

# Righteousness, Order, Striving After Wind

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[0:00] Okay, one thing that I never really set out to do when I came here to Squamish Baptist Church as associate pastor is I never really set out to start like half of my sermons with surveys, but for some reason I just keep doing that.

So we're going to do another one. I realized this after I wrote the sermon. I was like, wait, I'm doing another survey again? Show of hands. Okay, so a show of hands here. You should be used to this by now.

Have you ever uttered the words, that's not fair? That's not fair. All right, now keep them up for a moment. Keep them up, keep them up. You can take your hands down if you have never uttered the words, that's not fair as an adult.

Oh, man, okay, so apparently we still do it. I do it too, okay. So this is not just something that children do, even though we associate that with, you know, like a six-year-old kid yelling, that's not fair, right?

But as adults, we do it too. Last week we discussed, as part of our study on the book of Ecclesiastes chapters six and seven, we looked at a cultural trend that we've noticed in our culture of scandal and of outrage.

[1:08] We love to indulge in scandal and outrage. There's just something really satisfying about getting really angry at something that seems outrageous. It's not just a cultural trend. This is a human thing to do, a very human thing to do.

I'm just picking on our culture because we live in it. But this is something that is very human across all cultures, across time and space. We see someone treated unfairly and we get angry about it. That's because you and I, we have this innate sense of what the Bible calls righteousness. We have an innate sense of what the Bible calls righteousness. Now, righteousness is a word that you don't often hear used outside of church or outside of some sort of Bible study.

If you do hear it, it's almost always in a sarcastic sense. I mean, in college, I worked a summer on a construction crew and our boss was a man that the other men looked up to and respected.

But I never heard any of them, you know, if we were talking about him, none of them would ever say, he is such a righteous man. You know, that word would never come out of their mouth in a serious way.

[2:17] It's too bad. It's really too bad that we don't use that word very often in a serious sense. Because righteousness is something that is understood. Righteousness is something that is prized by every single human being who isn't a psychopath.

Right? Righteousness is something that we all value, that we all understand, and that we all prize. Inside of your bulletin, there should be a very helpful definition of the word righteousness. And if you don't feel like opening up your bulletin, you're going to see it anyway.

It's on the screen behind me. So this comes from the Tyndale Bible Dictionary, and it seemed like a really good one. Righteousness is the establishment of a right relationship, primarily between God and people, secondarily between people themselves.

Righteousness is the fulfillment of just expectations in any relationship, whether with God or other people. So what we're getting at is this.

Every relationship that you have, your relationship with God, your relationship with the world that God made, your relationship with every human being you meet, whether friends or family or your coworkers or your family in Christ here at the church or someone randomly that you run into at the grocery store, your relationship with your bank or your credit union, your relationship with your kid's school, your relationship with your golden retriever.

[ 3 : 43 ] Right? Every relationship that you have is governed by a set of expectations. Those expectations in some relationships are stated clearly and spoken out loud.

Those expectations in other relationships are implied and unspoken, but they are always, always there. Every relationship you have.

And the degree to which another person meets these expectations that you have of them is the degree to which you call them righteous. That is the degree to which you call them righteous. As Christians, we believe that the final determination, the final standard of righteousness is given by God. He is the one who determines righteousness.

He is the one who correctly judges what constitutes righteousness. He is the one who correctly judges whether you and I are righteous people.

[ 4 : 44 ] So we have this sense of righteousness, this God-given sense of righteousness. And along with this sense of righteousness comes a sense that human beings should be judged. We should be judged based on our righteousness or our wickedness.

And by wickedness, I simply mean this, our violation of those righteous expectations. When human beings are rewarded or punished for their righteousness or their lack thereof, we praise that. We approve of it. We use words like fairness. Or in our culture, we might borrow an Eastern word, karma. We innately understand that this is how things should be.

Good people should be rewarded. Bad people should be punished. Righteous people should be rewarded. Wicked people should be punished. And usually, this is how things are in sort of a general sense.

I mean, people who behave rightly tend to do better in life than people who are wicked. But not always. Not always. And we're going to encounter that in Ecclesiastes chapter 7.

[ 5 : 50 ] Now, we've been studying the book of Ecclesiastes over the summer. And as we've reached chapter 7, we've been seeing that the author of most of the words in Ecclesiastes is an Israelite man.

