

Choose Well, Trust Well

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[0:00] You'll open your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. We'll be in the whole chapter today. A little bit more of the chapter next week. Well, we need to begin to talk about wisdom because, as I mentioned in the call to worship for the next several chapters, wisdom will be a primary theme.

Let's start with the definition. Well, what is wisdom? When you go to the Hebrew lexicons and consult sort of the academics, they will give you, they can't just give you one definition. There's too much of a semantic range in the words, and they all mean a little bit different things. But I think if you were trying to simplify it as much as possible while remaining true to the concept, it would be something like, wisdom is the capacity to judge rightly in matters relating to life and conduct.

But it's important that I add a side B definition here, and I also say that there's a lot in the Bible that would describe at least some expressions of wisdom as simply coping or accepting or just contentment.

And so those are the kind of broadest descriptions of wisdom that work for us as we think about it. This is how I would describe this sermon is about this following thesis.

[1:22] When you have a choice to make, wisdom helps you choose well. When you have no choice, wisdom helps you trust well. There are parts of our lives where we have no options.

Those choices have been made for us. Often these are not happy times. These are not happy pieces of our life. But we certainly can understand that there are certainly moments in our life where we're out of choices.

There are no more choices to make. And of course, this chapter focuses on death a fair bit. And that's the classic example of that moment when what does a wise dying person do?

Do they make good choices? Well, I mean, fundamentally, your wisdom on your deathbed will manifest itself in how you trust God. Right?

How you acknowledge that you don't have choice right now. That you are on a one-way train and the rails are fixed and you're headed to the final stop. And in that moment, wisdom is just a trusting action.

[2:33] It's a contenting action. But most of the time in the wisdom literature, wisdom is presented as something that helps you make choices. And to make better choices.

And so on and so forth. And in many respects, you know, let's not lose sight of the fact that wisdom is an attribute of God. It's just like love. It's just like mercy.

It's just like anger. These are attributes of God. And so the presence or absence of this attribute in our life is a direct indicator of how godly we are. And we would certainly never say that wisdom has come from us, although there's a tension there.

We're going to talk about that today. There's just a lot of layers. And if you were to read Ecclesiastes 7 straight through, you'd see, man, there's not a lot of, like, really tight, linear structure. Like, not a three-part argument or something like that. He's sort of visiting the subject from multiple angles. But I think we can pull a lot of benefit out of this.

[3:33] Because wisdom is so useful in that it gives you both contentment, but also the capacity to make good choices, wisdom is used in the Bible. Wisdom is described in the Bible with the most superlative language.

It's gold. It's treasure. It's riches. It's the thing you should pursue. It's the best woman ever. Lady wisdom. It's always presented as this kind of ideal prize to attain.

And, you know, because it is an ideal prize, it has counterfeits. Everything that is worth something will wind up with a counterfeit. I really like watches, and I will never be able to afford or would probably never want to pay, you know, \$30,000 for a Rolex Submariner.

But I could just go to Manila in a couple weeks. 20 bucks. I'm solid for at least three days of Rolex-ing until it gets wet or sees the sun or something like that.

Anything that's super valuable will have counterfeits. And I want to mention just as an aside to begin with that wisdom has counterfeits. Wisdom has counterfeits.

[4:46] The very beginning of the Bible story begins with the forbidden fruit being presented to Eve as something that has the ability to make one wise.

In Colossians 2, Paul talks about legalism and asceticism and says these have the appearance of wisdom but are not true wisdom. So one of the things to keep in mind is not only do we have to pursue wisdom but we have to be able to discern what wisdom is and what wisdom isn't between the true and the false, between the real and the fake.

Which is kind of a conundrum because that feels like something you'd need wisdom to discern. You know, there are these moments in Ecclesiastes where you feel like you're going in a circle.

We talked about that at the very beginning of the series. And this conversation about wisdom has some elements of Hevel, some elements of, you know, just a vanity, a futility almost.

Like, so you're telling me there's a bunch of fake wisdoms out there and I have to choose the true one. But in order to do that, I need wisdom. It's like, cool. That's kind of what we're in for today and because of that I'm going to try to keep it short.

