

"Living Through Adversity" Ecclesiastes 6:10–7:14

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[0 : 00] Father, we have been in Ecclesiastes for a few weeks, and we've been thankful to you that your desire for us through this book is to open our eyes to what real life is all about.

And yet, every week, we encounter days and hours and minutes of unreality, of lies, of untruths, half-truths, fake-truths.

Lord, we want to live in the truth, in reality, on your terms. Father, sometimes that can be a very scary thing.

We would much rather be like the ostrich who sticks his head in the sand. We would rather doom scroll, or watch the next episode, or whatever it may be that causes distractions that help us not to face truth.

But Lord, help us to be brave this morning. Help us to look at your word and be thankful that even though it is difficult, it is for our benefit and for your glory.

[1 : 08] We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. We live in the modern age. You could say the post-modern age. I think in some ways it's all the same. One of the defining characteristics of the modern age that we live in is our obsession with using all of our resources to achieve progress.

Progress in every aspect of human experience. Progress by any means necessary. And often, this progress aims to eliminate inconveniences. Small ones and hardships, big ones.

So that all inconveniences are eliminated entirely. So that we can, as individuals, maximize our leisure, our recreation, our enjoyment of life.

Hardship, then, is seen as an obstacle to overcome. But the issue is that hardship and adversity are unavoidable as human beings.

They're a fundamental part of the human experience. So, yes, we do hard things. But we don't want to live lives of hardship.

[2 : 18] Even if we could resolve the issues of suffering and hardship, such pleasures would be brief for death. Also is the universal human experience. So to the modern mind, to our minds, this is a problem.

And it may be the problem. The problem of suffering. The problem of pain. The problem of adversity. The problem of hardships. Even for the Christians.

I'd say most of us are, or at least would confess that we're Christians. We swim in post-modern waters. We work post-modern jobs. We enjoy post-modern media.

We buy post-modern things. We are moderns. We are post-modern people. But what if adversity and hardship weren't problems to solve or avoid at all costs, but realities to accept where we apply wisdom, and then applying wisdom to such hardship and adversities, we grow in virtues.

In other words, instead of being obstacles to our happiness, could life's difficulties serve as the means by which we flourish as individuals? The sage of Ecclesiastes, far from being a fatalist or a nihilist, he is guiding us to a sober understanding of life and how to approach and deal with, in this case, adversity, so that we may flourish and not fade.

[3 : 53] So we're going to consider a few things. The sage is going to help us to consider a few things. And here's a bit of a challenge with this, because the sage has, up till now, really observed a lot of what it means to be human beings under the sun.

And now he'll switch it to speaking a number of proverbs to us. And a lot of them have themes.

Some of them kind of seem like they're a bit out of place. So I've done my best to kind of organize them in such a way that helps us to approach them with some understanding this morning in our short time together.

So the sage will help us to approach adversity and hardships as we consider comfort in our death, as we consider patience in our humility, and as we consider wisdom in our limits.

Comfort in our death, patience in our humility, wisdom in our limits. But before the sage gets into these considerations, he sets the table for us, for our considerations.

Look with me at verses 10 to 11 of chapter 6. And we'll be on page 24. By the way, I think we have a few more of these scripture journals. They're our gift to you.

[5 : 12] If you don't have one, grab one. If you're visiting, grab one for sure. There's some Bibles as well. Our hope is that you just follow along as we go through God's word. So, chapter 6, verses 10 to 11.

This is what it says. Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

The more words, the more vanity. And what is the advantage to man? The sage here is describing our reality. We see ourselves as in control of our destiny.

We can see ourselves as being the strong person. There's nobody stronger than us. I mean, there might be people stronger than us, but humanity at its, kind of if we're looking at humanity as a whole, what is stronger?

What is better? What is, what is, sits higher, who sits higher than mankind? So we see ourselves as in control of our destiny, as the king of our existence, the queens of our existence.

[6 : 21] Yet we cannot truly invent or even reinvent ourselves. We might be able to tweak human life or make slight improvements, but we cannot re-engineer who we are or change our fate as those under the sun.

Now, if you've been tracking with us, this will be familiar to you if you're new or visiting. The sage uses this term under the sun to describe mortal life.

We are people that live under the sun. And under the sun is a life of frustration and difficulty, what the sage also calls vanity, like a vapor.

It's here today and gone tomorrow. Early this morning, if you went outside, you would have breathed out mist out of your mouth. That is what this life is under the sun.

We are subject to so many forces beyond our control. Weather, politics, conflicts, health, the market, a flat tire.

