 18, and this wraps a lot of what we've seen together. He says, it is good that you take hold in this and also from this not cause your hand to rest.

Now, you may see a little bit of a difference. It says, I think in the New King James, it is good that you grasp this and also not remove your hand from the other. Well, it doesn't say the other.

It's the same thing. Solomon says you've got to get this. If you want to lay hold of something and have something permanent in your hand, this is it.

It's in the middle. It's in the shade. It's under the sun, looking for the silver, looking for the benefit.

It's not right out there on the surface. A superficial view would say, well, if wisdom is what I need, I'm just going to overdose on wisdom. If righteousness is what I need, I'm going to overdose on righteousness.

You can't have too much of a good thing. He says, no. You've got to take hold in this and don't let your hand ungrasp it.

Don't let your hand rest. Once you've grabbed hold of this, once you've apprehended it, don't let it go. For fearing God comes forth from them all.

Your goal is the fear of the Lord. Your goal is not righteousness as an end in itself. Your goal is not wisdom as an end in itself.

Your goal is not long life or happiness or prosperity, tovah. Your goal is the fear of the Lord. Your goal is life with the Lord.

These things are the means to an end. Any good thing can be taken to an extreme and abused. He says you've got to find the middle path.

You've got to operate in the shade of the sun. Well, I'll leave you that to chew on for a little bit and we'll pause here and take our break.