

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty)

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If you would open your bibles to Proverbs 4:7 we are going to begin this service here. I am going to be resuming in Ecclesiastes again and of this series this is number 20.

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

As we begin this sermon, I want you to take notice of the word principal, and the way it is spelled in this verse—principal. This word ending in ‘pal’ determines the way it is to be understood. According to the American Heritage College dictionary, it means: first, highest, foremost in importance, rank, worth, or degree, chief.

It does not mean a broad general rule but a quality or characteristic of the highest order, therefore the verse is saying, that wisdom is of the highest rank among those qualities being considered in this context, therefore get wisdom.

The NIV translates this phrase as wisdom is supreme. Further research on this verse reveals that it is in reality an expansion of verse 5; verse 7 is an exhortation to make every effort in life to pursue and get wisdom. It is as though there is in a practical sense nothing more important to life.

I want to remind us of the definition we are using for biblical wisdom, and where as the world associates wisdom with being in a rather abstract philosophical dimension of life, the Bible's wisdom consists of a package of spiritual attributes that are deliberately shaped into a practical skill in living God's way of life.

Notice that I said, “deliberately shaped.” It does not just magically appear; in its broadest application, we should be using it every day of life. Its attributes consist of such qualities as knowledge of God, understanding, discernment, judgment, prudence, equity, the fear of God, and more besides those already mentioned.

As these elements are blended, shaped and used, they become practical spiritual sagacity combined with youthful skills in applying the teachings of God's way of life as exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Ecclesiastes 7:8-10 The end of a thing is better than its beginning, And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools. Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

We are going to continue on through chapter 7 in which multiple comparisons are being made between wisdom and characteristics of possible attitudes and conduct that often accompany the unfolding of life's activities in anybody's life. These things are likely to be met, but they are being combined here in a context with wisdom to show better ways of applying or doing things.

Each comparison is showing wisdom's significance to a successful life; we are learning that the best way to perceive the council in Ecclesiastes is that it is written to God's converted children and not to the world, thus the thoughts tied directly into instruction and commands in other parts of God's word.

Much of this council is to patiently and meekly endure the trials of life that are tied to the fact that God is directly involved in them right along with us. Thus over the long haul the trials are going to have a positive result.

God and Solomon is urging us to not fall into the trap of unreasoning haste, just to get rid of the problem as it were, because we grasp that Ecclesiastes is written to God's converted children. The willfulness involved in one's haste is really nothing more than an expression of carnal pride coming to the fore. That is a reference to verse 9 where it says, "do not hasten in your spirit to be angry."

The first piece of advice for today is to not fall into the trap of unreasoning haste just to get rid of the problem. Verse 8 needs to be explained more thoroughly because it relates to a pertinent fact regarding these comparisons.

Recall that I stated that these comparisons are not to be understood as absolutes, but rather applied according to the circumstances during life's trials; this is because each trial may present different nuances that must be thought through.

Verse 8 proves my point here—the end of everything is most definitely, absolutely not always better, yet the verse said, "the end of a thing is better than its beginning." That is not an absolute, as I will prove to you in just a moment.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

A clear example is sin. Sin almost invariably begins pleasantly, perhaps even pleasurable. The fruit undoubtedly tasted good to Eve, but then they were kicked out of the garden and they died. Would you say that sin which started out so pleasantly, so good ended well? I do not think so.

You are beginning to get my point here as to why these are not to be considered as absolutes.

Judas undoubtedly was pleased with his thirty pieces of silver, but then he hanged himself. Was the end better? Not at all. I use these examples because they are so clear. Sin never, never, never ends well.

Things, circumstances, projects end well only when the project or the trial or the circumstance that was begun had a wise purpose right from the start, then that gives us something to work on that has very big possibilities of ending well.

I will give you a series of examples from Jesus (then Peter, who draws upon what Jesus said) and vividly brings conformation of its seriousness.

Luke 11:23-26 “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none, he says, I will return to my house from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order, Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

It seemingly started out so well, but it did not finish well. Are you beginning to see more clearly why we cannot take those comparisons that are made in the book of Ecclesiastes as absolutes? They have to be thought through; and the key to whether or not they are to be taken in a right way, is whether or not they start out well, with a good project that is fully worthy of entering into.

The choice made at the beginning is very important to whether or not it is going to be profitable at the end—to put all this work and care into what it is going to take to accomplish that. We will go from here to II Peter, where he made a similar statement.

