

“When Bad is Better”¹ (Ecclesiastes 7:1-14)

Have you ever been engaged? Are you currently engaged? If so, you understand the importance of an engagement ring—a “rock!” Jewelers talk about “the four C’s”—cut, clarity, color, and carat. These four variables are used to calculate the value of a diamond. I have always found the first variable—cut—the most interesting. “Cut” refers to the proportions, finish, symmetry, and polish of the diamond. These factors determine the brilliance of a diamond. Well-cut diamonds sell at a premium and poorly cut diamonds sell at discounted prices. The premise behind this variable is the more a diamond is cut, the more it sparkles. And what woman doesn’t want an engagement ring that sparkles?

Like a beautiful diamond, character is formed by pressure and polished by friction. A person doesn’t wake up one morning as a man or woman of character. Character doesn’t evolve out of osmosis. Character is developed by adversity or what many have called “the school of hard knocks.” Indeed, there is no education like adversity. Yet, adversity has the potential to create greatness in a person. Thus, Solomon says, “*Adversity is better than prosperity.*”² How can this be? Why is adversity better than prosperity? In Eccl 7:1-14, Solomon gives two reasons.

1. Adversity stimulates an eternal perspective (7:1-4). In this passage, we will discover that some of the medicine that tastes the worst has the best cure. Solomon answers the question he raised in 6:12, “For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life?”³ In doing so, he gives seven “better than” proverbs (i.e., proverbs of comparative value) to answer his own question.⁴ In fact, the word “good/better” appears eleven times in this chapter.⁵ Hence, the reason for the sermon title, “When Bad is Better.” In the first four verses, Solomon suggests that there is much to be gained by sober reflection on sorrow and death. In 7:1a he writes, “**A good⁶ name is better than a good ointment.**” This section starts by establishing that a good name (i.e., reputation) is better than a good ointment (i.e., perfume or cologne).⁷ To make it more relevant, a good name is better than Euphoria or Giorgio. The point of this proverb is: The character of one’s reputation is more valuable and enduring than the scent of perfume. A good name can live beyond the grave,⁸ but the scent of perfume ceases to linger. We could say, “Who we are is more important than what we have or do not have!”

I grew up watching Kyle Rote, Jr. play soccer. Kyle’s father is Kyle Rote, Sr., who was an all-pro NFL player in the 1950s. He was the captain of the New York Giants for ten years. What is so fascinating is after Rote’s death, Kyle Jr., said of all the compliments and awards his dad had received, one stood above the rest: fourteen of the elder Rote’s former teammates named their sons Kyle.⁹ The reputation of Kyle Rote, Sr. was so impressive that his teammates wanted to name their boys after him. The Rotes are a Christian family that has a legacy that outlives their earthly lives.

What about you? As a husband and a father what is your reputation at work, in the neighborhood, in your church...or most importantly in your home? Are you a man of integrity? Are you seeking to be exemplary in every area of your life? Are you an inspiration to young men and your peers? Does your name mean something? I tell my boys, “You are Krell boys. Live up to your name. Do your mother and me proud. Most importantly, do your Savior proud and live up to your name ‘Christian.’”

Solomon concludes 7:1 by saying, “**And the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth.**” There are two days in our lives when our name is prominent: the day we receive our name, at birth, and the day our name appears in the obituary column. What happens between those two days determines whether our name is a lovely ointment or a foul stench.¹⁰ Solomon is not buying into the philosophy of despair. If that were true, he wouldn’t tell us eight times in his book to enjoy life.¹¹ Ecclesiastes says that we must neither be hesitant to talk about death, nor scoff at it. Rather, we should talk about it forthrightly, for it is the inevitable prospect we all face, and its effects are devastating if we are unprepared.