He lived over 2,000 years ago. He's a man who calls himself either the preacher or the teacher, depending on your translation of the Bible. This preacher has been studying the world around him. He's been looking at everything under the sun. He's wanting to learn, is there any lasting gain to be had from everything under the sun? Is there a way to get ahead in this world?

Is there a good life that we can have? Something that we can reliably get? Something that can never be taken away from us? And he's been exploring the many facets of human life.

And we've been studying it over the course of the summer. And what we're finding is that all of them, without exception, have failed to produce this lasting gain. None of them get us the good life. And today, he is turning to our universal human quest for righteousness.

[ 6 : 53 ] And along with that, there's another universal human quest that comes hand in hand with righteousness. And that's our quest to understand the order behind the universe. To understand the order behind the universe.

To understand the scheme or the structure or the way things work. He's going to look at this righteousness, or maybe we can call it piety. And second, he's going to look at this wisdom or mastery of life.

In both cases, they are going to come up short. They are not going to reliably produce the lasting gain that he's looking for.

They are not going to produce the good life. Here's how he begins in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 15. In my vain life, I have seen everything.

There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness. And there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil doing. In other words, righteousness doesn't always work.

[ 8 : 03 ] Life isn't always fair. Karma doesn't always come through. Sometimes a righteous person is ruined precisely because she behaves righteously.

Sometimes a wicked person is successful precisely because she behaves wickedly. The preacher has seen it all. And the preacher knows that there is no neat formula to life that works 100% of the time.

Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Here's what his counsel is in verse 16. It is not what you would expect it to be. Be not overly righteous and do not make yourself too wise.

Why should you destroy yourself? Now, how many of you expected that verse to be in your Bible?

This is one that's bothered me for a long time. And the thing is, though, I actually like verses like

this.

The reason is that any time you're reading the Bible and you run into something that's difficult to understand, or you run into something that troubles you, or you run into something that offends you, what this means is that you are encountering something that God wants you to learn.

[ 9 : 11 ] What this means, perhaps, is that you're encountering a gap in your understanding. Or maybe you're encountering, for the first time, a God who looks at the world and who values things in the world differently than you do.

So verse 16, I don't think we should look at this as some sort of awkward embarrassment, like, man, I wish that verse weren't in the Bible. That's weird. We should look at this as a rich opportunity to learn and to grow.

So, what does it mean to be overly righteous? What does it mean to be too wise? Well, we've already talked about what righteousness is. We've already sort of defined that.

So let's talk about what wisdom is. So the Tyndale Bible Dictionary was really hitting it out of the park this week. It had a great definition of wisdom, too. So it'll be up on the screen here. Wisdom is the ability to direct one's mind toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfillment.

Wisdom is thus a special capacity necessary for full human living. It can be acquired through education and the application of the mind. Now, if you're really struggling to get that in, here's the main idea.

[ 10 : 20 ] Wisdom is an understanding or a mastery of life in this world that God made. Wisdom is insight into the structure and the order of God's world.

If you understand how the world works, if you know how to, if you understand that, then you know how to live skillfully, then you know how to live in harmony with God's created world. And if you do that, then things generally go well for you.

That's the benefit of wisdom. Instead of trying to fight against the structure of the world that God made, you go along with it. And things go well for you. There is a danger in being over-righteous and being over-wise.

The danger is this. You and I might think that if we behave righteously, if we behave wisely enough, then we are going to be able to get ahead in this life under the sun.

We're going to be able to get that lasting gain. We're going to be able to get that good life that can't be taken away from us. In other words, what we're doing is we are taking these good things, righteousness and wisdom, and we are taking them and twisting them into tools to strip mine God's world, extract out of it lasting gain and significance for myself.

[ 11 : 35 ] Instead of working in harmony with God's world, I'm basically trying to extract out of God's world something that I can hold on to, something that's going to get me ahead. So, let's think about two practical examples of that.

Just so that we're not, you know, just so that we're not dealing just with nebulous abstractions. Two practical examples. How do people like you and me, how do we manipulate, first of all, righteousness? How do we manipulate righteousness for lasting gain?

So, I'll give you one example here. One example is something that we might call asceticism. If you've never encountered that word before, that's fine. An ascetic is someone who denies himself as many earthly pleasures as possible.

Maybe a monk or someone who goes off into the wilderness and wears scratchy clothes and eats, you know, just eats flies and stuff like that and sleeps with his head on a rock and he's like, you know, living this horrible, awful life.

