

LIVING IN VIEW OF DYING

(LIVING OUR "BEST LIFE" IN VIEW OF THE DAY OF OUR DEATH)

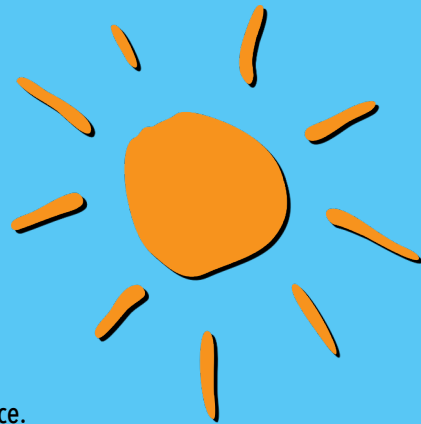
CONSIDER THE WORK OF GOD

Here, Christian, is thy refuge and thy rest.

Here enjoy quiet communion—satisfied confidence.

And here learn that man's wisdom consists in observing God's unalterable appointments, and suiting himself to them.

(Charles Bridges)



- **THE CRUCIAL THING TO BE REMEMBERED ABOUT THE UNIVERSE IS THAT GOD HAS CREATED IT ...** In the end we must remember that the universe is not a predictable machine but a personally governed and complex space. Wisdom is not magic. God is not an object to be manipulated, nor does God's world belong to human beings. If God makes something crooked, it is beyond human power to make it straight (*Ian Provan*).

OUTLINE ... (Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 ESV)

1. Living in view of dying is better than ignoring the day of our death, 7:1-6.

- (Ecclesiastes 7:1-6 ESV) A good name is better than precious ointment, **and the day of death than the day of birth.** 2 It is **better** to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. 3 **Sorrow is better than laughter**, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. 5 It is **better** for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.

A. A good name is better than the pretense and illusion of a perfumed name, 7:1a.

B. The day of death is better than the day of birth because living in view of dying refines the choices a person makes to end life with a good name, 7:1b.

One of the choices is character over riches.

- (Proverbs 22:1 ESV) A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

C. Going to the funeral home is better than going to a party because facing death corrects and sharpens our view of life, 7:2.

D. Sorrow is better than laughter because sorrow directs a person's heart past the superficial distractions of life to what is truly meaningful, 7:3.

E. The wise person takes the day of death to heart and as a result is better able to choose the path of true character over pretense and illusion, 7:4.

- (Psalm 90:12 ESV) So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

F. It is better to have our course corrected and face the reality of life than to be enticed by the escapism of the superficial which leads to further emptiness, 7:5-6.

If a person is living with dying in mind, he is already reaping the benefit of a life that is set on

the proper course. Having tasted the blessing and benefit of walking the path of wisdom this person is much more receptive to having his or her course corrected toward wisdom and away from foolishness.

• **EXCURSUS: THE BLESSING OF OPPRESSION**

LIFE IS SO HARD THAT WE MAY WANT OUT BUT GOD HAS OTHER PLANS THAT HE HAS YET TO REVEAL TO US.

I. IT IS A COMMON OCCURRENCE TO BE WEARIED BY THE OPPRESSIVE NATURE OF LIFE.

- (Ecclesiastes 4:1 NLT) **Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun.** I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless.
- (Ecclesiastes 5:8 ESV) If you see in a province **the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness**, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.
- (Ecclesiastes 7:7a ESV) **Surely oppression drives the wise into madness.**
- (Job 14:1-2 NLT) How frail is humanity! **How short is life, how full of trouble!** 2 We blossom like a flower and then wither. Like a passing shadow, we quickly disappear.

II. IT IS A COMMON OCCURRENCE THAT THIS "OPPRESSION" IS THE LORD'S DISCIPLINE AND THAT HE IS ACCOMPLISHING HIS WORK IN OUR LIVES.

- (Hebrews 12:6 ESV) **For the Lord disciplines the one he loves**, and chastises every son whom he receives.
- (Hebrews 12:11 ESV) **For the moment all discipline seems** painful rather than pleasant, **but later it yields** the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

III. JOB THOUGHT GOD WAS OPPRESSING HIM.

- (Job 14:3-6 NLT) **Must you keep an eye on such a frail creature and demand an accounting from me?**

4 Who can bring purity out of an impure person? No one! 5 **You have decided** the length of our lives. **You know** how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer. 6 **So leave us alone and let us rest!** We are like hired hands, so let us finish our work in peace.

IV. JOB WAS SO OVERWHELMED WITH THE HEAVINESS OF LIFE THAT HE CURSED THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH.

