

Solomon's Twelve Secrets

Session 7: Solomon's Wisdom for Whatever Has You Worried

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter seven. As we begin this morning, we'll do a shout out to the Men of Cornerstone at Cornerstone Community Church in Manchester, Iowa. Looked you guys up. They got a great church, sits right there on a golf course. Not bad. They are just getting started, six of them to start, going to be meeting on Friday mornings at 6:00 AM. Craig Hutton in the leader. Craig says, "Our goal is to enhance and advance each man's knowledge and strength as a disciple of Jesus Christ." I love that. Don't you just love each week seeing the different visions and purpose statements that these groups have? This is a great one. Craig Hutton leading this group. They do meet at the church upstairs in room two. Would you join me in welcoming the Men of Cornerstone to our Bible study this morning? One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We're so glad to have you with us and all of you other men too who join us online each week or through podcasts or iTunes or YouTube or however you're doing it, all those different ways.

This is a high tech Bible study. Y'all realize this? This is a high tech Bible study. The title of the message today in this series, Solomon's 12 Secrets, Solomon's Wisdom for Whatever Has You Worried. I'm going to go ahead and draw your attention to the last verse in chapter seven. Solomon says, "This only have I found God has made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." The subject that Solomon has chosen for the book is to search out what is it that is worthwhile for a man to do in the few days that he has in this life. In this particular chapter, he's focused on the subject of wisdom. He's sort of asking, "What is it that is wise for a man to do or what is it that will make a man wise?" He says the reason he's doing this is that men have gone in search of many schemes. Then, reading on into just the first verse of chapter eight, he says, "Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance."

I just remembered this right at this moment, how Abraham Lincoln once fired a man, I think a cabinet member, and he was asked why. Lincoln's answer was, "I didn't like his face." What he meant was is that there was something about his face that showed that he was a hard man or whatever Lincoln thought he was, but it didn't have the characteristic that Solomon's talking about. "Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance." The challenge that we have with this particular chapter is that it's very much like a list of proverbs. In other words, each verse or most of the verses deal with a single topic, and then the next verse changes the subject. They're all sort of under the mantle of wisdom, but I think we can pull a clear message out of this book. What I'm going to do today is I'm actually going to start with the Big Idea. Usually, we're inductive and build up to that. Today, we're going to be deductive and we'll start with that, and then see what we can find in the chapters to support it.

The Big Idea today, and this is more of an action point or an application because this is an application-oriented Bible study. The Big Idea today: **Stop trying to relive the past, control the present, and know**

the future. We'll take a look at what Solomon has to say about the past, the present, and the future. Before we get there, let me familiarize you with some of the other ideas in the book, some of these proverbs. Starting in verse one, "A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death is better than the day of birth. It's better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart." Well, you can see there is a whole message in each of those verses. We can't do all of those, so you can think about what the meaning and application of each of those would be.

"The heart of the wise," and now we're getting into this word, wisdom, "is in the house of the mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless." He's really drawing attention to the value of wisdom over folly, how that is meaningless. Then, in verse seven for example, "Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of the wise." No, anger resides in the lap of the fools. You can see we have here a list of proverbs about wisdom.

Then, in the next verse, verse 10, "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?'" Have you ever wondered where the saying came from, "What ever happened to the good old days?" Well, it came right from this verse. Any time somebody says, "What ever happened to the good old days?" You say, "Oh, you've been reading Ecclesiastes." They'll say, "What's Ecclesiastes?"

STOP TRYING TO RELIVE THE PAST

The first thing we'll look at here is stop trying to relive the past. Look at the next sentence. It says, "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?'" Which is reliving the past a little bit, "For it is not wise to ask such questions." It is not wise to ask, "What ever happened to the good old days?" It's not wise to relive the past. Stop trying to relive the past or rehashing the past.

We had a man who attended this Bible study, and he came to me one day. He'd been here for 10 years. I already knew that he was an angry person, that you could tell by experiences with him that he was angry about something, but he never talked about it. He kept that bottled up. One day, finally, he told me that 10 years before he started coming to the Bible study, he lost his dream job, and he had never gotten over it. He was so angry about it. He confessed to me that particular day that for 10 years, he had been berating his children and belittling his wife and taking out his anger at home on them. He was broken. He was, at the end of that, trying to reclaim or rehash or relive the past. Do you have something like that? Do you have something in your past that you keep reliving, that you keep wanting to go back to?