[7 : 29] I mean, you name it, there are so many factors factors that we experience that lay very clearly to us that our control is a fallacy.

We can control some things, but not everything. And far less things than we think. Our life is both finite and fragile. And the best we can do, as verse 11 tells us, only leads to more vanity since all our efforts result in little more than a fleeting moment of improvement, but result in nothing eternal. This is what it means to live under the sun. What is the point of our mortal life? The sage poses this question to us like this, verse 12. For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow.

For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? It seems like a very, again, like a dark question, like the sage has come to the end of his rope.

He is a terribly dark and negative person, but again, we have to remember that the sage is helping us open our eyes to what reality is all about.

[8 : 48] Okay? If we live in a lovely, beautiful fantasy land, it is better for us to be confronted with the reality that is more like dark gray clouds than remain in a fantasy land that doesn't truly exist.

So the sage asks these questions. For who knows what is good for a man while he lives the few days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

And then he begins these considerations. Look with me at our first consideration. A consideration of comfort that we ought to take comfort in our death. Verses 1 to 4.

It's on page 24 and 26 in the Scripture Journal. A good name is better than precious ointment and the day of death than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.

For this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

[10 : 02] Death, mourning, sorrow, and sadness. I would never talk of these things in a positive light. I don't think you would either.

Yet the sage is suggesting that these things are more beneficial than birth, than feasting, than laughter, than merriment. Somehow, in the sage's mind, going to a funeral is better than going to a wedding.

It seems very counterintuitive. But again, remember, the sage is speaking in a type of way to shake us out of our fantasy life, to direct our gaze to what real life is about.

So he uses jarring words to jar us out of our malaise. The thing with birth and feasting and festivities is that as we engage with them, life feels endless and expansive.

And so it should. There are no boundaries to what the future could hold. You hold a young child in your hands, a newborn, and it's like all of potential goodness is in your arms.

[11:19] This child's life is just open. You wish the best of a child. You don't hold a child and somehow think this kid's going to really screw it up. Instead you think, wow, life is ahead of this wonderful little bundle of joy.

Happiness and abundance seem infinite. Yet adversity, like death and mourning, remind us that life is fleeting. It's truly fleeting.

And not just fleeting, but extremely limited. We don't have boundless bounty at our fingertips. We don't have infinite happiness. Besides, even when we encounter something that brings us happiness, that seems almost too good to be true, these feelings tend to diminish over time.

Our experiences are temporary. And when we continually pursue these experiences that seem to bring us joy, they do not provide the same joy as they did the first time.

It's similar to how a fragrance, this is what the sage is getting at in verse 1, how a fragrance smells wonderful for a few hours before fading away. And all too often as modern people, we seek out mirth and laughter and happiness not as something to necessarily enjoy, but as a way to distract ourselves from life's difficulties.

[12:40] We embrace entertainment not merely as leisure, but as a form of survival because we have believed the lie that reality of this mortal life is too hard to face.

But again, the sage is telling us consider death, consider the end of life to see what reality is all about, that there are ups and downs and hopefully if we are shaken from our fantasy land, we will see that yes, there is enjoyment, yes, there's happiness, there is laughter, but it is vanity, it is vaporous.

And hopefully the idea would be as we see that life is brief and fragile, that we will begin to live a wise life, we will begin to reform our ways.

I'll give an example, it's very personal. My father died a couple of years ago as many of you guys know and we were not on good terms when he passed away.

It was a pretty sad situation but in my mind I just thought I have infinite opportunities in the future to reconcile with him.

[13:57] Now it wasn't all on me, okay, but in my mind tomorrow was always going to happen with my father. I took the future for granted and with his death I was shaken up.

I thought what I had would be there for the taking and it was snatched away. And with his death I reconsidered my approach to a few areas in my life.

I won't get into it but it shook me out of a false sense that I would have unlimited second chances not just for reconciliation but in other areas of my life.

The whole idea of a guaranteed silver lining is not a guarantee at all. Growing wiser from that experience is an ongoing journey.

I am far from there. I still in many ways take for granted tomorrow but realizing that life is much shorter than I believed it to be and far more fragile than I'd like to admit friends it's genuinely genuinely it's been a gift.

[15:14] It's been a gift. It's been a gift from God to me and in some ways to my family as well. we see things like new life and feasting and celebrations as gifts to cherish this is the way we should see them not as goals to chase such things cannot bring eternal happiness because we live a mortal life under the sun but they can certainly be appreciated for the gifts they are.

