

Thursday - Read Ecclesiastes 7:23

The Bible describes Solomon as the wisest man of his generation (1 Kings 4:29-31). And in yesterday's scripture Solomon encouraged us to seek wisdom. Yet in today's scripture Solomon admits that wisdom often seemed "far from me". Wisdom is less a destination, than it is a quest. Read Proverbs 9:9. Like breathing, acquiring wisdom is a life-long process. How has God already provided wisdom for your life? Who has taught you well? What difficult experiences has God redeemed, bringing wisdom to your life? Praise Him for this good start – and ask Him to use this day to make you "wiser still."

Friday - Read Ecclesiastes 7:29

Amid his research report on the human condition, Solomon says that God made us well, but our human tendency is to make a mess of things. God can be trusted, but we must understand our human tendencies, and adjust our expectations accordingly! I have been reading Thomas A Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, first published in 1427. It includes the statement, "All that is in the world is vanity except to love God and to serve Him only." Some forms of spiritual development tend to make much of our lives, our cares and our concerns, yet spiritual transformation that is initiated by God allows us to decrease and Him to increase. Praise God that His forgiveness -- and even His gifting for ministry - allow us to take ourselves less seriously, rather than more seriously. How can this attitude give you increased freedom today? Increased joy? Is there a worry you could lay down if you were to take yourself less seriously and simply invite God to grow bigger in you? He made you well, He loves you and He will walk with you through this day! Praise Him for the freedom of smallness – the freedom to take ourselves less seriously!

Life... Don't Go To Extremes

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

Solomon's Research Report

"In my vain life, I have seen everything." - Solomon

1. _____ ... and its limitations (15-18)

- Complete Righteousness Is Unattainable
- Some Folly Is Unavoidable

2. _____ ... and its limitations (19-24)

- Complete wisdom is unreachable

3. An Executive _____ of Solomon's Findings (25-29)

- There is something worse than _____ (26)
 - _____ is rare (28b)
 - _____! Who can explain them? (29)

Respond to the research by...

- _____ to God
- Not taking _____ too seriously

Sunday, August 9, 2009

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...and he opened to us the Scriptures (Luke 24:32)

There is a certain tension in me about the book of Ecclesiastes. I like the fact that Jesus' teaching on forgiveness helps me have good relationships. I like that what the Bible teaches about money leads to a stability and a generous financial life. I like that what the Bible teaches about marriage leads to a great home life and a strong society. I like when my faith works out -- in real time, in my life with real benefits. Yet Ecclesiastes talks about something else. Ecclesiastes highlights the discrepancies, the sometimes bitter exceptions that occur when the fruit of our faithfulness is delayed. But the fact is that these discrepancies exist not only in the pages of Ecclesiastes but in your story and mine. Solomon points us past the sometimes baffling circumstances of our lives to trust God, who is sovereign. It reminds us that God works things for our best interest, with eternity in mind. This is precisely why Ecclesiastes provides such a powerful perspective on our sometimes difficult life situations. Let's turn back to Solomon's research report to find perspective and power for living this week.

Monday - Read Ecclesiastes 7:15

Because of our God-installed sense of justice, it is natural for us to desire that the righteous be rewarded in this life for right living. Frequently this happens; often virtue does carry its own reward. But Solomon was struck, as you and I no doubt have been struck, that this is not always the case. Sometimes those who live for God do not appear to receive special blessings in this life. The writer of Hebrews recognized this. Read Hebrews 11:39-40. The heroic men and women listed throughout this chapter were commended for their faith, but the realization of what they hoped for was connected to the future - and somehow even to us! Both scriptures point to the truth that God's judgments are right, but not always synchronized to our calendars. Trusting God to work in our present circumstances is one step of faith; trusting God that regardless of how things work out in the present, He will make things right in the future, is another step entirely. Can you choose to worship our God, whose timing is not always ours, knowing that some of His actions may come after our earthly lives have finished? Ask God to increase your trust in His ability to do right, at the right time. Praise Him that He is eternal and entirely good!

Tuesday - Read Ecclesiastes 7:15.

We live in a culture that frequently blurs the lines between righteousness and wickedness. In fact, sometimes wickedness can look like the better way to go. Solomon noticed this in his day: some people lived long and well -- off of evil. But that doesn't mean God was pleased, or that it was, in the end, good for those people. In fact, scripture warns Israel's young leaders away from evil. Read Proverbs 1:10. Evil is real; it can be enticing, but its consequences are also real. Read Proverbs 1:19. Would you sit quietly before the Lord today and ask Him to point out any potential areas of evil around you? This could involve personal attitudes, interpersonal relationships, media or work projects. As a beloved, chosen, son or daughter of God, filled with Spirit and taught by the Scriptures, what are the realms of life that God would just **not** have you enter? Your inspired choices are worship -- and a powerful statement to our generation! Take a few moments to thank God for protecting your life from the calamity of evil and for preserving you for righteous living. Thank Him that the benefits of righteousness are eternal!

Wednesday - Read Ecclesiastes 7:19

We live with an unprecedented quantity of information: Google recently identified 1 trillion unique web pages. Yet I wonder if we are wiser than past generations. There is a difference between knowledge and knowing how to do the right thing, for the right reason, at the right time, in the right way. Our vast amount of information available puts a premium on wisdom -- the ability to use that information well. In today's passage, Solomon reminds us that wisdom can make us strong, even stronger than a select group of urban movers-and-shakers. Read Psalm 119:130. Praise God for the light and understanding He gives! Take a few minutes to review the activities of your day -- and then ask God to give you supernatural wisdom in those activities. Read Proverbs 13:20. Who are the wise ones God has already placed around you? What is the wisdom you've been given to share? God designed life to be enhanced by wisdom. Let's pursue wisdom as a way of strengthening each other!