And he's doing this because he thinks it makes him more righteous. He's trying to be over-righteous. He's thinking that God is going to approve of him, God is going to reward him for the severity with which he treats himself.

[ 12 : 46 ] And the Bible actually contains many warnings against this sort of asceticism. For example, 1 Timothy chapter 4, the apostle Paul warns against certain false Christians.

He identifies them as liars who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

So, the idea there is that there's some people that Paul may have encountered who are basically like, sex is bad, food is bad, we should like live a miserable life and that's how you get ahead, that's how you be righteous.

And Paul's basically saying, no, sex within the confines of marriage is good, eating food is good, they should be received with thanksgiving. Asceticism is one example of how we twist righteousness to suit our own hands.

It's basically an attempt to become holier than God. You're not going to impress God by trying to become holier than God. A second example of this sort of manipulation. This one's more common today, I think.

[ 13 : 49 ] We might call it the prosperity gospel. Prosperity teaching says that God wants you and me to experience perfect health, outrageous wealth.

God wants the American dream for you. And you are assured of getting it as long as you have enough faith. If you failed to get it, it's because you didn't have enough faith.

Really, this should be a subject of a longer sermon. The truth is, and maybe I'll surprise you by saying, that God actually does want health and wealth for you. Here's the catch.

Here's the thing, though, is we are not promised them here and now. We are not promised them until the new creation. Everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ is going to be raised from the dead, is going to live forever with him on the earth.

The meek will inherit the earth. You will be healthy, you will be wealthy beyond your wildest dreams.

God will wipe away every tear from your eye. But in this present age, we aren't promised that.

[ 14 : 54 ] Sometimes we get a bit of a sneak preview of that. God does heal people. God does give us money, obviously. But we're not told to expect these things.

In fact, Paul warns in 1 Timothy 6 against false Christians. He identifies them as people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Godliness is a means of gain. See, these are the people who've got giant arenas in Texas filled with people watching them tell you about how God can give you your best life now.

This is people who have, these are false teachers with private jets, with TV ministries, exporting what is the primary American export, the prosperity gospel, to countries all around the world.

And Paul says they are depraved in mind. And they are deprived of the truth. Those are two examples.

[ 15 : 58 ] Asceticism and the prosperity gospel. Two of many other examples we could give. But those are two that we find very clearly condemned in scripture. Two ways that people like you and me might try to use righteousness to extract lasting gain out of life under the sun.

Results are not guaranteed if you try to follow those methods. And neither are results guaranteed when you do the same thing with the accumulation of wisdom. So we looked at two examples of trying to accumulate righteousness to suit our own ends.

Let's talk about two ways we might try to accumulate wisdom to suit our own ends. First example. This is something that you see a lot in our culture. It's found, it's usually found more outside the church than in it.

It's found in people who love to talk about how rational they are. Who seem very confident that human enlightenment, human engineering will allow us to make progress. Will rescue us from the mess we're in.

We might call this progressivism. My favorite advocate for this viewpoint is not like one of these great authors or politicians. It's this guy here, street urchin Esquilito from the movie Nacho Libre.

[ 17 : 08 ] One of my favorite movies. And this guy, you know, this street bum, his catchphrase is, I don't believe in God. I believe in science. He isn't referring to scientific, to like this scientific process.

So when someone is using science in that way, using that word, what they don't mean is they're not referring to like a system of forming a hypothesis and trying to test that hypothesis with experiments and confirming or denying it.

That's not what they're talking about. They're talking about something much bigger. They're talking about the ability of human beings to use their wisdom, to use their reasoning, to make progress, to use those things to advance civilization, to use those things to get ahead, to use those things to extract lasting gain out of God's world.

This was very, very popular in the late 19th century and early 20th century. It kind of died for a little while. What killed it was World War I.

When all that human progress and technology resulted in one of the most horrific bloodbaths that had ever existed. You'd think that would have permanently crushed our faith in human engineering and enlightenment.

[ 18 : 20 ] But I suppose after living 70 years under the umbrella of the American nuclear arsenal, that has prevented mass war all over the world, I suppose we develop a case of amnesia.

Hopefully we don't have to relearn this lesson. We can get all judgy about people who think like that. So before we start feeling really smug about ourselves, let's look inward.