Have you ever noticed the way we mark a person's life span? We will write a person's name, and below it will put something like this: 1934–2008. We list the year of birth and a year of death. Between the two is what? A *dash*. Solomon might agree that this life is a quick dash between birth and death—just a vapor. All we will ever do on earth, all the influence we will ever garner, all the reputation we will ever build is summarized in a simple line between one year and another. It's not much time to serve God, but plenty of time for making a huge mess of things.¹² *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

Solomon continues his wise words in 7:2: **“It is better to go to a house¹³ of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.”** Solomon suggests that we would be better off going to a funeral than a party.¹⁴ The reason he gives is that death is “the end of every man.”¹⁵ I have some bad news for you. You are going to die. I have checked the death rate in Thurston County and it is a whopping 100%. You are going to die. Neither jogging, nor liposuction, nor all the brown rice in China can keep you young forever. Death is the destiny of every man. The wise person has come to terms with the brevity of life. He doesn't live as though life on earth will last forever. Wise people go to funerals and pay attention. Wise people see the Tsunami horrors and watch and think carefully. Wise people study cancer victims. Wise people number their days and make the most of their time.¹⁶

If you were to visit old churches in New England, you would notice that many of them have a cemetery in the churchyard. The windows in the sanctuary are filled with clear rather than stained glass so that the pastor would see the graveyard as he preached. As he communicated his message to the congregation, a very serious message was being communicated to him. Two hundred fifty years ago, Christians believed that the central mission of the church was to bring men and women into a right relationship with God. That's why they constructed their church buildings with see-through windows. They wanted their pastors to be continually reminded of the seriousness of their calling. Everyone who sat in the pews before them each Sunday would eventually fill a place in the cemetery and ultimately stand before God to be judged.¹⁷ This is why I have said for many years that I would rather do a funeral any day than a wedding. Now you may think I am morbid, and you're probably right, but I see here in Ecclesiastes some biblical basis for my viewpoint. To be honest, one of the reasons I prefer funerals is a selfish one. As a preacher I appreciate it when people listen, and believe me, people listen much better at funerals than at weddings.¹⁸ But aside from that, funerals remind us that life is short and we need to think seriously about our lives.

In 7:3-4 Solomon writes, **“Sorrow is better than laughter,¹⁹ for when a face is sad a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.”** Although most of us would prefer laughter and pleasure, Solomon informs us that there are benefits to sorrow and mourning. This life is full of sadness and sorrow,²⁰ yet life's difficulties have the potential to awaken a spiritual dimension in us. Sorrow makes us think about life, its meaning, and our priorities. A party rarely does. Sorrow and suffering often brings one to God, while pleasure seldom does.²¹ Even these sad times give us hope, peace, and strength for there is a mellowing and maturing that takes place in affliction and sorrow that cannot be attained any other way.²² Solomon is not condemning happiness, just the opposite, he is advocating an appropriate peace and contentment that is not based on temporal circumstances alone. *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

Imagine reading your own obituary. Alfred Nobel had that opportunity. Around the turn of the 20th century, Nobel's brother passed away. Alfred picked up his morning paper the next day to see what was written about his brother and was stunned to discover his own obituary! The paper mistakenly printed that Alfred had died, describing him as the inventor of dynamite. Nobel realized the legacy he was leaving was associated with death and destruction. Alfred had a second chance to rewrite his legacy. With input from friends, he decided to invest some of his wealth to honor those who furthered the cause of peace in the world. Today many know that Nobel invented dynamite, but he is better known for another of his creations—the Nobel Peace Prize.

You are going to leave a legacy. Your life will have a lasting impact. God has given you the capacity to think carefully about what will be left in the wake of your life and to live intentionally to leave behind something eternally worthwhile.²³ I challenge you to create a eulogy you would like offered at your funeral. First, write up your present eulogy. At this point in my life, what would my wife say? My kids? My coworkers? My neighbors? God? Now write up your future eulogy. By God's grace, what might my eulogy ideally say?²⁴ *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

During World War II, the Japanese attacked allied forces using "kamikaze" pilots. These pilots, who believed in the Shinto philosophy of honorable death in battle, would commit suicide by flying their bomb-laden planes into allied sea targets. A television documentary showed the kamikaze pilots as they climbed into their planes. Once they were situated, workers would permanently seal the cockpits closed, prior to their departure. The planes were given only enough fuel for a one-way journey from the ship to the target. The fate of the kamikaze pilots was sealed before they left the ground. It's hard not to wonder what must have been going through the minds of the young soldiers. Certainly they must have thought about what was going to happen to them, but I can imagine that they bravely shut out any inkling of death from their minds, choosing instead to focus on the mission at hand. How closely this seems to parallel our lives. We are, in a sense, kamikazes too. Our being has been permanently sealed inside of our bodies and we've only been given enough fuel to make it for a hundred or so years—if we're blessed. Death awaits us all, but we—perhaps like kamikaze pilots—choose not to think about it, but rather the mission at hand: that big project at work...our vacation plans for next month...that term paper due on Tuesday. So many things on our minds, we really haven't time to think about death—and besides, who wants to think about it anyway? But failing to think about death usually means failing to think about life.²⁵

[Adversity stimulates an eternal perspective, but as we shall see...]

