

CHASE

"NOTHING TO CHANCE" ECCLESIASTES 7:13-14

This Week's Core Competency

Peace – I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, others, and me. Philippians 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The words found in Ecclesiastes 7:14 are among the most memorable in the entire book. "When times are good, be happy," the Teacher says. "But when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." Commenting on the verse, one author writes, "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*" (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 321, italics added). What's more, no one can undo what he has done.

Solomon's words and those of the author commenting on them resonate with the words of what is now commonly called "The Serenity Prayer." The words of the prayer are frequently attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr although prayers with a similar sentiment appear before his time. The prayer

***Take what he gives,
And praise him still,
Through good or ill,
Who ever lives.***

— Richard Baxter

became more widely known after being brought to the attention of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1941 by an early member, who ran across it in a *New York Herald Tribune* obituary. The co-founder, William Griffith Wilson, and the staff liked the prayer and had it printed out in modified form and handed around. "With amazing speed," writes Bill, "the Serenity Prayer came into general use and took its place alongside our two other favorites, the Lord's Prayer and the Prayer of St. Francis. Thus did the "accidental" noticing of an unattributed prayer, printed alongside a simple obituary of an unknown individual, open the way toward the prayer's daily use by thousands upon thousands of A.A.s worldwide" (<http://www.aahistory.com/prayer.html>). It has been part of Alcoholics Anonymous ever since, and has also been used in other twelve-step programs.

Here is the full version of this prayer aimed at living serenely in a frantic and unpredictable world:

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.*

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For Discussion

In the words of one commentator, "God brings both prosperity and recession" (Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 321); both are from his hand. How so in your view?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

13 Consider what God has done:

Who can straighten
what he has made crooked?

14 When times are good, be happy;
but when times are bad, consider:

God has made the one
as well as the other.

Therefore, a man cannot discover
anything about his future.

Cf., other translations

13 Consider the work of God:

For who can make straight what he has bent?

14 In times of prosperity be joyful,
but in times of adversity consider this:
God has made one as well as the other,
so that no one can discover what the future holds.

(NET)

13 Think about what God has done. How can anyone straighten out what God has made crooked? 14 When things are going well for you, be glad, and when trouble comes, just remember: God sends both happiness and trouble; you never know what is going to happen next.
(GNT)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "what God has done" in v. 13.
- * Bracket "straighten" in v. 13.
- * Bracket "crooked" in v. 13.
- * Circle "good" in v. 14.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 14.
- * Circle "bad" in v. 14.
- * In the margin next to v. 14a write, "Cf., 3:1-14."
- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 14 (see note).
- * Bracket "anything about his future" in v. 14.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. How would you define the word "consider," which occurs *twice* in verses 13 and 14?
2. What *exactly* does the Teacher want us to "consider" in verse 13?
3. What's the implied answer to his *rhetorical* question in the same verse?
4. Put the point of this *rhetorical* question in your own words.
5. Explain how the terms "good" and "bad" are used in verse 14a.
6. The term "but" in verse 14a indicates *contrast*; "good" in line one is contrasted with "bad" in line two. What would you expect to find contrasted with "be happy" in line one?
7. Instead, line two contains the *unexpected*. How so and so what?
8. Explain why God has made *good* days as well as *bad*.
9. **Discussion:** No one knows the future. Talk about whether this is a good thing or bad *overall*.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Forrest Gump unwittingly channeled the Teacher when he said, "Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." The same idea is conveyed a bit differently in Ecclesiastes 7:14. Life includes a time for everything (3:1), both good things and bad (7:14a). What's more, God has made it that way "so that no one can discover what the future holds" (v. 14b) (NET).

Verses 13 and 14 echo a number of themes that the Teacher has touched on in previous chapters. In verse 13 he declares that "what God has done" is *immutable*; in other words, no one can change the facts of life previously described in 3:1-8. "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven . . . a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." Human beings are powerless against God, who "has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time" (v. 11 NET). No one lives a life of laughter without tears or a life of tears without laughter. Laughter and tears are facts of life as God has ordained it just as much as birth and death, and nobody can do anything about it. "Who can straighten what he has made crooked?" the Teacher asks rhetorically in the same verse to stress that no one can undo what God has done. As he said in 3:14, "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it."

Given the reality surrounding "what God has done," the Teacher declares in verse 14 that "in times of prosperity" we should "be joyful." This isn't the first time he has said as much. In 3:22 he declares, "There is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work," and in 5:19 he states that the enjoyment of one's wealth and possessions is "a gift of God." In a number of other places he

laments it when people are denied that enjoyment (6:2, 3, 6). He also proclaims the sovereignty of God in verse 14. This, too, is a theme touched on before. In 2:26 he says, "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God."

