

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: COMING TO TERMS WITH REALITY

PUTTING WISDOM TO WORK

ECCLESIASTES 7:15–29



The Heart of the Matter

By the second half of Ecclesiastes 7, Solomon started to get a little better perspective on life. As a result, his counsel took on a whole new style. The dark clouds of despair and hopelessness broke, thanks to the hope that wisdom brought. Instead of cold, sarcastic cynicism, Solomon's words evidenced a greater depth of caring, understanding, and insight. In the seventh chapter, each verse drips with rich and rare wisdom . . . the kind of counsel we get so little of in our world of human advice. But the writer's desire was not that we simply extol the virtues of wisdom and stand in awe of it, but that we *put it to work*. What good is wisdom on the shelf of theory? Who needs it if it can't benefit everyday life? Ecclesiastes 7:15–29 will help us see wisdom's practical usefulness.



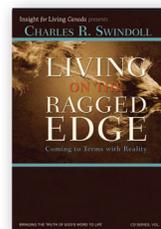
Discovering the Way

1. An Analysis of Wisdom

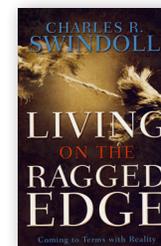
Solomon's perspective was rather dim in the first six chapters of Ecclesiastes when he examined the futility of life without God at the center. However, in Ecclesiastes 7, Solomon began to use the wisdom he had gleaned from his exploration of the world. We'll see Solomon's perspective come into even clearer focus in his description of the outworking of wisdom to produce balance and stability in life.



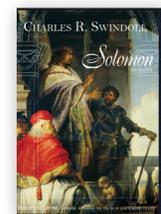
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2. The Outworking of Wisdom (Ecclesiastes 7:15–29)

When God's people put His wisdom into action, we will experience three benefits: balance, strength, and insight.

- *Balance:* Wisdom guards us from the extremes of an overly zealous, “super-pious” attitude, and it helps us to live with authenticity.
- *Strength:* Wisdom helps us accept painful tensions, restrains us from gullibility, and enables us to resist criticism.
- *Insight:* Only God can make us wise. Wisdom teaches us that our most basic battle is not with God but with ourselves.



DIGGING DEEPER

God's Timing versus Ours

We Christians believe that God knows the length of our days. And because He knows the future perfectly, the time of our death is set on His calendar, even though we may fill our own calendars for years beyond that date. So what did Solomon mean in Ecclesiastes 7:17 when he said, “Why should you die before your time?” Can we change the time of our death and the future God already knows? Wouldn't that thwart His plan or at least catch Him by surprise? Does God's plan and knowledge of the future change based on our decisions?

While there is room within conservative theism for various perspectives on the tension between the sovereignty of God and the human will, we must conclude that because God knows not only all possible futures but also the future that will actually unfold, then each of us has a date and time when our lives will end. No matter what we do, we can't thwart God's plan or nullify His perfect knowledge.

So what do Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 7:17 mean? Even though God's plan includes knowledge of the end of our lives, He wants people to live wise, godly lives that are long and rich. By fearing God and keeping His commands, people can generally avoid things that shorten their lives and can continue to live long, fruitful lives. But by living foolishly in unrighteousness, we can shorten the normal lifespan and fail to experience God's blessings. Thus, from the human perspective, you can “die before your time,” but from God's eternal perspective, He's not surprised by such a premature death.

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Starting Your Journey

Wisdom is not merely a theoretical concept to be written about and stored on our shelves to collect dust. Neither is it simply the result of our own ingenuity, education, and experience. The Lord gives us wisdom so we can view life with objectivity and handle it with stability. Those of us who have already placed our faith in Christ alone for forgiveness have access to that wisdom from God through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Here is a helpful checklist to evaluate whether or not you are living with wisdom:

- *Regarding balance:* Is wisdom guarding you from extremes?
- *Regarding strength:* Is wisdom keeping you stable?
- *Regarding insight:* Is wisdom clearing your mind?