

1. I was thinking of just calling this lesson is "Solomon the moralist". That's how I describe how he's acting throughout this chapter. To quote Jon Curson, "Solomon trades in his Ferrari Lamborghini for a Ford station wagon". It's as if Solomon realized at this point in the book what a waste of his time it was to pursue living frivolously to just try to acquire as much wealth as possible or say to build as many projects as possible. Solomon is saying effectively that it's better to go live a moral life than to waste one's life in pursuit of things that don't matter eternally.
 - a) It is as if we can say to Solomon, "You almost got it, but you are not entirely correct in the way God wants you or us to live." It is a little like when God disciplined Job near the end of that book to say in effect, "Hey Job, it was not your fault that you had to suffer, but at the same time, not all the arguments you made so far about your life is correct". In other words, Job was not a perfect person, neither is Solomon and neither are you nor me.
 - b) OK, so none of us are perfect. What is the point and why should I read this chapter?
 - c) To answer, let me give my title, "Solomon looks left and right, but forgets to look up".
 - d) Solomon realizes that to live a good moral life is much better than all the pursuits he has engaged in prior to writing this book. Remember that Solomon was a powerful king with great wealth, and every material thing one can imagine at his disposal. He also made the time and had the gift of wisdom to figure out how one should live one's life. The results of living that life that Solomon did, and having that gift of wisdom is Ecclesiastes.
 - e) Solomon's conclusion to this point is that living a good moral life is better than to waste it with things that don't matter for all of eternity. That is why I decided to title this lesson:
 - i) "Solomon looks left and Solomon looks right, but he fails to look up". This chapter is how he figures out the best way to live is to live a good moral life. The problem is he fails to trust in God daily in order to live that life.
2. OK John, too bad for Solomon. However, I do trust in God to guide my life. Why should I study this chapter if I already get the fact we need His guidance for our lives?
 - a) For starters, Solomon uses this chapter to teach us how to acquire good wisdom in the first place. He explains to us, "Hey, you want to be wise, here are some practical tips on how to get wisdom. Consider these steps and you (us) can have wisdom like me."
 - b) In other words, Solomon is saying, "Ok then, since I've now beaten it over our heads how not to live one's life, let me tell you how to acquire good wisdom.
 - c) The point for you and me is that we all need our daily reminders to "look up" or else all we would do is focus on our problems of the moment. Even if we do decide to live out a good moral life, the mistake Solomon makes, is a mistake made throughout history, it can not be done without God's power. That in effect is what the Israelites collectively failed to do in their history as a kingdom and that is what Christians fail to do when we "look left, look right, try to figure it out ourselves and never look up."
3. With that said, this chapter is full of practical advise how to get wisdom so that we can live type of moral life that God does desire we live. In a sense, Solomon is not wrong that living a moral life is the best way to live. What He hasn't stated yet and won't until the conclusion of this book is our dependence upon God in order to live that moral life.
 - a) Therefore, I encourage you to read through this lesson, not to know to depend upon God in order to live a moral life, but to listen to Solomon's practical advice on how to acquire wisdom so that we can live the type of life that God desires we live.
 - b) This lesson does not focus too much on "I have wasted many years doing this or that, and now I am living a better moral life." While there is a little of that in this lesson, most of it is designed to teach us how to have wisdom in our lives so that we can live the type of life that is pleasing to God. With that said, we are ready for Verse 1 of this chapter.

4. Chapter 7, Verse 1a: A good name is better than fine perfume,
- a) To understand much of Chapter 7, remember the phrase "better than". The writing style of much of this chapter is essentially, "this is better than that". My job is to explain why each "x" is better than each "y". While some of these comparisons are going to be obvious when we think about them, many require explanations. Each statement is explaining to us how living this way is better than living that way. Remember that Solomon has now come to the realization what a waste of a life it is to just live to say, build things or make money or even just to have good time. He is arguing that living a moral life is better than to live an unmoral life. The fault in his logic is about not living a God centered life to be moral.
 - b) With that statement out of my system, I'm ready to talk about this half a verse. Solomon is comparing one's name (that is, one's reputation) to perfume. The idea is to think about how others see us. I have learned that it is wiser for us to focus more on what critics say about us than to just listen to compliments. Let's be honest, compliments build our ego, but we don't learn much from them. However, when a person we respect does give us an honest criticism, his or her comments will make us better people.