2. Adversity cultivates godly character (7:5-14). This second section reminds us that God loves us too much to let us remain as we are. In 7:5-6 Solomon writes, "**It is better to listen to the rebuke²⁶ of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter²⁷ of the fool;²⁸ and this too is futility.**"²⁹ Solomon likens the meaningless praise and laughter of fools to "**the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot.**" This was a culturally relevant comparison that we don't readily understand. Branches of a thorn bush thrown on a fire will flame up with rapid intensity, providing a short hot burn. If you needed to heat up something quickly instead of preparing a fire for slow cooking, you would throw thorn branches on the fire. Solomon uses his illustration to say that the praise of fools is quick, hot, showy—but gone quickly. It flames up, dies out, and you need something else to stoke the fire. The rebuke of a wise man, however, can change your life forever.³⁰

In the past few months, my wife has been helping me work through some of my weaknesses. Lori has the gift of discernment so she has God-given insight into my life. Since she knows me better than anyone, she also has the ability to help me work through my weaknesses and sins. I can't imagine not receiving her input. God has used her to speak into my life like no other person. Husbands, are you man enough to welcome a rebuke from your wife? Can you receive a rebuke from the person who loves you the most? If not, why not? If your wife has the courage to lovingly lay you out, why can't you receive it? Is it your pride? God wants you to hear from your wife because she may be the only person courageous enough to speak into your life. If you are unmarried, can you receive a loving rebuke from a parent or a friend? Are you teachable with your dad or mom? Remember, the ones who brought you into this life love you and want what's best for you. But you may say, "They sure don't show it!" That may be the case, but that is not your responsibility. You can't change other people's actions, but you *can* change your reaction. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov 27:6b).³¹ Will you receive a rebuke from a parent or friend? If so, God will mold your character and make you into the man or woman that He wants you to be.

Famous New York Yankee Mickey Mantle tells how as a teenager playing in the minor leagues, he began playing poorly. Growing discouraged, he gave into homesickness and self-pity and tearfully called his father to come and take him home. But when Charles Mantle arrived, he didn't give the expected sympathy and reassurance. Instead, he looked at his son and said, "Okay, if that's all the guts you've got, you might as well come home with me right now and work in the mines." It was a stinging slap in the face, but the young man got the message, stuck it out, and went on to make baseball history.³²

In 7:7-10 Solomon writes, **"For oppression makes a wise man mad [impatient], and a bribe³³ corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning;³⁴ patience³⁵ of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools. Do not say, 'Why is it that the former days were better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this."** The injustice of life causes many people problems, even believers (cf. 4:1; 5:8), if we don't allow God time to set it straight, and sometimes it is not until the afterlife. It is easy to be discouraged. Oppression rules and reigns in our country and throughout the world. I just heard a report on the news yesterday that young girls are being kidnapped from Washington State to work as prostitutes in other parts of the world—some as young as 12 years old. Business tycoons corrupt politicians and corrupted politicians seek even larger bribes. Government officials, politicians, and pastors sell out. That is the world we live in. This past week, a young man asked me a profound question: "Why do I get madder the more I read the Bible?" The answer is because he is seeing our world from God's perspective and things aren't as they are supposed to be. Yet, in these discouraging realities, we need to remember the One who will have the last word. The end of God's work is even better than its beginning.