[6:01] You knew this was coming, by the way. We can't have a whole series in Ecclesiastes that is relatively upbeat. At some point, you know, I need to leave you contemplating the meaning of everything, you know.

So this is maybe going to be a little bit more of a cloudy sermon but it's pointing to something really beautiful and true. And that is that God has this great gift for us called wisdom.

And if we do strain through the counterfeits, we will find something that helps us not only make great choices when we have choices to make, but also to find great contentment when we don't have a choice to make.

Last word, and I'll revisit this concept later, but if you were to ask me what is counterfeit wisdom exactly, I would think it's true wisdom combined with pride, combined with self-centeredness.

But we can test that theory out as we progress. Okay. We'll use the word better. It appears quite a bit in the first seven verses or so of Ecclesiastes 7.

[7:03] But the word better appears a lot in the wisdom literature. The word is always presented as that kind of idea, almost always presented as that kind of sense of knowing which choice to make.

Right? Good, better, best. Never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best. Anybody else learn that as a kid? No. Okay. So it was just my super works-driven youth group.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That was the gospel growing up. No. The word better in the Hebrew appears a lot in wisdom, and it's just got that sense of this is better than that.

This is better than that. And so the first concept we have, as we talked about our thesis statement, is that when you have a choice to make, wisdom helps you make a good choice. And so part one of the sermon will just be thinking about discernment.

If you want to understand sort of the grand project of wisdom literature in the Bible, it's really found in Proverbs 14, 12. There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end leads to death.

[8:09] The great project of the wisdom literature is to help people step out of this problem that we experience due to our fallenness. And that is, there is a way that seems right to a man, and in the end leads to death.

And though it's never said explicitly in the scriptures, there is also the opposite statement that's being handled. And that is, there is a way that seems wrong to a man, but in the end leads to life.

There is a way that seems right to a man, and in the end leads to death. There is a way that seems wrong to a man, and in the end leads to life. That second idea is really what's happening in verses 1 through 5.

Look at chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes. For the most part, what you see here are things described as better that we would assume are worse. A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

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. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

[9 : 20] The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of the fools.

So here you have a lot of things that are presented as better, better choices, that are really counterintuitive. These things seem like less good, not more good than their opposites.

And so, again, if you want to understand the whole project of wisdom literature, I would say there is a way that seems right to a man, and in the end leads to death, and there is a way that seems wrong to a man, and in the end it leads to life, and wisdom literature is here to help you see those things clearly.

I'm going to just start dropping kind of some of my opinions, findings on wisdom literature that I've studied over the years, and here's another thought that relates, and that is people say that Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes are wisdom literature, and that Psalms and Song of Solomon are poetry.

And I would say I think it's all wisdom, because I think the heart of wisdom is God is worship. The heart of wisdom is you are God and I am not.

[10 : 43] And the second most wise thing you could ever do is just to love one person with all your soul for your whole life, and that's Song of Solomon. So I would say that actually the whole thing is wisdom.

Worship is the most wise thing you can do, and it often feels like not the way that leads to life, but it is. And the same with marriage. There is a way that feels like death sometimes, but in the end leads to life.

Another thing to drop as we move through the text is just that this passage is really clearly showing us that while we as a church and as a denomination believe in once saved, always saved, we want to be clear that the Scripture teaches absolutely that there is no such thing as once wise, always wise.

There's no such thing as once wise, always wise. It can be confusing when you're young to talk to some older Christian and hear rancid folly come out of their mouth.

It's kind of confusing. It's like, what's going on here? I thought you were going to be wise with age. Well, the likelihood honestly is that they were, and now they're not.

[12 : 01] Wisdom is not something once acquired that you retain indefinitely, regardless of how you live or think or act. Wisdom is not something you can take for granted.

If you've acquired it, there's no guarantee you'll keep it. Look at verse 7. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. This points us to this important concept as we go and seek wisdom from others, and that is that you need to not simply ask, has this person been wise in the past?

That's not sufficient, unfortunately, because wisdom spoils. It has a shelf life. And how I mentioned earlier that what counterfeit wisdom seems to be is real wisdom combined with pride.