II Peter 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb. "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire,"

I think you can see this is the parallel to what Jesus illustrated in Luke chapter 11.

Here is a quick summary: In both of these cases a good project may have begun, but it might not be carried through, so we are admonished to be careful. Jesus uses the illustration of an empty house. Have you ever walked through an empty house? Almost everyone has done that; it may have possibilities, but while empty, it is not a warm, accepting, and welcoming place.

Some of the reasons why the beginning of a good project might not be carried through fit right into the remainder of the council that is given back in Ecclesiastes 7:8-10.

Ecclesiastes 7:8-10 The end of a thing, is better than its beginning, And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rest in the bosom of fools. Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

The context of Jesus and Peter's council in Luke 11 and II Peter 2 assumes the person is called, forgiven, and changing, which is good. Jesus terms it, "swept clean." Peter calls it, "escaped from the pollution of the world." But devotion to the project in both cases is weak; the person regresses and becomes entangled again in his pre-conversion ways.

This happens on occasion, and this is a very strong illustration regarding dangers that might fall upon us as we go along the way. Jesus cursed the fig tree even though it produced no rotten figs; in fact, it did not produce any figs at all, but it looked so good on the outside with all its foliage and at least it did not produce any rotten figs.

The man who rejected his pound, the gift given to him upon conversion, was rejected. He simply did nothing with it. In other words, he showed no positive fruits from his gift, just like the fig tree had no positive fruit.

Solomon names four possibilities as to why progress ceases and decline grows. They are: pride, impatience, anger, and discouragement. We might also say: a failure to correctly evaluate the trial's value. In reality, pride is the father (or generator) of the other three. A person must be able to control his willfulness—these other things that are mentioned (the other three) are expressions of pride's willfulness. They are: impatience, anger, and discouragement as one works through his trial.

The person who is successful controls them; and there is a reason why he controls them. It is because he sees a purpose in the trial, in what he is being asked to endure that is far greater than himself. This is very important to our overcoming. The person who overcomes sees a purpose in what he is being asked to endure that is far greater than himself.

For us, because by faith we see God involved in our lives trials, we should perceive them positively as preparations for the kingdom of God. That is why we see a purpose in those trials greater than ourselves. The result of that—if rightly used—is we control our impatience. We control our anger, we control our discouragement. All of those things could very easily come along unless we control the spirit within us. I am not talking about God's spirit. I am talking about man's carnal spirit that is still within us.

Sometimes we can learn from our children what we may be like in our relationship with God. I think this scenario has happened to every parent. A family piles into the automobile to begin a fairly long trip, and it is not long before one of the children ask (in a whiny voice), "Are we there yet? When will we get there? How much longer is it going to be?" They do this because they have little or no concept of time and distance; their mental clock moves much faster than older folks because they have no experience to teach them about such things.

A similar lack of experience may be working against us in relation to God, His purpose, and the trials that He puts us through. The result of that will be that we do not control ourselves; we do not control our impatience; we do not control our anger; we do not control our discouragement.

This is a major reason why we must come to know God.

John 17:3 "And this eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Eternal life is directly tied to knowing God, having an intimate knowledge of Him, and

living like He does. The comparison in these verses is really between patient endurance and pride with its fruits of impatience, hasty frustration, and discouragement.

Contained within this section (beginning in verse 7-10) is a muted suggestion that the long way is very often superior to the quick and easy way the immature almost invariably seek. I know the way I am. I begin jobs and then once I have begun, I want it to be done as quickly as I possibly can; if I do not control myself, I get frustrated. I will either leave everything, or I will say “there, it is done,” when it is not done.

Frustration can build up in me very quickly. I get a super idea for a sermon and I start out typing away at things, then I lose it. I am sitting there in front of the monitor and wonder why did I begin this, where was that great idea I had? It just evaporated out of my mind. I get frustrated. It teaches me that it was not a good idea to begin with; it was a flash in the pan and that is all I had.

I have had this happen thousands of times, but do you know what happens? Maybe a year later it will come into my mind again and this time it works. So it was not completely useless. God brought it back to mind at a better time, when I could make better use of it. I had gone through experiences of learning, understanding, or whatever, so that this time I could make good use of it. This is the kind of thing that he is talking about, here.

The muted suggestion that is in these three verses is that we must beware of that urge to get it done the quick and easy way, because most of the time that is an immature thought. We hurriedly do things just to get it done without being all that concerned about how well the job is done.