Moreover, "what God has done" is not only immutable but also *inscrutable*; no one can know what will happen next. One commentator writes, "Solomon closed his treatment on the wise response to adversity and prosperity by reminding his readers that God sovereignly disposes of both and that His disposition of them is immutable (cf. 3:14) and inscrutable . . . God so mingles together adversity and prosperity that man cannot discover anything about his future (cf. 8:7; 10:14)" (Donald R. Glenn, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 993). In this the wise are no better off than the foolish. As another writer observes, "Not even wisdom can rectify this frustrating fact of life. And what is worse, God has designed it this way. God purposely set up good and bad days in order to hide the future even from the wise" (Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 192). All that any person can do in light of what the Teacher has said is walk by faith.

The book of Ecclesiastes opens with the refrain "Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" And yet, the Teacher never suggests that life isn't worth living. He isn't a pessimist; he isn't a fatalist. Instead, he repeatedly states that people are to find satisfaction in what they do and enjoy life as a gift from God.

The Message of the Passage

Enjoy times of prosperity and find peace in times of adversity, knowing that both have their place in God's sovereign plan.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“Nothing to Chance”

(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

- v. 13 *what God has done* I.e., life as ordained by God; cf., 3:1-14, esp. vv. 11, 14.
- v. 13 *straighten, cooked* These figurative terms refer to "what God has done" in v. 10. They do not carry the moral connotations that we often ascribe to them (i.e., "straighten" does not mean "make right," and "made crooked" does not mean "made wrong"). This may explain why the NET renders the verse, "who can make straight what he has bent?" The *rhetorical* question simply means that no one can undo what God has done (cf., 3:14). "Verse 13 is speaking not of moral crookedness but of the shapes of things and events which we find awkward but should accept from God" (Derek Kidner, *A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*, 68).
- v. 14 *but* Verse 14a contains an example of *antithetical parallelism*. In *synonymous parallelism* the second line contains *synonyms* for key words in the first line. In *antithetical parallelism* the second line contains contrasting *antonyms* for key words in the first line, e.g., "bad" is the antonym of "good." The expected antonym for "be happy" (i.e., "be sad") is missing.
- v. 14 *good, bad* Lit., "the day of good," "the day of bad." The terms "good" and "bad" are used in a morally neutral sense as in the frequently asked question, "Did you have a good day or bad day?" Many English translations make this clear: NET, GNT, NKJV, NRSV, NLT, ESV, and NJB.
- v. 14 *therefore* The Hebrew expression indicates purpose rather than result and would be better translated "so that" as in many other English translations (cf., NET, ESV, NKJV, NRSV, NJB). "The strength of [the Hebrew expression] ('in order that') should not be weakened to 'therefore' as the NIV has done. Our ignorance of the future is in the purpose and plan of God" (Garrett, 321).
- v. 14 *his future* Lit., "anything after him" (cf., ESV, NKJV, NRSV). "There is disagreement as to whether what comes after him refers to the future earthly life or the afterlife. I prefer the former interpretation because Qohelet is nowhere explicit about an afterlife" (Longman, 192).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Special note to parents: Our summer series in the book of Ecclesiastes is called Life on Mission.

Eight-year-old Kyle was educating his five-year-old sister at the family Thanksgiving meal. "So, this is how it goes. There are lots of awesome desserts at Thanksgiving, BUT Mom is going to make you eat the yucky stuff before she lets you have the good stuff. Put small portions on your plate and eat fast!" There is some wisdom in Kyle's logic. We cannot avoid the fact that there will be good things and bad things in life. The same God who provided the ingredients for pumpkin pie created the ingredients for squash casserole. Our text today reminds us that God is ultimately in control of all things. He can be trusted in His goodness and in His justice. Take a lazy summer evening this week to have a discussion with your family. Ask, "What is something that was unexpected and difficult to deal with this past school year?" Allow each family member to share. Then ask, "What was something great that happened this past school year?" Allow each family member to share. How has God used these events in your family? Can you see good things in the difficult times? Pray together thanking God for the good and the bad. Tell Him that you trust Him to work all things out and then intentionally rest in the peace He alone can bring!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Ecclesiastes 7:13-14a

Fill in the blanks:

"Who can _____ what he has made _____? When times are _____, be happy: but when times are _____, consider: _____ has made one as well as the _____."

What Do You Think

How does knowing that God is in control of the good times and the bad times make you feel?

What R U Going To Do

Does your family know someone who is going through something difficult right now? Maybe you know a neighbor who has lost his job or a grandparent who is sick. Think about a way as a family you can encourage them and remind them that God is good and is in control!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Peace - I live without worry because things are good between God, me and others.

Memory Verse

Colossians 1:20 - "... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC _____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade _____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. He and his wife Ruth have been married forty-five years and have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.