This is why Solomon emphasizes patience.³⁶ Our Western society has lost its taste for the long haul. We want everything NOW. We crave instant coffee, fast food, immediate gratification, and instant entertainment. Our computers and our modems are faster and we chaff at the idea of waiting for anything. How many times have I allowed myself to become impatient at another drive or a red light? How many times have I been impatient with my wife or children? How many times have I been impatient with myself or our church? I can think of plenty of times. Yet, Richard Hendrix once said, "Second only to suffering, waiting may be the greatest teacher and trainer in godliness, maturity, and genuine spirituality most of us ever encounter."³⁷ God is interested in character development so He will test our patience to develop perseverance. He frequently does this because life is a marathon, not a sprint. God is building patience in us so that we will go the distance in our marriage, ministry, and Christian life.

However, humans without a sense of God's presence and purpose in one's daily life often seek peace, but reflect on positive circumstances in the past! Bruce Springsteen used to have a song called, "Glory Days." Yet, the truth is the person who laments the passing of the "good old days" does not remember them very well.³⁸ Instead, we should have the attitude, "I would not trade today for anything! These are the days God has given me. I want to live for today."³⁹ *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

In 7:11-12 Solomon writes, **"Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors."** Prosperity can be a good thing if the prosperous person behaves wisely. Solomon states that both prosperity and wisdom are literally "shadows" that offer protection.⁴⁰ The superiority of wisdom, however, is that it guides one through difficult times and thus preserves life. Money, to the contrary, often vanishes in hard times.⁴¹ So prioritize biblical wisdom, which Solomon says, elsewhere, is "the fear of God" (Prov 1:7).

Our passage concludes in 7:13-14 with these powerful words: **"Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent? In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him."**

Solomon explains that we cannot understand why God uses adversity and prosperity as He does.⁴² God “bends” certain things and there is nothing we can do about it. Affliction is the appointment of God.⁴³ It is generally futile to try to figure such things out; we can’t straighten what God has made crooked. There are “crooked” things we cannot straighten, and we must learn to believe and say, “God, you are God. You are good and powerful. I trust you. I believe in you. And even though I don’t like some of the things that come from your hand, I think I accept them with joy.” God does not waste sorrow or adversity. He knows the purpose for which we go through tragedy and sorrow. It is for our good, and the good of His kingdom.

A man or woman of faith trusts God. Therefore, when times are good, be happy. Enjoy what you have. Don’t waste the opportunity by trying to accumulate more. Don’t wait for retirement. Enjoy now. One of the saddest things in life is the fact that when our children are young and most enjoyable we fathers tend to be busier than ever, establishing ourselves in business and preparing for the children’s future. Unfortunately, too often, by the time we have their college education secured they are gone and there’s little opportunity to enjoy them. When times are good, be happy. But when times are bad, be patient. Be patient because the same God who made the good times has allowed the bad. Neither situation is outside of His sovereignty and there is no sure way of knowing what’s coming next. Try as we might, we cannot prepare for all contingencies, and while God expects us to be prudent, He does not want us to play God. There are times when you just have to play the cards which you have been dealt. Remember that it is God who is the dealer. What you have has been given by Him. *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

You may be familiar with the story of Job—the man who lived out Murphy’s Law. He lost his health, his wealth, and his children. He had it so bad that his own wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). But Job said to her, ““You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10). *Adversity is better than prosperity.*

A wise old Chinese woodcutter lived on the troubled Mongolian border. One day his favorite horse, a beautiful white mare, jumped the fence and was seized on the other side by the enemy. His friends came to comfort him. “We’re so sorry about your horse,” they said. “That’s bad news.” “How do you know it’s bad news?” he asked. “It might be good news.” A week later, the man looked out his window to see his mare returning at breakneck speed—beside a beautiful stallion. He put both horses into the enclosure, and his friends came to admire the new addition. “What a beautiful horse,” they said. “That’s good news.” “How do you know it’s good news?” replied the man. “It might be bad news.” The next day, the man’s only son decided to try the stallion. It threw him, and he landed painfully, breaking his leg. The friends made another visit, all of them sympathetic, saying, “We’re so sorry about this. It’s such bad news.” “How do you know it’s bad news?” replied the man. “It might be good news.” Within a month, war erupted between China and Mongolia. Chinese recruiters came through the area, pressing all the young men into the army. All of them perished, except for the woodcutter’s son, who couldn’t go off to war because of his broken leg. “You see,” said the woodcutter. “The things you considered good were actually bad, and the things that seemed bad were actually good.”⁴⁴