I couldn't help but have the words of Bruce Springsteen's Glory Days pop into my mind. I decided to download the lyrics. "I had a friend, was a big baseball player back in high school. He could throw that speedball by you, make you look like a fool, boy. Saw him the other night at this roadside bar. I was walking in. He was walking out. We went back inside, sat down, had a few drinks, but all he kept talking about was glory days. Well, they'll pass you by, glory days. In the wink of a young girl's eye, glory days, glory days." Then, he gives a couple of more illustrations, and then he finishes up, "Now I'm thinking I'm going down to the well tonight," whatever that is, "and I'm going to drink till I get my fill. I hope when I get old, I don't sit around thinking about it, but I probably will. Yeah, just sitting back trying to recapture

a little of the glory. Well, time slips away and leaves you with nothing, mister, but boring stories of glory days. Glory days, well, they'll pass you buy. Glory days in the wink of a young girl's eye. Glory days, glory days."

You might be stuck with a previous life that you think is better than the one that you have now. That would be one kind of a narrative, but I wonder if you would agree with me that the narratives that we have in our minds that are good get better over time than they really were and that the narratives that are in our mind that are bad get worse over time than they actually are. We think that we would want to go back to a previous period in our life, wish we could recapture that, when really, 10 years later, really it isn't really as good as we remember and visa versa. The narratives that we have that are bad, I've talked about this here just a couple weeks ago or within the last few weeks, just about the whole idea of the father wound or the mother wound, in my case.

I had a mother wound. I didn't have a father wound. I had a mother wound. My mother passed away when I was 54 years of age, and I didn't feel anything. I thought that was a little strange. I mean, I didn't feel anything. She died, my mother passed away. I felt nothing. A little odd? I thought that was a little odd so I decided to go get some counseling. I did, and I found out that I had a mother wound. Who would have thought I had a mother wound? When I was a little boy, I remember this pretty clearly, eight, nine, 10 years of age, I remember getting ready to go to a little league baseball game. I remember that my parents said they wanted to come to the game.

Well, they had not been to any of the other games, and I remember very clearly pleading with them with tears in my eyes that I didn't want them to come to the game, and they believed me and they didn't go. Then, I remember threading my glove over my handlebars and crying all the way to the baseball field because my parents weren't going to be there. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, yeah, but apparently I made a what my counselor called a vow. We sort of traced it back to then. Again, this is a narrative. It could be wrong, right? It's just a narrative. It's a reconstruction of history. It's a narrative. Apparently, I made some kind of a vow. Well, if you don't need me, if you don't love me, if you don't care about me, I'm done with you. From that age on, I was basically done with my parents, you see, and quit high school and left as soon as I could.

Now, I have really, not so much now, but even 10 years ago, I would have been very, very harsh in my narrative about my past, but I've softened. They're gone and now I've had enough of the problems at different ages that they obviously had too, and I see that life is not as simple as I thought it was. I've given them much more of a break. I've kind of rewritten the narrative. Don't relive the past, the one that was really good and you wish you could get back to, but also, this is not in the text, but I think it's a very appropriate extension of this principle, don't relive your negative past either. Don't exaggerate these narratives. I'm working with a young man now, been working with him for a while, who can not get to success. He has not been able to get to success. The reason that he has not been able to get to success is that he keeps reliving the past. Just at the moment when he's about to take hold of success, the guilt and the shame that he has for the things that he's done in the past somehow sabotage his success. By the way, everybody in his life has forgiven him, but he can't accept the forgiveness. He won't forgive himself. He won't allow himself to be forgiven because of his guilt and shame.

The first stop on our journey here today deals with the past, to stop reliving the past, to think about the narratives that you have about the past, whether they're good or bad, but realizing that ... You know, there are four voices in your head all the time. All the time, you have four voices in your head if you're a Christian: the world, the flesh, the devil, and the Spirit. We have to be intentional about which of the

voices that we're listening to. There are so many different narratives that the world is putting out there. One of the big narratives right now is to divide the generations. You see this in the media, right? Why does it happen? I don't know. Well, I could guess, but none of us really know. I just think it's the fact that they get too many people reporting, they don't have anything else to do except to generate things.