- (Job 3:1–5, 11 ESV) **After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.** 2 And Job said: 3 **“Let the day perish on which I was born,** and the night that said, ‘A man is conceived.’ 4 Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, nor light shine upon it. 5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. ... 11 **“Why did I not die at birth,** come out from the womb and expire?

V. JEREMIAH HAD A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE AND EVEN ACCUSED THE LORD OF DECEIVING HIM.

- (Jeremiah 20:7–9 ESV) **O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;** you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. 8 For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. 9 **If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,”** there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

VI. JEREMIAH LIKEWISE CURSED THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH.

- (Jeremiah 20:14,18 ESV) **Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!** ... 18 **Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?**

VII. BUT HERE IS WHAT GOD WAS DOING IN THEIR LIVES.

- A. Through his suffering and trials the Lord brought Job **from** trust **through** doubt **to** complete trust .

A **From POINT A – where Job had heard about the Lord and trusted and worshiped him ...**

- (Job 1:20–22 NLT) Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. **Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship.** 21 He said, “I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!” 22 **In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.**

B **To POINT B – where Job saw things too wonderful and now completely trusts in the sovereign, providential rule of the LORD ...**

- (Job 42:1–6 NLT) Then Job replied to the LORD: 2 **“I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.** 3 You asked, ‘Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?’ It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, **things far too wonderful for me.** 4 You said, ‘Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.’ 5 **I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.** 6 I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.”

- B. The LORD was preparing the mouth of Jeremiah (*the prophet vessel*) for the words of God.

- (Jeremiah 1:4–9 ESV) Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you;** I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” 6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” 7 But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.” 9 **Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.”**

–END EXCURSUS–

2. Living in view of dying helps us to decipher and overcome the seeming inevitability of life, 7:7-12.

- (Ecclesiastes 7:7–12 ESV) **Surely oppression drives the wise into madness**, and a bribe corrupts the heart. 8 **Better is the end of a thing than its beginning**, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. 9 **Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools**. 10 Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. 12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

- A. The oppressive nature of life is maddening.
- B. The oppressive, corrupt nature of life tends to drive a person further into escapism and the laughter of fools, 7:7, cf. 7:5-6.
- C. It is better to patiently live with the end in mind to preserve some semblance of balance and sanity even for those who live only “under the sun,” 7:8.
- D. It is better to avoid the tempting, quick-fix promise of anger that only drives foolishness deeper into the heart of the fool, 7:9.
- E. The wise person knows it is wrong and foolish to look back—longing for the good old days, 7:10.
- F. Wisdom with an inheritance is good and beneficial in a person’s quest to live right, 7:11.
- G. Wisdom is like shelter and protection for those who receive and obey it, 7:12.

3. Living in view of dying directs us to consider the work of God which grows our faith and yields quiet confidence and joy in the purpose of God, 7:13-14.

- (Ecclesiastes 7:13–14 ESV) **Consider the work of God**: who can make straight what he has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: **God has made the one as well as the other**, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

- A. Living in view of dying we are more likely to consider the work of God and understand the universe he has created and the purpose for which he created it.

*****The crucial thing to be remembered about the universe is that God has created it. Wisdom is not a key that can be used in independence of the Creator to unlock the secrets of the universe, to shape existence after mortal desires, and to control life. Although certain ways of being and behaving are wiser than others and in general tend toward life rather than death, yet in the end we must remember that the universe is not a predictable machine but a personally governed and complex space. Wisdom is not magic. God is not an object to be manipulated, nor does God’s world belong to human beings. If God makes something crooked, it is beyond human power to make it straight (v. 13; cf. 1:15). [Provan, I. (2001). *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (p. 151). Zondervan.]

- B. The wise person **considers ... drives his mind forward ... causes himself to see ...** the work of God.

Consider ... The Hebrew word is ra’ah, raw-aw and means ... to see, literally or figuratively; advise self, to consider, discern; to look at, inspect, perceive; **to cause to see, to cause to look intently at, to behold, to cause to gaze at.**

- C. Properly considering the work of God enables us to (at least) begin understanding that God makes things crooked that we think should be straight.
- D. Properly considering the work of God we are more able to accept and joyfully receive his sovereign, providential activity in our lives.
- E. We begin to see ... are driven to the conclusion (in a good way) ... that prosperity and adversity are both the work of God.
- F. God works and rules in his universe in such a way to intentionally stymie our feeble, inadequate understanding of life so that we may receive his way.
- G. This person “knows stuff”.

- (Job 42:2 ESV) **I know** that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
- (Romans 8:28 ESV) **And we know** that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.