So you see the sage when he is saying consider death consider mourning being greater than laughter and death being the day of death being greater than the day of your birth what he is saying to us is that it affords us the opportunity to orient our life our hearts our minds our priorities our money the things that make us us so that we can treasure our days and to look towards a future to take advantage of the opportunities that we have and to not assume that the future that is in front of

us is a given it also helps us to fight the pride that blinds us to the reality of life so it's not just that we think tomorrow is guaranteed but we we have a pridefulness within us where we think that we can live on our terms as opposed to God's and this brings us to the second point the sage is helping us to consider humility over pride verses 5 to 10 it is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools for as the crackling of thorns under a pot so is the laughter of the fools this also is vanity surely oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart better is the end of a thing than its beginning and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart of fools say not why were the former days better than these for it is not from wisdom that you ask this the sage again he is trying to show us a better way you'll notice that he is he is constantly saying better is better is better is he wants to help us to understand that the life of pride is not a better way to live but rather the life of humility listen there are no and maybe there's some actually but I'm sure that there are hardly any self-confessed fools amongst us you might not think you're overly wise or smart but a fool I doubt it yet verse 5 envisions a single wise person offering tough but godly admonition compared to a crowd of fools singing sweet nothings that lead others astray the wise are always a smaller group than the fools and it serves as a warning for us to humbly consider whether we are either singing along with fools or listening to their song it's hopefully pushing us towards listening to the wisdom of the wise and what does the wisdom of the wise look like often times it's constructive criticism it's sometimes it's unsolicited advice although often times we are harder to accept that nevertheless constructive criticism unsolicited advice it's not always pleasant to hear in the moment certainly not as pleasant as the sweet words of flattery and praise but they stand up much better under the weight of hardship especially compared to the foolish words that as we see in verse 6 are described as insubstantial as insubstantial as ash okay it does not do us any good when suffering in when we are suffering and struggling to hear a massive load of flattery that only worsens our hardship sometimes the hardest words to hear are the ones that bring life will we be humble enough to consider them the sage is asking us will we embrace pride and be counted as amongst the fools or will we heed the wisdom of the wise in a humble way and yet even if we avoid foolish advice how do we deal with the problem of oppression and corruption we see this in verse 7 and following such issues are unfair and they undermine the sound advice of the wise because with corruption one tries to enjoy all the benefits of a good life without any of the hard work that's entailed with it it's like cheating so that you run the last kilometer of the marathon and you claim to have run the previous 41 grueling kilometers it's a way of cheating a corrupted soul arises within us when we bribe and cheat or oppress as these actions compromise our integrity or they impair our judgment we begin to see that pride although feels good it starts to deaden our soul instead of seeking the truth we become attached to our biases and not the truth we do not become calm and considerate but unfair and angry this is the nature of pride there is no goodness in pride sages teaching us to avoid such pride and anger we must be patient and self controlled by the way this isn't telling us not to be angry the sage isn't a zen sage but what he is telling us is not to nurture or nourish anger we cannot allow anger if our life is a garden

I use this analogy a lot with my boy if our life is like a garden we cannot allow weeds to grow up not one not one square foot of your life should be devoted to anger or pride do not set up a trellis so that it may grow up do not water it so that it may be nourished anger is a weed pride is a weed that will choke out all other virtues bitterness as well it feels justified and satisfying to engage with an angry heart a bitter heart even if you have truly been wronged engaging in sharp words or damaging a reputation behind someone's back it feels good in the moment it feels sweet it's justified but allowing resentment to grow between spouses and siblings parents and children colleagues and neighbors it is not a recipe for a wise life but a foolish one one that interestingly will result in death relational death emotional death friends the sage is helping us to see that when adversity comes and it will and we are faced with a choice between a prideful anger or a humble patience and forbearance only the latter will enable us to live soberly and wisely finally the last bit in verse 10 we must resist the urge to long for the past as if it were free from any difficulties we currently face it's another form of impatience and pride we become unwilling to confront present hardships and find ways to overcome or work through the things that we find so difficult this isn't a complete condemnation of nostalgia