I think I have used this illustration before but it really stuck in my mind. It is a brief conversation I had with my main foreman when I was working in the mill. He sent me out on the job. I was going to be welding on a very high pressured press—the hydraulic line was going to supply the power, the force, the energy to work the press. I had been on the job the day before and I knew that it was going to be a job that was going to be very difficult for me to be able to do a good job on. I was not concerned that I would be able to weld it; the thing that concerned me was how good was the weld going to be, because I knew the pressure that was going to be going through that line was in the thousands of pounds per square inch.

I complained to him. I must have had a whiny voice like the kids in the automobile, and he said something to me that stuck with me. He said, “you are going to get jobs where you just have to do the best you can; not every weld is going to be made in a beautifully positioned place where you can really do a good job.” So when that comes up, there are

factors which you cannot overcome.

That kind of a situation can lead to frustration, when you get into that kind of a job. I have to admit this is the kind of attitude I was in, because the weld was way down in a ditch, five feet below the surface. It was a two-inch pipe, and I could not get under it to even look, so I had to do it blind, virtually. It held, but I think I had some help.

We are going to get into some situations like this where we are not really equal to the task, and there is no way to do a good job. The kind of thing that enters into your mind is the kind of frustration that makes you just want to throw up your hands and say, “forget it, get somebody else to do it.”

I think I had help from God for that. I did what I could, and I think God made it up the difference. We are going to be over our heads from time to time; in those cases our faith in God has to come through for us—to get us through that kind of situation.

In both Peter and Jesus’ illustration, it is clear God is not satisfied with partial solutions. You can see that in both of those situations. This is what the carnal mind so easily slips into being satisfied with. God desires flaws in our character to be overcome, not merely covered. We must remember during our relationship trials with God: He is the Creator, not us. He knows what we are accomplishing and how well it can be done.

I believe that this is why the comparison between patience, in this context, and a hasty anger, is made, because we get frustrated very easily from time to time. Very often doing a good job is superior simply because it is done well and does not have to be done over and over by someone else to check out, double check, the quality of the workmanship.

A question arises from these verse here, how often does a person’s temper feed into the way and quality that a job is done? This is important to all of us. One of the things that God is clearly implying here, is that a person’s temperament has a distinct affect upon the quality of workmanship.

Answer these questions to yourself, we are dealing mostly with anger here, in this part of the verse, Does an angry person make a good spouse? Does an angry person make a good employee? Does an impatient person make a good employee? Does an angry person make a good church member? Does a driver burning with road rage, make a good driver? I think you can see the answer to all of those things.

This is why God is so concerned about peoples temperament, because people who are

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

impatient, people who are angry, people who are easily frustrated, they do not do good things, they do not produce good fruit, it is not wisdom for them to be employees, spouses, whatever it happens to be.

Anger, on the other hand, is good if it is used at the right time and is controlled, directed toward the right ends and not simply an expression of personal willful frustration because things are not going ones way.

You can see what this section is about, God wants us to make the best of every trial that we are going through, regardless of what that trial is. If it is one that God has brought upon us in some way, then the beginning of it is good, it is a good project, and the end will be good too, depending upon how well we go through it. I think we have told you in the past that it is highly likely if we do not do the trial as well as God thinks we should, we are probably going to go through it again, and that is good.

It is good that God wants us to accomplish it better than we did before. So, it is not wise to be an impatient person, are you beginning to get the point? It is not wise to be an angry person, it is not wise to be somebody who gets discouraged easily, because it is going to affect the quality of what is produced at the end.

Proverbs 14:17 He who is quick tempered acts foolishly, And a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Proverbs 14:29 He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly. [think things through, God is saying.]

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. [good to keep ourselves in check.]

James 1:19-20 Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools. [we do not want to be counted among to fools]

What that means in practical situations, the anger is ready to burst out even at the slightest irritations, because, one's pride convinces one that his irritation simply should

not happen to such a wonderful person as me.

There is something interesting here attached to impatience, notice back in verse 7, that a bribe is mentioned, a bribe debases the heart. Impatience is a gentle step to bribery, how can that be? The answer is this, a bribe is very often taken because the recipient of the bribe, wants to hurry the process of achieving wealth and power, and the recipient of the bribe convinces himself that it is merely a short cut, it is a means of getting a job done quickly.

However, the bribe is in reality a trap that binds a person by indebtedness to another person, and ultimately to shame, so do not be misled by one word in verse 8. It is the word “end”—the end of a thing is better. The reason you do not want to misunderstand is that the end is not necessarily referring to the end of the job or the completion of the job. He is not necessarily suggesting a job being over and done with; rather, knowing the way God writes things, He is thinking about the outcome—what is produced is what He is concerned with or the quality that is achieved as we go through this trial.