Second example of how we twist wisdom. Religious people can do it. And I'll hit myself. I see this a lot among Bible scholars and theologians. Because we can quote all of our favorite Bible verses.

We can quote all these theologians and church fathers and creeds. And we can list all these things with a smug sense of superiority. A false sense that, you know, I'm in control.

I've got some sort of degree of control and mastery of the universe because of this cheaply acquired knowledge that I read in a book. That I haven't really taken to heart. It's just sort of this cerebral intellectual stuff.

[ 19 : 25 ] And you can do that. You can quickly acquire that sort of knowledge. And it's going to work for you and make you feel in control right up until you encounter the brutal reality that this false wisdom does not prepare you to face suffering and death.

It does not prepare you to face life under the sun. None of this mastery of life is going to get you ahead. Being a know-it-all doesn't work.

Trust me. I've tried. I had that reputation among my friends. It doesn't work. It doesn't get you ahead. What the preacher is telling us in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 16 is that the good life is not gained by extravagant piety and mastery.

The good life is not gained by extravagant piety and mastery of life. In other words, we cannot manipulate our way towards the American dream. We cannot manipulate our way towards this enlightened progress.

We cannot manipulate our way towards having all the answers. We cannot manipulate our way to earning God's favor on us. And just so that he's not misunderstood.

[ 20 : 38 ] Okay. The preacher tells us in verse 17 that we're not well served by running in the opposite direction from righteousness or wisdom. He says, So what he seems to be saying is this.

We should embrace both warnings. On the one hand, don't abandon righteousness and wisdom. Okay. So when I was saying those things about theology and doctrine and so forth, please don't take that to mean that I think theology is useless.

It is far from useless. I think every one of us would be well served by knowing and studying our Bible better, by learning the right doctrine and sound theology. Right? Every one of us would be well served by becoming more righteous people.

On the other hand, don't expect that accumulating enormous amounts of righteousness and wisdom is going to get you ahead in life under the sun.

Because he says, A person who fears God shall come out from both of them. A person who fears God is someone who sees things clearly. Who sees the world clearly. And who affirms that the world is centered on God.

[ 21 : 54 ] Who affirms a God-centered reality. You know, I'll borrow a bit of an illustration from John Piper. And he says that what this fear of the Lord, what this wisdom is like.

It's like imagining that you look at the world as a solar system in which everything in life revolves around this source of glory and light and incredible gravity at its center.

That is God. God is the source of gravity. He keeps everything in harmony and in motion when he is at the center. He is also a source of incredible gravity in that we approach him solemnly.

Soberly. We fear the Lord. Someone who does not fear the Lord is like taking that sun out of the center of the solar system and throwing it away. And all the other little planets and moons either fly off into space, far away from one another, or they crash into each other.

That's the difference between the life that someone who is wise and who fears God and someone who doesn't. Someone who fears God affirms a God-centered reality. They embrace and they experience the presence of God.

[ 23 : 03 ] And this person has a right orientation to life. This person is truly wise. And the preacher wants to encourage us to embrace this way of thinking. He says, he gives us a proverb to encourage us in verse 19.

Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. So in other words, a person who fears the Lord, a person who is wise in this way, that person understands both the benefits and the

limits of righteousness and wisdom.

That person who thinks that way, who understands these things, that person is more effective, more valuable to our community, to our town of Squamish, to our culture.

This person is more effective and valuable than ten well-paid government bureaucrats. Where the fear of the Lord is present, your income taxes can be safely reduced. Where the fear of the Lord is not present, you need those bureaucrats.

The preacher explains to you and the preacher explains to me in verses 20 through 22, why this wisdom is so useful and why it is so necessary.

[ 24 : 16 ] He says, Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. So in other words, the reason wisdom is necessary, the reason it is so useful and so important, is because wisdom recognizes our sin.

Wisdom recognizes that you and I, we are not righteous. In fact, according to God's expectations of righteousness, there is not a righteous man on earth.

Friends, that is one reason that righteousness, quote unquote, doesn't work. Because no one is righteous.

No one loves God. No one loves other people the way that we should. Maybe you have heard the question asked, sort of the armchair philosopher question, are human beings basically good or basically evil?

[ 25 : 24 ] And the Bible's answer to that is human beings are basically good and thoroughly corrupted. We are basically good and thoroughly corrupted. No part of our being has escaped corruption.