I think it's a wonderful thing to reminisce to think about wonderful memories but it can also cause problems for two big reasons the first we can glorify the past in such a way that forgets or excuses the sins of the past the 1950s weren't somehow a sin free existence and then the TV came and

then the sexual revolution came and then the smartphone came and then that's when sin really took root okay I mean listen there might be better eras than ours ours might be better than others the point is when we say that you know I wish it were like yesteryear I wish it was like my parents generation we are failing to see that sin is a pervasive thing that can take over everything and does take over everything the second it can diminish our motivations to live wisely and righteously in the present and the future we can become self-righteous we look at the fantastic life and of the previous generation and somehow stand morally higher than the generation we are currently in but this only perpetuates pride okay it perpetuates pride it does not allow us to take a self-inventory and deal with our own sin and our own messed up-ness this brings us to our final point as those who feel the limitations as those who live under the sun verses 11 and 12 we'll read together wisdom is good with an inheritance an advantage to those who see the sun for the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it wisdom serves a preservative role it certainly does much like money and even and especially surpasses money and its ability to safeguard life however ultimately wisdom has its limits in protecting our lives indefinitely it cannot guarantee a life free of hardship or a certain future for the next generation mortal beings who rely on wisdom in their lives do not become immortal or even superhuman wisdom is still in this realm of under the sun even as we grow in wisdom we still are living lives that are often full of vanity and prone to frustration and confusion and I'm not saying that you should then not bother with wisdom you should totally bother with wisdom embrace it but just know that the life you are living where you are pursuing wisdom is temporary and it's fleeting and while wisdom certainly can preserve our life making good decisions usually results in a better life lived a healthier life lived it does so only in an earthly sense not in an eternal one even though as we saw back in chapter 3 verse 11 that God has written eternity into our hearts going back to the beginning bit about us moderns we spend billions and billions and billions of dollars trying to fix our life to make straight what the

[27 : 27] Lord seems to have made crooked yet our best efforts have not removed adversity or hardships the problem of pain still persists evil endures death remains the reality for us all and here's a consideration with all this are we really on the cusp of cracking the code that would let us live forever are we one invention away from eliminating evil what if we discovered a way to live forever but never solve the problem of pain we would simply seek out death only to find it elusive perhaps we could eliminate evil and pain but still have to face mortality it would be like tasting heaven for a moment and then having it stolen away forever it's a kind of torture therefore at the end of this investigation the sage does not state that the ultimate goal of human wisdom is life is wisdom in life to find salvation in life through wisdom instead he encourages us rather to reflect on the work of God he's saying listen wisdom is fantastic but it has even wisdom has its ends he asks us to consider two things verses 13 and 14 consider the work of God who can make straight what he has made crooked verse 14 page 28 in the day of prosperity be joyful and in the day of adversity consider

God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not find out anything that will be after him the sage tells us that the ultimate goal of wisdom is to know God and especially his sovereignty over life his plans his purposes are ultimately beyond our understanding as we cannot fully grasp them he allows us to face hardships that we might seem that might seem unfair or unjust and we don't understand why he's touched on it in previous sections but has not somehow offered an ultimate reason however what the sage is trying to help us understand is that God is sovereign sovereign over both the past the present and future not only is he wise but he is also the source of wisdom recognizing our limitations in light of this in light of God's sovereignty is incredibly good news for us for it means we will stop relying on our own ingenuity!

for salvation our own wisdom for salvation for there is no salvation outside of him because we can't somehow transcend a life under the sun and yet we are destined for eternity I'll wrap it up with this will we venture to entrust our lives to the sovereign God who instills in us a longing for eternal life with him even though we still face adversity and hardship in this life will we humble ourselves or will we allow ourselves to get bitter towards God although we can never fully comprehend God's character or his ways we know that his desire is to resolve our dilemma to save us from the hardships and the challenges of this mortal life to give us an eternal home with him Jesus in John 11 says this verse 25 and 26

I am the resurrection and the life whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die and then he asks do you believe this this fundamentally changes how we live now if we live with this understanding that through Christ God has made a way for us to endure hardships endure adversity and to be rescued from it one day by being in his presence being with him forever it will change the way we live in the present for we can enjoy life's joys and endure adversity and pain in a virtuous way because our hope is in the Lord and he is sovereign the apostle Paul after quite the few chapters chapters 9 10 and 11 he ends this kind of mini gospel within

Romans with this verses 33 and 36 friends this is a life that understands the difficulties that we face and yet looks to eternity and can endure all things because Christ is with him let this be our cry by God's strength let us follow suit to Christ alone be the glory amen let us pray father when we experience hardships and difficulties and adversities!

[33 : 24] Help us not to quickly find distraction from them but Lord rather bring them to you and trust that you will help us to endure that they will through the consideration of death and and the foolishness of pride and our own limitations that we will become wise unto salvation that we will look to you and not ourselves Lord help us we believe but Lord help our unbelief in Christ's name amen