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Scripture References

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14
1 Thessalonians 4:13
Proverbs 15:13; 22:1
Proverbs 4:5-13
Luke 12:16-21
1 Corinthians 1:18-24
Colossians 2:1-3

Study Questions

1. What are the advantages of death, mourning, and sorrow (7:1-4)? How do these sobering realities shape my perspective? If I died today, what phrase would sum up my life so far? What issues have dominated my time lately? Which ones will really matter 1,000 years from now? How can I spend more time and energy focusing on the eternal?
2. When was the last time I was rebuked by someone I know (7:5-6)? How did I respond? When in my life have the “wounds of a friend” proved to be faithful and beneficial? Read Proverbs 27:6; cf. Psalm 141:5 and Proverbs 20:30. Which is harder for me: to rebuke a friend or to be rebuked by a friend? How can I grow in my confrontation skills?
3. What types of situations make me impatient or angry (7:8-9)? Would an objective person say that I have a problem with anger? How have I reacted foolishly in my anger? How can I learn to control my ungodly anger? Read James 1:19.
4. How has God used suffering in my life to improve my character? What is the worst trial I have ever encountered? How did God mature me through this ordeal? Read Romans 8:28-29. How has God used me to comfort or encourage someone else as a result of my suffering? Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.
5. If I could change one situation in my own life right now, what would it be? If I could ask one question about my future, what would it be? Do I truly believe that God has ordained my hard times as well as my good times? When I face suffering and hardship in the future, how will I respond? What will enable me to trust God in these difficult experiences?

Notes

¹ This title came from Tommy Nelson, *The Problem of Life with God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002).

² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 80, 82.

³ The last two rhetorical questions of Eccl 6:12 are answered in 7:1-14 (6:12a is answered in 7:1-12 and 6:12b is linked to 7:13-14 by the phrase, “after him.”)

⁴ It is important to remember that proverbs, by their very nature, are not intended to be absolute, unalterable principles but generalized observations on life.

⁵ The word “good,” often translated “better” links chapters 6 and 7 together (cf. 6:3, 9, 12 and 7:1[twice], 2, 3, 5, 8[twice], 10, 11, 14, 18, 20, 26).

⁶ Davis notes, “Of the 52 occurrences of the word *tob* (good, better, prosperity, happy, pleasing) in the Book of Ecclesiastes, 14 (i.e., approximately 27%) appear in chapter 7 (with 11 of those 14 being recorded in the verses 1 to 14). No other chapter in the Book of Ecclesiastes (or in the rest of Scripture) contains more than 7 occurrences of this word (cf. Genesis 1; Psalm 119; and Ecclesiastes 9, for the only other chapters in Scripture containing at least 7 occurrences of the word *tob* [good]).” Barry C. Davis, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, Multnomah Biblical Seminary unpublished class notes.

⁷ Solomon utilizes a play on words with the Hebrew words for name (*shem*) and ointment (*shemen*).

⁸ Prov 22:1 says, “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth.”

⁹ Preaching Today citation: Kansas City Star (8-16-02); submitted by Kirtes Calvery, Raytown, MO.

¹⁰ David Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 163.

¹¹ In Solomon’s book of Proverbs, there are at least thirty verses emphasizing the goodness of enjoying life (e.g., Prov 15:13, 15; 17:22). Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 162.

¹² Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 164.

¹³ “House of...” is a Semitic idiom (cf. 7:4, i.e., Bethel, Bethlehem).

¹⁴ Jesus said something similar in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are they that mourn” (Matt 5:4).

¹⁵ The noun “end” (*soph*) is used only five times in the OT and three of them are in Ecclesiastes (3:11; 7:2; 12:13).

¹⁶ The Psalmist declares, “So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

¹⁷ Haddon W. Robinson, “Ecclesiastes 7:1-4: Funeral or Birthday?” *Daily Bread*: http://preceptaustin.org/ecclesiastes_illustrations_ii.htm#7.

¹⁸ Michael P. Andrus, “The Tests of Adversity and Prosperity” (Ecclesiastes 7:1-29): unpublished sermon notes.