Some things that do not seem to start well actually become very productive. There is a saying that “all's well that ends well.” That is the sort of thing that He is thinking of by the use of this word “end” in verse 8.

This is quite important to growing and overcoming; we are getting back to the quality that is produced in the end. Many, many times we are fearful of getting involved with even the first small steps of overcoming a difficulty so that one's conduct is improved. What do we usually do

in a case like that? We probably procrastinate; we hem and haw and we do nothing; we just fumble around rather than attacking the character problem that we know we have.

After a while we eventually convince ourselves that we really better do something. So after a few hesitant steps... I have seen it happen in my life many times. I begin to become encouraged because I am producing more than I ever thought possible would ever happen.

Are there examples of this in the Bible? Absolutely there are. A clear example to us can be found in the fact that when God sent His Son into this world, it was as a babe. You cannot get any weaker than that. He did it in a second rate occupied enslaved nation. He was born into an insignificant family, but what is going to be the end of that? What I am getting at here is that just because a thing starts out very small, and we begin to think that nothing good will ever come of this, still there are examples to show that God

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Himself practiced this even with His own Son. From that insignificant birth is going to come Revelation 22, with all of those glorified immortal people gathered into one awesome family.

Mr. Armstrong used to say nothing ever started as small as this work; he meant it. He did not mean that he did it; it was God who did it, but it started out with just one man and one woman who had a dream of truth and spreading it around.

Just because something begins small does not mean that it cannot build into something that is very great. We understand this in regard to our own problems; we begin so weak with anything that we have to overcome. It will never be overcome unless we jump in and begin, regardless of how hesitant we are, thinking maybe that nothing will ever be produced. Once we get involved in it, God begins to give us proof that it is going to produce something awfully good.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

This verse feeds right into the overall thoughts regarding how we think about life

now that we are in the midst of our calling and have a much clearer view of how things are going on here on planet earth. It is very easy for us to let ourselves get down, frustrated. To me discouragement is very much a child of impatience; we want to get things over with quickly and allow the carnal mind to motivate us to accept the bribe—that if we just return to what we were before, it will make life less stressful and tiring.

How many give up because of those feelings? This is understandable because the nation is going to hell in a hand basket, and we seem to be getting delivered right into the hands of this nation's enemies by those who are governing us, dragged into the gutter by others invading us. So much of this nation's wealth is flowing into the hands of the very few top one percent, as it were.

All of these things are indeed true to some degree, but we have to resist this influence and not allow it to get a firm grip on us because it indicates one's focus is too much on the carnal men and their self-centered flaws, rather than what God is accomplishing in order to fulfill His purposes and His promises.

I do not know how many times that I have either felt it or have heard people telling me

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

about how bad conditions are. They are bad, but we need to think of this in a very narrow way. I think it is narrow anyway. So all of those things are indeed true, but God is the other side of this coin. Yes, it is bad, but He is telling us to look ahead and focus on future accomplishments.

We have a choice; we can focus on the world around us, or we can focus on the future. It is not always easy to do, but it is something that we have to make efforts to accomplish. God wants us to honestly evaluate what we have received by virtue of His calling. How valuable is it to us? That is going to make a big difference in our life because we thought about it and we have honestly evaluated because we believe it.

I want you to think about an interesting aspect regarding what the Bible says, about the mind set of our father in the flesh, Abraham. To me this is interesting.

Genesis 13:1-2 [Abraham is described by God and God does not exaggerate] Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Hold on to that thought about being very rich, and turn back to Hebrews 11:10.

Hebrews 11:10 for he [Abraham] waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

So Hebrews 11:10 reports that despite all of the wealth, he was looking forward to a city whose builder is God. We know that he was wealthy enough to put together an army of over three hundred men, but God is showing us what dominated Abraham's mind. What drove him was not the present, but something in the future. Despite all of the wealth that he had, his mind was not lost in enjoying his wealth; his mind was still on the future, which he valued more highly than the wealth that he had. He is showing us what was in Abraham's heart.

Hebrews 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Issac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;

This very wealthy man lived in tents. A tent is a symbol of temporariness, while at the

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

same time it is also a symbol representing a lack of wealth, and a lack of status. This was a very wealthy man. Abraham was not unaware of the wealth of the world around him. First of all, he came from Ur of the Chaldeans, a very wealthy city. It was a thousand or so miles away from where he was living. He visited Egypt, the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world at that time.