 - c) At this point let me share my favorite comment about perfume: It should be smelled not tasted. In other words a person's scent should not enter a room before one does and at the same time should not linger after they are gone. In other words, too much is a bad thing.
 - d) The comparison of one's reputation to perfume is a clever way of saying, it is better to be known for having a good reputation than how one smells (or looks). While that statement is obvious once one thinks about it, it also fits into Solomon's theme of it is better to think about one's life than just to do things that have no eternal benefit. That theme will be more obvious as we go through the rest of these proverbs.
5. Verse 1b: and the day of death better than the day of birth.
- a) The second half of Verse 1 compares the day of death to the day of birth. To understand this half of a verse, realize it is not talking about one's own birth and death, but about say, attending a celebration of a friend's new baby and attending a funeral of a friend.
 - b) Think about it this way: The celebration over a newborn baby is can be a lot of fun and if it is a person we care about, there is nothing wrong with being a part of that celebration. Now think about attending a funeral. Every one that I have ever attended, I have learned things about the life of the person who died. That funeral also makes each of us consider how short life really is, and makes us appreciate the time we have.
 - i) That comparison about learning more from a funeral than one does from joining a party to celebrate a birth is Solomon's point.
 - ii) As we go through the first 10 verses of this chapter, we will see Solomon continue this trend of comparing one action to another just to explain which action will give us greater wisdom about how life works. With that said, Verse 2.
6. Verse 2: It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.
- a) Since Solomon in his depressed mood thinks funerals are better teaching tools than say, a party celebrating a new baby, he continues that thought in Verse 2. The comparison made in this verse is about visiting two households: One is in a bad mood because someone in that household just died. The other household is holding some sort of celebration.
 - b) In my opening lesson on this book, I called it "Solomon needs a valium" because he seems to be depressed as one goes through this book. I don't believe Solomon is just saying that spending time at funerals is preferable to spending time at parties. His point is just about what one learns at both functions. Think about this from a New Testament perspective. We should be joyful with those who are happy and sorrowful with those are in pain, in order to be a good witness for Jesus. (That is my paraphrase of Romans 12:15.)
 - c) However Solomon's point here has nothing to do with enjoying either event. His point is how mourning reminds us how short life is, while feasting teaches us very little.

7. Verse 3: Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.
 - a) Well if Verse 2 didn't depress us enough, Verse 3 should drive us over the ledge.
 - b) I don't think Solomon went around being depressed all the time and avoided people who were in a good mood. His main point here is simply that we learn more in life from times of sorrow than we do from times of pleasure.
 - c) Think about when we have learned the most in life, from our successes or our failures? When do we change the most in life, through trials or successes? Laughter is not a bad thing. It is just that we learn more from sorrow than from fun times.
 - d) This depressing tone continues in Verse 4.
8. Verse 4: The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.
 - a) One thing one learns in life during times of difficulty is usually we can't fix it. The reason we should spend time with those who are hurting is not to fix their problems, but just to be there and be willing to listen. I think this is harder for men than it is for women. Most women I know are better at just listening than stating their opinion. Most men just want to solve problems and not take the time to just be there and listen.
 - b) My point here is simply that we learn more in life when others are going through a period of mourning than during times when there is a house full of celebrating. Solomon is not knocking times of celebration. The comparison is about when we learn the most. In that sense, one can see how Verse 4 is similar in tone to that of Verse 3.
 - c) Hopefully by this time, one gets the flavor of the opening verses of this chapter. It is not about when we should celebrate or be with sad people. It is about understanding when it is we learn the most about life. Solomon is trying to teach us here about when the times do occur that we gather wisdom for our lives. What we do with that wisdom is an issue coming up later. Meanwhile, Solomon isn't done lecturing us yet on how to get wisdom.
9. Verse 5: It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.
 - a) The term "song of fools" can also be translated "praise of fools". Remember that the term "fool" refers to one who doesn't care about God. If we get a bunch of praises from a group that doesn't care about godly wisdom or hear a uplifting song that has nothing to do with godly wisdom, that song is not nearly a valuable moment as a rebuke by a wise man. As I stated earlier in the lesson, wise people are more interested in good criticism by people with wisdom than just empty praise. I know of a book writer who loves to read what his critics say about him much more than those who just compliment him for what he writes. We learn more from good criticism than we do from empty praise. That is the point of the comparison being made in this verse.