I think if we're thinking about what happens to people when they become less wise than they once were, it's often a consequence of having acquired wisdom, humility is something in the Bible like the natural thing you would do in response to having wisdom, and also the preservative for wisdom.

[13 : 25] It's the thing that keeps wisdom from going bad. So this passage, verse 7, it seems to suggest that if a person is wise, but they act in oppressive ways, if they act in unjust ways, they lose their wisdom.

And that would just be one of countless ways a wise person can lose their wisdom, or the other way to say it would be one of countless ways where a person's wisdom can get contaminated with their arrogance and become foolishness.

So I think we're probably going to go through a season generationally where a bunch of people that we were hoping would be older and wiser will turn out not to be.

And that's unfortunate, but I think it's worth mentioning that you can't just look at someone's number next to their age and assume that they're wise. It unfortunately doesn't work like that.

After all, this whole book is written, at least in the voice of Solomon, if not by Solomon, and Solomon's the great example of this very thing, as we'll see toward the end of the sermon.

[14 : 39] In fact, the reason that Solomon got wise was that he was humble, right? He was put in a position to lead, and he cried out to the Lord. The Lord said, I'll give you whatever you'd like.

And he says, give me wisdom. Kind of preaching to myself right now, too, by the way. You know, it's one thing to have sought wisdom and to honestly have sought wisdom at the expense of other things that other people sought.

And I can say before you that I did that with a large part of my life. But if that ever gets, you know, fused with pride, all of that work to attain wisdom, it'll just all be spoiled.

Look at verse 11. Wisdom is repeatedly commended in the next three chapters or so as the thing you need to make good choices.

Verse 11. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. 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.

[15:46] Have any of you ever gone through a storage wars phase where you watch storage wars? For like, they used to have it. I think this always seemed to happen when we would travel.

There's a channel on TV. We don't have cable at home. But like, there's a channel where they show you one storage war episode, but then they don't take a commercial break between the next one.

They show you the beginning of the next one.

So you can accidentally watch four hours of storage wars and not realize what happened, especially when you're on vacation. And so I've done this before. And so I think probably most of you understand the show, but the basic concept is that, you know, you can buy abandoned storage units for less money than you probably, you know, would expect.

And if you can buy an abandoned storage unit and you get to sell all the stuff in it, you could make quite a bit of money. And so the whole conceit, the whole idea of the show is, is that the storage unit door slides open.

And there are all these people who make a living doing this. And they scan the contents really quickly. Notice things that are of value, indicators that more value exists there than one would have thought.

[16:53] And they sort of are really impressively good on this. And sometimes they're wrong, but many times they're right. Friends, your entire life is that.

Every day of your life, every moment of your life, is you're just scanning your environment, evaluating what is important, what is not, what is good, what is bad, what you should move toward, what you should move away from, and so forth.

Well, what, what tools do you have to do this consistent scan evaluation thing? Well, that's what the Bible presents as wisdom.

Now, that's one piece of wisdom, this ability to make good choices. And we'll lead into that more in the coming weeks. The second piece is acceptance. I mentioned that, you know, when you have choices to make, wisdom helps you make a good choice.

Wisdom helps you choose well. But sometimes you don't have choices to make, and in that case, wisdom helps you trust well. Look at verse 13. Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked?

[18:02] In the day of prosperity, be joyful. 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.

So this is the second part of the thesis. There are times when you have choices to make. This is most of the time. And then there are times when you don't have any choices to make. And when you don't have any choices to make, it could be described as, what God has made crooked, you cannot make straight.

It's just the way it is. And that seems to be what's happening in verses 13 and 14. Sometimes you need wisdom to understand that this is not a moment for straightening.

This is a moment for sitting, for calming your soul, and letting the Lord do the work that he has intended to do. And you need wisdom, I suppose, to know which time it is, right?

And it's conceivable that you're in a situation where you've got both going on in different parts of your life. But the second component of wisdom is the ability to be content, the ability to trust God in moments where you can recognize the play that is being run is way above my pay grade.

[19:22] God has made some decisions. I'm in a state that I'm in, and now I need to learn how to trust him. Verse 14 again, In other words, when life is good, enjoy life.