¹⁹ Here, as often in the Proverbs written by Solomon, the author stretches a point to make a point. Certainly sorrow is not always better than laughter, nor is a sad face always good for the heart. Solomon himself says the opposite in Prov 15:13: “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face” and in Prov 17:22 he wrote, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.”

²⁰ Job 5:7: “For man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward.”

²¹ Cf. Matt 5:1; 2 Cor 7:10.

²² God may have to break us in order to make us. Reproof is one proof of God’s love. Jesus, the perfect man, is described as “a man of sorrows,” intimately acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3). It is hard to fathom, but even the incarnate Son of God learned and grew through the heartaches He suffered (Heb 5:8). As we think about His sorrow and His concern for our sorrow, we gain a better appreciation for what God is trying to accomplish in us, through the grief we bear.

²³ Wayne Schmidt, *Soul Management* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 129.

²⁴ Schmidt, *Soul Management*, 135.

²⁵ Tim A. Krell, “Thoughts about Life” (Eccl 7),” *Chasing the Wind: Philosophical Reflections on Life*: an unpublished paper, 3/1/1996.

²⁶ See Solomon’s words in Prov 15:31-32 and 17:10: “He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding...A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.”

²⁷ The term “laughter” (*sechoq*) is used often in Ecclesiastes (cf. 2:2; 3:4; 7:3, 5, 6). It is used metaphorically of the person who seeks instant gratification. It denotes life that focuses on the pleasure of this life in an existential moment, but does not ponder the “lasting benefit.”

²⁸ The simile portrays the fool as both worthless (like thorns) and about to be destroyed (burning under a pot). Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman, 1993).

²⁹ There is another play on the Hebrew words pot (*shir*) and thorns (*sir*).

³⁰ Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 172.

³¹ The Psalmist writes, “Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; it is oil upon the head” (Ps.141:5a).

³² Jeremiah, *Searching for Heaven on Earth*, 173.

³³ This is not the normal word for “bribe” (*mattanah*; cf. Exod 23:8; Deut 16:19), but is the word “gift,” used in a specialized sense (cf. Prov 15:27).

³⁴ This may be a summary statement of Eccl 7:2 related to 7:1 about a good name which is acquired with time and must be maintained. Often we judge something or someone too quickly and are disappointed.

³⁵ This is often used in Proverbs for a person slow to anger (cf. 14:29; 15:18; 16:21; 19:11). However, its most common usage describes Yahweh’s merciful character (cf. Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nah 1:3).

³⁶ There is also a correlation between impatience and a tendency toward anger. Impatient people are prone to anger. And an angry person is a foolish person. This brings us to the following progression:

Pride → Impatience → Anger → Foolishness

The opposite is also true. Humility leads ultimately to wisdom.

Humility → Patience → Peace → Wisdom

See John Stevenson, “The Better and the Best” (Eccl 7:1-14): <http://www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/eccl07-01.html>.

³⁷ Preaching Today citation: Richard Hendrix, *Christian Reader*, Vol. 31

³⁸ Robert S. Ricker with Ron Pitkin, *Soul Search: Hope for 21st Century Living from Ecclesiastes* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 95.

³⁹ The Psalmist said, “This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24).

⁴⁰ This is the Hebrew word for “shadow,” which offers protection in the desert (e.g., Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:1, 4). The term “shadow” was used in the sense of brevity in Eccl 6:12, but here in the sense of God’s personal presence and protection.

⁴¹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*.

⁴² Throughout the Scriptures God acknowledges that He sovereignly permits everything (good and bad) to occur. In the beginning, God created darkness and light and He continues to allow disaster as well as prosperity (Isa 45:7).

⁴³ Eccl 7:13 harkens back to the insoluble problem of 1:15. Here, however, the point is that God is in control of the times, and nothing can be done to resist His will. Verse 14 clarifies that this is to be understood in an economic context. God brings both prosperity and recession. When times are good, one should enjoy the prosperity; when times are bad, one should reflect on the fact that this too is from God’s hand. God does not allow us to know whether tomorrow will bring unexpected wealth or sudden calamity, but we can find peace if we accept all as from God (see Lam 3:38).

⁴⁴ *Nelson’s Completes Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000) 653-54.