We see man's vision of what Egypt was like when we go to the movies, like the "Ten Commandments." This is the only way that they can express the little that they know about Egypt itself. This was a powerful, wealthy nation. Abraham visited Egypt, and he experienced that. You do not build pyramids out of nothing; they are not paper Mache; they were not made out of papyrus. They are buildings that are still standing to this day. Not only were the Egyptians powerful in wealth, they were also pretty powerful in terms of the intellect that it takes to build things that are places of grandeur.

Abraham witnessed that stuff. Paul reports to us in the book of Romans chapter 4,

Romans 4:13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world [talking about Abraham who was living in tents] was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Do you think that Nebuchadnezzar would have done that? Or any one of those other great kings that ruled that world at that time? Perhaps you mistakenly think that everybody lived in tents in Abraham's time, so Abraham was merely living the way every wealthy person lived. No, he was not. That assumption leads one to conclude that there was nothing unusual about the Bible pointing these things out. Not so, brethren. The way Abraham lived was a reflection of where his heart was. He could have had built a huge, magnificent mansion for himself, his family, and his servants.

Have you ever read "The Bible is History" by Warner Keller? It is worth reading because what he reports on is what archaeologists have dug up about the times that Abraham lived in. They have found indications that they had multistory homes. They have found evidence that the paints that they put on their walls still retain their color to this very day. They are finding that they had indoor toilets on the second floor, which means that they had a pressure system to get that water up there.

We have been schooled by people who believe in evolution who say that we are constantly getting better and better, but they forget so quickly that for five or six hundred years when the Catholic Church was ruling the western world, what did we call them? The Dark Ages. Because man lost his light, man lost his science. Mankind lost what was

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

previously there. Have you ever read about the temple, how big it was? Not simply that it was a huge building, but I mean big in terms of the wealth that it represented and the size of the rocks that it took to build that thing. They are awesome. How did they move that stuff around and lift those things into position? We find no evidence of huge cranes to pick them up.

What I am telling you is that there were times when mankind was living a life, maybe not what we have today with electronics, but they knew a thing about building buildings. They knew things about beauty. Abraham, this very wealthy man, lived in tents even though he was heir of the entire world. He lived in tents because it reflected where his mind was, where his heart was.

If the father of the faithful can do that, why can't we? Why can we not focus on the future? That is what God wants us to do. Even while we are going through trials, our mind is looking ahead. That should be what is motivating us, inspiring us, and guiding us into His word in order to learn about His way of doing things.

This verse, here in Ecclesiastes, says not to look back. God does not mean we should never look back. We have to look back in order to learn about our roots; we begin here and we go on. What He does not want us to do is to think about our life that somehow the good ole days were better than they are now. We cannot afford to do that.

It has been said that the good ole days are the result of a bad memory and a good imagination. We old folks have a proclivity to look back and say, "the old days are better," and the strange thing is that once in a while it is true. Are we not discussing, right in my sermon, that things are definitely going downhill from where they were?

There is a reason why God says not to do this. I think what He means is not to dwell on it at all. We must learn from history, and history is what happened earlier. If we do not learn from history, then we are sadder for it, if we let it dominate our minds.

Think of this in a practical sense. If we are looking backwards, over our shoulder, while at the same time attempting to move forward, we are very likely to either smash into something or trip over some impediment and fall. Jesus uses this example in Luke 9.

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Solomon, back in thought, is urging us to get with it by looking toward and working

always toward the future. Thus, in context, “the former days were better” statement is referring to the time before we were converted, not to fifty years or five hundred years before.

We do have to look back. Looking back to recent history is not too bad, but going way back is not too good at all, so this makes the warning in Ecclesiastes 7:10 more potent. This is not easy at any time, but it is especially difficult now because we are living in nations that are losing both their moral and economic power at one and the same time. Thus, what we are going through easily creates feelings of despair and thus tends to keep us focused on merely just making it.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 is warning us, from God, that it is not wisdom to carry a strong thought that the former days were better. So, again, He is urging us to keep our minds on God's sovereign power and His purpose and accept His governing judgment as to the circumstance of our times.

That last thought is important because we do not want to be calling Him into account. This is exactly what we would be doing if we are in despair and frustration about the times that we are required to live in and go through by God. We must never forget that God rules constantly. His oversight of what is going on in this world is not an afterthought. He is pleased to give us the world as it is without calling Him into account for the way things are.