Don't be suspicious of it. Just enjoy it. It won't always be good. Enjoy it. But also, and in the day of adversity, consider who has made the one as well as the other.

God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. In other words, there's just a lot of this world that is not in your control, and wisdom is able to recognize that and rest in the Lord.

There are counterfeit versions of this. Anxiety be one of them. Worry would be one of them.

Obsessive control would be another. Those are all foolish responses to uncertainty.

The wise response to uncertainty is to say, there is a God in charge. His nature is fundamentally good. He loves me, and he has prepared a plan for me to go through what is described here as a crooked season.

[20 : 40] Now, in 1707, a Scottish pastor named Thomas Brooks took a church in a parish called Ettrick. It's just a tiny little place that has more sheep than people.

It's in the hills. It's about as far from influence as a man can be assigned, and he stayed there 25 years until he died. Somewhere in those years, out of the obscurity of his environment, he wrote a book on Ecclesiastes 7.13 called The Crook and the Lot.

The Crook and the Lot. The Lot, in Puritan speak, is your portion. The thing God has given you. The life that God has given to you.

And the crook is the part that you don't like. The thing that has the bend in it. The thing that isn't straight. The thing that you would fix if you could, but you can't because Proverbs 7.13.

Who can straighten what God has made crooked? And so Thomas Boston wrote an entire book about this subject because he knew this subject as an individual.

[21 : 55] His health was wrecked for most of his ministry. One of the reasons why it probably was God's favor for him to serve in obscurity in spite of his intelligence and godliness is physically not up to handle much.

Not only that, but he put six of his ten children in the ground before he died himself. And his wife, a woman he loved dearly, spent at least the last decade of her life confined to her room with her own sickness.

A sickness that no physician of that age anyway could touch. So this is the man who wrote a whole book on Ecclesiastes 7.13 and finding contentment in the crook.

And he has three concepts that he clung to as he considered the reality that sometimes life is not what we want it to be and we need to learn the wisdom of contentment.

His first point is this. Whatever crook is in your lot, God made it. Whatever crook is in your lot, God made it. Not permitted it at arm's length while looking away, made it.

[23 : 15] God has made the one as well as the other, verse 14 says. The bend in your life did not escape the design of the designer. Boston refuses to give you a smaller God just so your theological brain feels more comfortable.

It's a fool's errand to suggest that somehow God is less in control than the Bible presents him to be. All too often, there's a kind of theology out there that portrays Jesus or God as a kind of Superman. He is super strong, super powerful, he's good, but he has one kryptonite that will render him powerless. Free will.

That's how God is presented in a lot of churches. It's the one thing that God can't resist. He's really strong, he's really impressive, but there is this one thing. If people decide to do what they want to do, God has no capacity to handle that.

Well, that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches a much more troubling reality in some respects and a much less troubling reality in other respects, and that is that no one can resist God's will.

[24 : 30] And so to some degree, however you calculate it and however you'd want to systematize it and put it in the most theologically clean way, Boston is simply saying, reality, I'm in a bad way, God knows, and he's allowed that to happen at the very least.

Charles Spurgeon learned in his great discomforts of life, his great sufferings, also had a very sick wife for a very long time, himself struggled with health issues, a massive amount, and also, he was famous, but that came with a lot, a lot of slander and attack.

And Charles Spurgeon once said that I would tremble to think if the hardship that has come to my life was not carefully measured out and sent to me by my father's hand.

It's like the alternative is that this is all random and outside of my father's control. That is not a comfortable thought. And so Boston's first point in this particular piece of wisdom, how to handle the moments when you don't have a choice, is to understand that this has come from God.

His second was this, what God has made crooked, you cannot make straight. You could spend 30 years trying, you can throw money at it, therapy at it, prayer as a leverage at it, a second marriage at it, a bigger house at it.

[26:00] But Boston's point is not that the effort to handle things well and to be a good steward of your life is wrong, but it is easy for us to get some categories confused and to understand that sometimes things just are the way they are.