Our minds, emotions, and will, they've all been corrupted by this sin. We are thoroughly corrupted by this rebellion against the good life, by this rebellion against God's way of righteousness.

Wisdom recognizes our sin. And true wisdom is valuable precisely because you and I are corrupted by sin, precisely because we live among a people corrupted by a sin.

To fear the Lord, to be wise, is to be realistic about the lack of human righteousness in us and the lack of human righteousness around us.

So when you and I find other people, we learn that other people have been gossiping about us, when we learn that other people have been sinning against us in other ways, we're not surprised.

[ 26 : 27 ] We're not startled. Because that's how sinners behave. That's what they do. They sin. We're also a bit slower to condemn them.

Slower to condemn them because wise people become sensitive to their own sin, first of all. They see and recognize their own sin, first of all. Several hundred years after this was written, Jesus of Nazareth encouraged his disciples to respond exactly this way to other sinners.

In Matthew chapter 7, here's what Jesus said. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is the log in your own eye?

You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. So to explain that a little further, the author, Dave Harvey, he says, when our goal is to address someone else's sin, Jesus tells us, our own sin must loom large in our sight. It must be, by far, the primary and more significant issue. Some of the best counsel I've ever received, and counsel that I regularly give out to other people, just because it is so good, is how do you deal with other people's sins?

[ 27 : 54 ] Someone close to you has sinned against you, and sometimes someone will come to me saying, you know, how do I talk with them about it? How do I tell them about their sin? How do I confront them about that?

And the counsel that I once received, and that I will always give out if you ask me, is this, that in a situation like that, it's almost never one party being 100% innocent, and the other party being 100% guilty.

It's usually both have sinned in some way. Maybe one person said something rude and cruel to the other, and the other person responded by sniping back. Or some person did something, and the other person responded by yelling at them.

Or, you know, usually I've almost never run into a situation where one party is 100% innocent. So here's what you do. If you ever come to me, and you're asking, how do I approach this other person who sinned against me?

Here's what I'll do, and here's what I'll tell you, and I'll tell you this because I think this is what Jesus is saying. You go to that person, and you confess your sin. And yeah, their sin may look way worse than yours, but someone who is wise sees their own sin looms so much larger.

[ 29 : 05 ] When your brother has a speck in his eye, and you've got a smaller speck in your eye, that smaller speck fills your entire vision. It's all you can see when you see with wisdom. And so you go to your brother, and you say, I've sinned against you.

I did this. Will you forgive me? And so now you might be thinking, okay, that's great. So I'll do that, and then once they forgive me, then I'll bring up their sin. Now here's what you do.

Conversation's over. Come back two days later, and confront them about their sin. The reason you do that is because they have to know that you're not doing this just to sort of like clear the books because their sin is the real problem.

You're looking at your sin. You're taking it seriously. You're addressing it. Then in a couple days later, come back and let's talk about theirs. Deal with your own sin first. And that might sound terrible.

Okay? That's not fun. It is not fun to do that. But believe it or not, this is the good life. Believe it or not, this is the good life. The good life is found in recognizing our sin and inadequacy.

[ 30 : 10 ] The good life is found in recognizing our sin and inadequacy. And if you think that sounds morbid and depressing, well, maybe that's why you don't do it.

Maybe that's why you're not doing it. But really, this is one step on the path to the good life that God wants for you and me. And if you don't take this step, you're never going to get that good life. The good life, the life that you can get and that will never be taken away from you is found in recognizing our sin, first of all.

But it's not just our sin that we are meant to recognize. Wisdom recognizes not only our sin but our inadequacy. Wisdom recognizes that we are unable to discern what the preacher is going to call the scheme of this world.

We're unable to find out the order and structure of the world. The preacher writes in verse 23, All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, I will be wise.

But it was far from me. That which has been is far off and deep, very deep. Who can find it out? We might call this the scheme, the order, the structure, the framework, the blueprint of the universe that God created, whatever you want to call it.

[ 31 : 32 ] It is inaccessible and it is unfathomable. It is inaccessible because we cannot, a single human being cannot possibly gather all the data that we need to understand it.

Our lives are too short. Our lives are vanishing away. It is unfathomable because its complexity is just orders of magnitude beyond the human ability to comprehend it.

We're kind of like, I don't know, we're like squirrels trying to, you know, understand the inner workings of the internal combustion engine of the car in which we built our nest.