10. Verse 6: Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.
 - a) For those of us who rarely sit next to a wood fire, let me explain this. A thorn that is being burnt up in a fire, makes a crackling sound and burns up instantly. It is a picture most of us can relate to as most people have seen wood fires at some point in their lives. Solomon compares that picture to the "laughter of fools". If a group of people is laughing out loud about something, that laughter usually ends pretty quickly. What Solomon is trying to compare is two different "quickly gone, meaningless" ideas. OK, so what?
 - b) Again, remember the biblical definition of a fool. It has nothing to do with the level of one's intelligence. It is describing a person who can care less about whether their lives are pleasing to God or not. The "laughter of fools" would then be describing someone who is say making a joke about how religious people act or saying what a waste of time it is for people to worship God. I believe the idea is to say that just as a burning thorn makes a lot of noise and goes out quickly, so does the lives of those who don't care about God.
 - c) OK, and what is the wisdom to be learned here? It is about considering where and when we should spend our time and what is a waste of time to be doing certain activities.

11. Verse 7: Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- a) Solomon is still giving us "proverb style" bits of wisdom to consider here. In this verse, he focuses on extortion and bribery. Extortion is when one person knows a bad secret about another person and that first person demands money in order to keep one's mouth shut. The other side that action is when one pays a bribe to the other to keep quiet about that same sort of secret.
 - b) The point here is about doing something wrong and others find out what we are doing wrong. That is when bribery and extortion come into play to not let others find out the things we are doing wrong.
 - c) I was thinking about the worst sins that I have ever committed in my life. If someone did threaten to extort me for those sins, I would say, "Go ahead and announce it. I know that I did wrong and I know that God has forgiven me of those sins." I would rather live with the public knowledge of those sins than to be in a bribery and extortion situation.
 - i) To state the obvious, it is better to avoid the sins in the first place. Solomon's point is that it is better to live with public knowledge of it then to get in a situation when one has to pay bribery to deal with it. In the end, I find such secrets do come out in the open anyway, so it is a waste of time and money to try to pay someone off.
 - d) I was also trying to think of things we want to keep secret. Suppose someone has a great idea for a new business or just something we are ashamed of. To state the obvious some more, then one has to be careful whom one shares that information with.
 - e) This reminds me of another classic joke: Three religious people were sharing their secrets with each other. The first said, "I confess, I have the sin of lust and I want to get that sin out in the open so you two can pray for me. The second said, I confess too, that I have the sin of greed and I have stolen things that don't belong to me. The third said, I too suffer from a sin. I suffer from the sin of gossip and I can't wait to get out of this meeting."
 - f) Now that we understand about being careful what we say, it is time to move on.
12. Verse 8: The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.
- a) To understand this verse, we need to focus on the word translated "matter" and the word "pride". The word matter can refer to any issue or problem that hangs over us for a good period of time. The word "pride" refers to our ego. It would be trying to solve that issue based on what we think is best as opposed to say godly wisdom to solve that problem.
 - b) Think about our problems. It is always better when that problem comes to an end then when it starts. In this verse Solomon is saying to have patience to let the thing come to an end than to let our pride get in the way and make it worse. The point is to compare that happy ending of having patience in a problem with not letting our pride get in the way.
 - c) Remember that we are reading a bunch of "better than" statements. The idea is how we are to apply Godly wisdom to any situation. Just as the end of a long drawn out problem is always better than when it starts, so is having patience in dealing with that issue better than having our ego get in the way and solving a "matter" the wrong way.
 - d) I was thinking about someone with little knowledge about cars, trying to fix that car. The right thing to do is to take that car to someone with good knowledge of the problem and letting them solve that problem. Pride is trying to fix by oneself what one doesn't have the talent to fix. That is the patience that Solomon is getting at in this verse.