And his third point was is that seeing the crook as God's work is the only way to carry it well. Boston called the crook the great engine of providence for revealing what is actually inside of us.

His thought is is that God uses the thing we can't change but want to as a way of revealing who we really are. Revealing to ourselves who we really are.

Now, Boston moves from that verse to another passage in Hebrew or in Proverbs and he starts talking about humility is the only way to live righteously with the crook, with the broken thing, with the hardship.

You have to have humility. You have to humble yourself before God. And so that's part three of this sermon. Humility really throws us back to the beginning of chapter seven.

[27:22] Why is it better to be in the house of mourning than the house of feasting? Why is it better to be in sorrow than to have laughter? Why is it better to receive the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of the fools?

Because fundamentally humility is the best place a human being can be. humility. So, I could tell you this straight up.

If you have a choice to make, choose well by choosing humility. humility. The thing you should be chasing aggressively, if you are wise, is you should be aggressively chasing the virtue of humility. humility. If you are wise, if you're able to see the storage door open and be able to scan all the things and decide what should I chase, what should I be about, how should I spend this moment, how should I spend this life, you would choose humility.

humility. It is absolutely the best virtue a human being can pursue in many respects. Why?

[28:36] Well, because humility winds up being the destination for both halves of our thesis. If you have a choice to make, choose humility. If you don't have a choice to make, be humble.

Accept what God is doing. Trust Him. Remember how we said at the beginning of the sermon that the thing that probably spoils wisdom is sort of like the attainment of wisdom and then the recognition that one has attained wisdom?

I think I've confessed this before, but I remember I was in this room by myself praying one day. This is probably six, seven years ago. And I prayed something kind of that I pray fairly often.

It was just like, Lord, I don't, I don't know what I'm doing. Like, I'm going to mess everything up if you don't help me. Like, my main prayer throughout the week is, God, help me not to be as dumb as I will naturally be if you don't help me.

Anyway, so I'm in this room alone on a Wednesday or whatever, and I'm praying, you know, God, please don't let me be an idiot. I'm just going to mess things up if you don't help me. As soon as I was done praying that, a thought came into my head and thought, you know, not a lot of guys would acknowledge that.

[29:53] It's pretty humble. I think that's what chapter seven is doing. It's like, yes, pursue wisdom, wisdom.

But with wisdom comes its own trap. Understand that as much as you pursue wisdom, you need that wisdom to terminate into humility, and the second you see humility absent from wisdom is the second you should start worrying.

look at verse 14. This is acceptance. This is humility. Take life as it comes. That's a mark of humility. 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 come after him.

Acknowledge that life is short and sometimes unfair, and that's just the way it is because you're a human being. Verse 15. In my vain life, I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes, and his righteousness.

There is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil doing. I do worry about the younger generations that they were trained to believe that they could stop in the middle of their bumblebee soccer match and say this is unfair and that anyone would care.

[31:13] No one cares about the interest rate, guys. Like, no one cares about the GDP compared to home price rate.

like, the reality is life is unfair. And it can be unfair and you can still win, but you have to be humble and not think that the world should stop because life's unfair.

It's not, it's not, I'm not suggesting life is fair. I'm not suggesting you're born in the most ideal economic conditions. I will say it's kind of soft to keep talking about it instead of just getting out there and getting after that.

Verse 19, or verse 16, sorry. Be not overly righteous. Do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?

Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of this and from that withhold not your hand for the one who fears God shall come out of both of them.

[32:23] I think the idea here is just really quickly is the more you think of yourself as wise, the more likely you are to become unwise. Get your eyes off yourself and fear God.

Verse 19, wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than 10 rulers who are in a city. Now, hopefully as you read wisdom literature, you learn to hear the wink.

You learn to see the wink or the sardonic in a verse. Do you understand that verse 19 is not all sunshine and rainbows?

Because if I get strength from wisdom, more than 10 rulers who are in a city, what is that likely to do to my humility? So that's the strange thing about wisdom.

It will actually give you advantages, but those advantages when not adjoined with humility and gratitude become disadvantages. And so you see this chapter ending with this real emphasis on humility.