The right approach is this: If God is doing it, it has to be done this way, for His purposes. Do not allow yourself to get into the attitude that you wish that things would change real quickly simply because you are frustrated with it. No, it has to be this way in order for God to carry out His purpose.

Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

These verses provide a brief examination of one of the properties that wisdom and money share. The key word is “share.” Notice that the term “better” does not appear in the context; and the thought is that wisdom is so superior to wealth that it derives no additional glory from wealth being associated with it.

If one has both, that is of course good, but if one personifies them, then the conclusion is that wisdom can do better without wealth than wealth can do without wisdom.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

However, both share the power to protect, to be a defense, to be a shade (as some translations may say) against life's difficulties; however, the reality is that they are being compared because they share an attribute. But even with regard to this quality, the comparison reveals that wisdom has the greater value.

The comparison is that wisdom—this will give you a sense of the measure of the comparison—a wall of protection, whereas wealth is merely a hedge. Do you see the difference? A wall will save and resist a very powerful force against it, whereas a hedge would bend and crumble under the same force. A good way to remember it: wisdom is so much better that it is a wall, as compared to only a hedge.

What does he mean when he says, “wisdom is good with an inheritance?” This is a difficult verse, according to the research I have done, difficult to translate. The Revised English Bible reinserts “better” by saying, “wisdom is better than possessions and an advantage to all who see the sun.”

The New International version translates it, “wisdom like an inheritance is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.”

The Jewish Soncino makes two suggestions. They admit it is a difficult verse to translate. Here is what they suggests: “wisdom is good when it is an inheritance.” That is one translation. The second is this: “wisdom is good when there is an inheritance together with it.” They are taking two slightly different tacks there.

Now we will put this together with that translation, the one in the Soncino. Solomon seems to be saying that even when given an inheritance within a family is an advantage, so also is receiving family wisdom an advantage; thus the verse becomes an admonishment to youth to learn from their parents because then you have inherited some wisdom from them.

I believe that the Soncino catches the essence of what Solomon is saying because biblical wisdom always gives a person an advantage regardless of one's age. The younger the person is when they begin using what they have learned from their family, the better. This fits perfectly with another verse right in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 11 verse 9.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment

If we use it in the way that Soncino suggested, he is telling young people to take every advantage to learning wisdom from your parents. The council, back in Ecclesiastes 7, in this last phrase might be taken to ways: the reference to the sun can be taken as very general and thus including everybody that is alive on earth, but it also might be especially directed toward those who truly see God as a part of their worldview—the over the sun group that we touched on earlier.

Taken that way, verse 11 carries stronger council directed to those who have God-given wisdom which enables them to see God. As a result His wisdom imparts better judgment for taking the difficulty of the times with a much steadier walk and broader sagacity. At the same time, in order to be realistic, there are some events that may impact on one's life that neither wisdom nor wealth can protect one from.

An example might be a national, economic disaster that's completely out of your control. Or a natural disaster like a flood or earthquake that one cannot totally physically prepare for.

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defense a money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

The wisdom God gives becomes one's defense. Defense from what? The trials of times, anytime in history, in which one, anyone who has this wisdom derive from a relationship with God.

I want to go back to Proverbs because in order to really understand verse 12, we have to understand what it said there in verse 12. We are going to see wisdom expounded in a way that shows at least some of its value.

Proverbs 8:1-11 Does not wisdom cry out, And understanding lift up her voice? She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way, where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, At the entrance of the doors: [Solomon is saying, there is wisdom to be drawn from anywhere on earth from God's creation] "To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence, And you fools, be of an understanding heart. Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, And from the opening of my lips will come right things; For my mouth will speak truth; Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; Nothing crooked or perverse is in them.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

[this is the value of God's wisdom] They are all plain to him who understands
And right to those who find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not
silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold; For wisdom is better than
rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.”

Proverbs 8:32-36 “Now therefore, listen to me, my children, For blessed are
those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, And do not disdain
it, Blessed is the man who listens to me, [this is the wisdom that God gives, it
is not the wisdom of the world.] Watching daily at my gates, waiting at the
post of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, And obtains favor from the
Lord; But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate
me love death.”

That is how valuable it is. We will conclude with Ecclesiastes 7:12 to see how that verse
concludes.

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the
excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life [just like Proverbs 8:36] to
those who have it.

I might add, to those who use it. Because they have it, they want to please God.