Right? We're like a colony of ants. We're trying to understand the inner workings of a desktop computer in which we're looking for food. We have no capability. It is so far beyond us to grasp and to understand what is going on in this world.

The preacher understands that he doesn't know what he doesn't know. He admits that a lot of the formulaic wisdom that just gets thrown around all over the place, this wisdom that we count on, it doesn't hold true 100% of the time.

[ 32 : 40 ] Some of it doesn't even hold true most of the time. And he's reflecting over all of this wisdom that he's been acquiring. There's really only one pattern that he's found to hold true infallibly without exception.

Right? So he's spent, basically, he's spent decades of his own life. He's spent decades of his life experience. He's trying to put together a 100,000 piece jigsaw puzzle of the structure and scheme of the world.

And he has to find the pieces first. And he's finally, after decades, found one piece. And he had to work really hard for it. And so, of course, he's going to tell us what it is. Verse 25.

Verse 25. I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. And I find

something more bitter than death.

The woman whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. So there you go.

[ 33 : 40 ] That's his one infallible finding. There are some women out there who are nothing but trouble, but he who pleases God doesn't get suckered in by them. Right? And he hasn't seen an exception to this.

And I'm just trying to think through it. Honestly, I don't know that I've ever seen an exception to that either, right? I've never seen a man who is genuinely wise, who is genuinely faithful to God, genuinely dependent on God's family, who is good in God's sight.

Never seen them get suckered in by a pretty face on an obviously crazy woman. Right? Never happened. That's one thing the preacher has confirmed as a rock solid truth from his own experience, from his own observations and experience and wisdom gathering.

That's the only puzzle piece he's got. Honestly, it seems fairly obvious, I guess. You know, this is like, you know, you found that one puzzle piece and it's like one of those blue sky pieces that could go just about anywhere in the puzzle and you're like, wow, good job.

You know? The preacher tells us that's the best he could come up with on his own, from his own observation, from his own perspective. He continues in verse 27.

[ 34 : 50 ] Behold, this is what I found, says the preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things, which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

Now, if the translation of the Bible you're reading is the New International Version, or especially if it's the New Living Translation, you might find verse 28 to be a little off-putting.

Here's how the NIV translates the second half of verse 28. I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. If you're thinking, wow, this guy has a problem with women, wait till you hear how the New Living Translation puts it.

Only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one woman. Now, most of the other translations I think handle this better. The word upright or virtuous that we see here, that is not in the original text.

The translator supplied that because the sentence is really confusing. They're doing their best, you know, I don't want to be so hard on it. They're doing their best, okay, they're trying to make sense out of a really confusing verse.

[ 36 : 02 ] The ESV shows how it's confusing. Here's the translation and it's very close to the original. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

What does that even mean? The commentator, Ian Proven, just a phenomenal commentary on Ecclesiastes, absolutely loving it.

And Ian Proven argues that the preacher is talking, he's still talking about this attempt to gather wisdom, this attempt to find all of these puzzle pieces that make up the scheme of the universe. And there are pieces out there to be gathered, but the preacher himself really has only been able to get one.

He's never been able to get more than just that one piece. And so what he is doing in this verse is he's lamenting his limited perspective. And I think Ian Proven is correct here.

And the reason I think he's correct is that in verses 25 through 28, the preacher uses, he talks about himself in a very personal way that he doesn't do in the rest of the book.

[ 37 : 07 ] He refers to himself as I and my soul and even throws in there that phrase, says the preacher, which is just really weird. He hasn't referred to himself as that in a really long time.

What he's doing is emphasizing that he is speaking from the limits of his own point of view.

Speaking from the limits of all that he can kind of pick up by observation from the world, all the wisdom he can gather.

So here's how we might paraphrase the last half of verse 28. I have gained the perspective of only one man out of a thousand. And in all these experiences, I haven't even gained the perspective of a single woman.

You know, which makes sense, which is why he talks about, you know, he sees the woman whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters, right? Maybe he's had some experience. No doubt, if it were a woman writing this rather than a man, she might have had something to say about men whose hearts are snares and nets and whose hands are fetters.

She might have found a totally different piece of the puzzle, but probably not more than one. This is only one man. And this man is honest in a way I think that we are not, and especially in our culture. [ 38 : 19 ] He is honest about how hard it is to get firm, solid, reliable knowledge that you can bank on. Gathering infallible knowledge about the world is really, really, really hard.