[33:31] Look at verse 20. Surely there is not one righteous man on earth who does good and never since. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. Here's pride mentioned in 23. All of this I've tested by wisdom.

I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me. That which has been is far off and deep and very deep. Who can find it out? He's, he's, he's understanding. He's trying to articulate.

Yeah, wisdom is great. It's, it's better than foolishness as Ecclesiastes said, but it doesn't come without a cost. And we're going to wrap up by showing you the cost.

Look at verse 25. I turn my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

[34:28] And I find something more bitter than death. The woman whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

Verse 27. Behold, this is what I found, says the preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things, which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found.

One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. See, this alone I found, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Okay, so what's going on here? You're like, no idea. Way to be humble. Wisdom literature handles women in a very interesting way.

They're idealized. Lady wisdom, Proverbs 31, Lemuel's mother, but they're also presented as like this horror that could absolutely destroy you if you get it wrong.

[35:41] That's what's going on here. Okay? That number, a thousand, I have not found one good woman among a thousand.

That number is meaningful here. If you have your Bibles, or you can see it on the screen, 1 Kings 11, 1 through 8. Some of you have postulated that Ecclesiastes is Solomon's, like, final repentance act.

I would say it doesn't, it doesn't come out that way in 1 Kings. 1 Kings 11, 1. Now, King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, you shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.

Solomon clung to those in love. He had 700 wives, and where, and who were princesses, and 300 concubine.

What's seven plus three? Right? So this number in Ecclesiastes is not incidental. The thousand women are a reference to the way that Solomon ended his life.

[37:09] and the course that wisdom took in his life. And his wives turned away his heart, for when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David, his father.

For Solomon went after Ashereth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David, his father, had done.

Then Solomon built a high place for Chamash, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech, some of you know, it's pretty dark stuff, Molech, the abomination of the Amnemiters, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.

And so he did for all his foreign wives who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. Here's what I think Ecclesiastes 7 is doing.

Wisdom gives you status. Wisdom is wonderful. It's powerful. It gives you status. And status gives you access to special privileges. And status makes you proud.

[38:30] And so on and so forth. I think that's the sober warning of Ecclesiastes that is either written by a repentant Solomon or by someone speaking for him in a voice of repentance.

Yeah, wisdom's great. It's better than almost everything else. But if you don't adjoin humility to it, you're just going to be another Solomon.

Just a big waste of wisdom. Just a big hedonic pile of ruin. And you know, for him, it was women.

But for you, it could be work. It could be anything. You know, we would all have our various ways of spending the currency of wisdom that we've acquired over the years in selfish ways.

And so it appears to me that Ecclesiastes is championing wisdom. Yes, pursue it, but be careful.

Because it's so potent and so glorious and so powerful that it is just as likely to ruin you.

[39:48] And you'll become a fool. And I think that's why we wind up back at the beginning being told that it's better to be in the house of mourning.

It's better to hear the rebuke. It's better that God should, in various ways, bring us humility even as he gives us wisdom. Because that will keep us safe.

And that will keep us from ending up in the way of the fool. You ever notice how after Paul experiences the third heaven, which I think you could just describe as a marvelous, supernaturally aided insight, he really saw something, perception, he really understood things.

God says, proactively, in order to keep you from becoming conceited, I give you a crook in your lot, a thorn in the flesh. Three times I prayed that the Lord would remove this thorn, but he said, my grace is sufficient for you.

Friends, I think that the call today is absolutely let's pursue wisdom, but let's also ask the Lord, God, keep me humble. Keep me humble.

[41:02] The reality is is that there are ways that seem right to me that aren't, and there are ways that seem wrong to me that are right. Keep me humble. Let me pray for us and then we'll go into communion.

Father God, you've taught us clearly in your word that seeing well, seeing truth, having wisdom, understanding is just one step in the path to godliness.

It's an important step. It should be pursued and we should want to grow in wisdom, but Lord, we live in such a broken state that even when we acquire insight, we can still be self-deceived.

this chapter to me is the most fundamentally vain, futile, feeling chapter in the entire book of Ecclesiastes because it's saying, yes, you have things to be about.

Yes, there are priorities and also, we live in a world for the... ..