You know, when people talk about, well, for a while, it was the attack on the millennials. Now, I'm seeing more coming out about the boomers. The boomers have betrayed everybody. Anyway, these are narratives, but they're not from the Holy Spirit. You know, the Holy Spirit is about wanting to bring unity, love, peace, unity. You get the idea. There are these different narratives out there. It's important to make sure that you listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit about the past, and the Holy Spirit has inspired all of the scriptures, including Solomon here, and Solomon says, "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask these questions." It's just not wise to ask these questions. Big Idea today: **Stop trying to relive the past, control the present, and know the future.**

STOP TRYING TO CONTROL THE PRESENT

Now, let's move to stop trying to control the present. By the way, in regard to wisdom in the broader perspective here, verses 11 and 12 say, "Wisdom is like an inheritance. It's a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves the life of its possessor." Then, onto stop trying to control the present. Verse 13, "Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other." We talked about this last week. I read to you Ecclesiastes chapter six verse 10 in the New Living Translation. To refresh your memory or if you weren't here, Ecclesiastes chapter six verse 10 in the New Living Translation says this, "Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be. So there's no use arguing with God about your destiny." This was considered to be or talked about in theology as the sovereignty of God.

I did speak to one of our men about it afterwards and wanted to know if I was reformed in my theology. I said, "Well, I just was reading straight out of the Bible. It's not a theological persuasion." Now, I have a theological persuasion, and I'm not going to tell you what it is because if you're not mature enough to hear it, then I will alienate you. If you are mature enough to hear it, you don't need to know. I'm just teaching the Bible. I'm not teaching a sliver that has been blown up into its own idea. I'm teaching you, men, the Bible, and this is what the Bible says. This verse today in chapter seven basically says the same thing as in chapter six in a different way. Again, "When times are good, be happy. When times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other." Isaiah chapter 45 verse seven, "I create light and make the darkness. I send good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things," Isaiah chapter 45 verse seven. God is trying to get across to us that he's got this. He's got you. He knows what's going on.

I have a real estate deal right now. By the way, with regard to the sovereignty of God, this is my comfort in life. This is, the sovereignty of God, these verses that talk about that God's in control of this universe, this is my single greatest comfort in life. If it's not true, if God's not in control, looking around at everything that's going on, I'm hooking up my camper this afternoon and I'm out of here. If God is not in control, I am out of here. When we say that God is sovereign, it doesn't mean that he's micromanaging every little molecule. What it means is, what I said last week, he has this larger narrative for each of our lives that he's put into place. We can work on the Roman numerals and the capital A and the number one. Those things are set, where you're going to live, what color your skin is, whether you're going to go

bald or not, whether you're an endomorphic, mesomorphic, or what's the other one? Body style. If you're a big boned person, you're not get small bones by working out a lot. There's some things that are set in life.

As I say, my biggest comfort in life is that God is sovereign. I have a real estate deal that's supposed to close this month. Any of you who have done real estate deals know you really don't know if it's going to happen or not happen, especially when they have as many contingencies as they have in this one that I've got going on. Here's the thing. I'm not trying to control, I don't feel the need to control the present anymore. By the way, this is a big change in my life, which should be an encouragement, because I was the guy who used to say, "I just go through the open door." In my early days as a Christian, "I just go through the open door. Wherever the open door is, I just go through it." What I didn't tell anybody is that if I went up to the door and it was shut, I'd rattle it. Then, if it was locked, I'd bang on it. If I still couldn't get it open, I'd go get some C4 and I'd blow the hinges. I was going through that open door because I was going to be in control of the present.

It should be an encouragement to you that, after now walking with God for decades, I really am a different person. I look at this particular deal and, instead of trying to control it, my perspective is this. If it is God's sovereign will for this deal to close, then there's really nothing I can do to mess it up. I could call the buyer today and tell him, "I saw your wife on the street the other day and she is so ugly," and it would still close. I believe that. Well, maybe not all that way. You get my point. I mean, you don't have to parse your risks so carefully and be so nervous that you're going to mess something up if it's God will. Conversely, if it is not God's will for this deal to close this week, then I can pray and beg and plead with him and the seller and the seller's ugly wife, and nothing's going to make it happen. That's because when times are good, be happy. When times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.