You know, the evening news, it just throws around these phrases like, studies have shown, or a new study has come out, and you know, and this is supposed to be like the new information that you can rock saw and you can bank on about how, you know, it's like if you eat white bread, you are going to get cancer and stuff like that, right?

They come to us like these are, these have been carved in tablets of stone and brought down from Mount Sinai. You know, thus saith the researchers.

But the more you learn, you know, especially if you study about how you have to put together these studies and experiments, you learn how difficult, especially in the fields of psychology and sociology, there's so many problems with sample size, control groups, statistical analysis, replication of results, researcher bias, all of these issues, the more you realize how so very, very, very, very hard it is to learn anything true and trustworthy at all, to learn anything true and trustworthy about how to live life wisely in God's creation about how to live in a skillful manner. You know, for everything, there is a study and a theory for every matter under heaven. It's not getting us anywhere. People still live foolishly. The scheme of things, the order of the universe, the structure of our world, it just seems so confused, it seems so tangled, it seems so impossible to unsnarl.

[ 40 : 02 ] And the preacher tells us another thing that he does know because he tells us how we got into this mess we're in. Verse 29. See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

So in other words, it's true that you and I, on the one hand, we are limited just by our very nature. We're limited in our mastery of life simply because we're human, right? Simply because our bodies and our minds, we have finite limits.

You're only so smart. You're only so able to put things together. But there's something else that's sowing seeds of chaos. There's something else that is disrupting what reasoning abilities that we do have.

Remember how I said that human beings are basically good but thoroughly corrupted. And it is our minds that have been corrupted among other things. God has made human beings upright. God has made human beings good. God has made human beings able to learn and to embrace the good life. But we have sought out many schemes. We have rejected God's ordering of the world.

[ 41 : 10 ] We've rejected God's place at the center of the universe. We have tried to establish a new structure, a new framework, a new order of things. And this began with our ancestors, with the first man and woman who God placed in a garden.

And we read in Genesis chapter 2 what the Lord God told them. You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You shall not eat for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

At some point in their relationship with God in this garden, Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, would be faced with a decision. And this is an inevitable decision.

Would they trust God's assessment of what the good life is? Would they embrace the way that God had ordered the universe? Or would they reject God? Would they decide for themselves what the good life is?

Would they try to reorder the universe to their own liking? Would they try to give themselves control and usurp God's authority? God was very gracious.

[ 42 : 17 ] God was so good. He made this decision about as black and white, as cut and dried as possible. There was no way this was going to sneak up on them. He placed a tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden.

That clarity of decision making left them without excuse. When this happened in Genesis chapter 3, when the woman saw, when she saw and assessed that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.

It was going to make her wise. It was going to give them a way to restructure the world. It was going to give them another scheme to replace the scheme that God had placed the world in to replace

God's structure of the world.

They saw and assessed that the good life and this is their assessment, the good life is found in disobedience to God. They determined that they would seek out another scheme. They would reorder, they would exploit the world to their liking.

So they acted unrighteously, they acted wickedly, they flew in the face of God's right expectations of them and God responded to their unrighteousness by condemning them and by condemning because they were the best humanity had to offer then and now.

[ 43 : 46 ] By condemning them and condemning all humanity to confusion so that now we are running every which way, now we are fighting and arguing and raging against one another and against our God in an attempt to gain control, in an attempt to gain control by means of extravagant piety and mastery of life.

And we can't get out of this mess and we have tried and tried and tried for thousands of years. What we need is a savior and we have a good savior in the Lord Jesus Christ because Jesus is the second Adam.

He is the one man who stands in the place of everyone who believes in him. Jesus is the one righteous man. Jesus is the one wise man.

He is perfectly pleasing to God. And Jesus was crucified, Jesus was buried, and Jesus was raised to life on behalf of everyone who believes in him.

So now everyone, everyone, and that could be you, who confesses their faith, who confesses their sins, who turns from their sin to believe in Jesus Christ, to follow Jesus Christ, everyone who does that now belongs to Jesus Christ and is united with Christ.

[ 45 : 05 ] And whoever belongs to Jesus Christ, whoever is united with Jesus Christ, is counted as righteous by God and is given access to the wisdom and insight of God's spirit.

And so the good life is not gained by extravagant piety and mastery of life. The good life is found in recognizing our sin and inadequacy. Now as we...