How about you? What is your default narrative? I'm controlling the events of today. What's the default narrative that you have? Most people, I'm not saying you, but most people would have a narrative that sounds something like, "If it's going to be, it's up to me." You know, that's one of those old self-help bromides. Another narrative you might have might be the negative side to that, "Well, there's nothing I can do about it anyway, so I'm just going to let the chips fall where they may." I think a better narrative is this. By the way, there is a great quote. I've attributed it to Dwight L Moody. Some people attribute it to Ignatius. I don't know who gets credit for it, but someone has said somewhere along the line, "Pray like it's all up to God and work like it's all up to you."

Oh my gosh. I just had an epiphany this week. That is so wrong. Pray like it is all up to God. Work like it is all up to God. Oh my gosh. Talk about getting your narratives mixed up. I've had that narrative in my head for a couple of decades. However, that said, we do take human responsibility. Here's the picture I have in my mind of how we take responsibility. I'm like a little child with a crown in my hands. I can either reject God's help and draw the little primitive picture that I could draw with my own frail hand or I could invite my father, "Father, Dad, would you please help me?" and allow my father to come and wrap his hand around my hand. I'm still working, but my father is helping me do the work. Does this make sense? That's how we stop trying to control the present.

STOP TRYING TO KNOW THE FUTURE

The Big Idea here: **Stop trying to relive the past, control the present, and know the future.** Now, back to our text. Stop trying to know the future. The verse says, 14, "When times are good, be happy; bad,

consider: God made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." What? A man cannot discover anything about his future. One day, I took a man to lunch. He said to me, he said, "I don't know where my life is going." In other words, "I don't know the future." He said, "I don't know where my life is going." I asked him, I said, "Are you happy?" He said, "No, I am not happy." I said to him, I said, "I think I may know what's going on. Let me tell you." I talked to him about this principle out of Ecclesiastes, "No man can know anything about the future. You don't know where your life is going, and it's frustrating to you. Instead of putting your faith in a good and a great and loving, merciful, gracious God, you are trying to figure out how to control the particular details of your future. The problem is and the reason you're not happy is that it's impossible to do that. It's impossible to know the future. Because you're trying to orchestrate that and know what the future looks, you're never going to find happiness."

I was sitting in my backyard one day. I was 50 years of age, sitting in the backyard in the morning in the dark, praying and so forth. It struck me that for 50 years, I had been experiencing apprehension about the day ahead, the same day which the next morning I'd be thanking God for in prayers of gratitude. I thought to myself, "There's some opportunity for a paradigm shift here." I'm apprehensive about today now, but tomorrow morning, the same time, I'm going to be saying prayers of thanksgiving. Why don't I approach today, the day that I can't know what's going to happen, why don't I approach this in the Psalm 118 verse 24 mindset? "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it," knowing that he's got this, knowing that he has this.

What's the wise application for today? It's to believe in God. It's to trust him, that he does know what's best for us. Then, the inscrutable counsel of his divine will, he actually knows what's best for each of us. You've heard me say this before. The earth is heaven's womb. This is just the womb, and we are all in what? Anybody remember? Gestation. The earth is heaven's womb, and we are all in gestation. This is gestation. We're not even born into the eternal place yet, wherever that is, whatever that is. You're a fetus. You're God's fetus, for crying out loud. Stop trying to know what's going to happen after you come out of the birth canal. Again, the Big Idea today: **Stop trying to relive the past, control the present, and know the future.** Put your faith in God, Jesus.

John chapter 14 verse 27, to close it out. Listen. Take it in. Drink it in. Believe it. Love it. Live it. Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I leave with you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Let us pray. Our dearest Father, I pray that for all of these men here online, listening to audio, watching a video, doing it by themselves, in groups, Lord, I pray for all of us, Lord, that you would help us change the narratives that we have about the past, the present, and the future, that we would take great comfort that you are the sovereign God, that nothing is happening outside of your will. Two sparrows bought and sold for a penny, not one of them falls to the ground apart from your knowledge. I ask this in Jesus' name for each of these men. Amen.