13. Verse 9: Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.
- a) To get this verse, stop and think what makes us angry. I love the acronym "HALT". That stands for "Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired" the four biggest causes for getting angry. Solomon's point here is simply that we rarely if ever do good things when we are angry. When we get frustrated over a situation, it is better to walk away, or take a deep breath than it is to lash out at someone for how they are acting. While this bit of advice seems to be obvious when we are calm, the trick is to "HALT" when the anger arises. Solomon is just saying the wise don't let our emotions get the best of us when we make decisions.

- b) Before I move on to the next verse, let me pause for a moment, to help all of us see the big picture here of why Solomon is stating all of these "better than" verses. Solomon knew he had a gift from God to apply wisdom to his life. What he is trying to share with us, is the idea that if you want to have wisdom, "this concept is better than that concept". To say it another way, time spent doing "this" is better than time spent doing "that". That includes how we react to situations, which is why Solomon is warning against getting angry.
 - i) Again, the big picture is that Solomon has now spent half of Ecclesiastes in effect telling us, "here is how one is wasting one's life". Now Solomon is pausing from that discussion to say to us, "you want to be wiser than all of those things that I brought up in the first six chapters? Great, here is how you get that wisdom".
 - ii) We will get to the benefits of that wisdom later. Here Solomon is just saying in effect, "Do you want wisdom? Great. Now consider these points." Speaking of considering different ideas, let us now get back to the text.
14. Verse 10: Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.
- a) Ask oneself: why do the earlier days of our lives seem better than the present times?
 - i) For starters, we were younger and more care free.
 - ii) Second, our memories tend to focus on the good things of the past, and not too much on the problems we went through at those times.
 - iii) Third, we tend to look at the present and see all the problems that are in front of us. We fantasize about earlier times before those specific problems existed.
 - b) Then Solomon hits us with this reality: It is not better to fantasize about the past thinking it was better times than the present. Remember the goal is about acquiring wisdom. It is not wise to think the past is better than the present.
 - c) I was trying to imagine going through something horrible, like a bad car accident, or say losing one's ability to see or walk. Wouldn't it be better to live one's life before that event happened then just to focus on the present? What about if someone has cancer? Wouldn't the "old days" be more enjoyable than the present? Of course they would and that is not the issue here. The issue is about romanticizing the past to the point of ignoring what life is like now. It is about not living in a fantasy world without having to deal with whatever it is we have to face today. Yes of course, we can think about life in heaven without facing such horrible things is acceptable.
 - i) The point is whatever we have to deal with, we should pray something like, "Dear God, don't let this thing rule over my relationship with You. Give me Your grace and power to face what I have to face today. I can't handle this based on my own power so I am dependant upon You to deal with my situation. Provide me what I need to deal with what I have to deal with today and help me to trust that You are there with Me through this whole ordeal." In Jesus name we pray, amen.
 - d) As for the rest of us, back to Solomon. The good news the next verse is more positive.
15. Verse 11: Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.
- a) Solomon continues his speech through this chapter on the benefits of having wisdom. His point here is simply to appreciate it. It would be like receiving a large inheritance from a deceased relative. It is a benefit to those of us still living. That's the comparison here.
16. Verse 12: Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.
- a) Solomon continues his comparison of wisdom and an inheritance in this verse. I can just see most of us thinking, "Wisdom may be nice, but a big check that I was not expecting to get would be better. I can't spend wisdom on my problems." In that sense, one is wrong. It is better to have the wisdom to make the right decisions than to have that big check.
 - b) Remember that Solomon spent chapters discussing the fact that money doesn't bring any happiness. It just causes more problems. The wisdom to do what's right preserves us.

- c) Ok, I'll bite. How does wisdom preserve our life? For example, think about the prayer I just laid out for someone going through a really bad tragedy. Wisdom is saying that we can depend upon God to guide us through the worst of times as well as the best of times to make the best decisions possible. Wisdom is realizing, "It is not just up to us, but there is a God who does care about us and desires to guide our lives". That realization that we can trust God to guide us makes wisdom greater than a financial inheritance.
17. Verse 13: Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?
- a) OK, what has God made (or allowed) to be crooked? It could be as simple as some path we have to take in life to those tragedies we have to live through as I described earlier.
 - b) To say it simply, life is not easy and there are things we can't explain. The issue comes back to if we believe He exists, why don't we trust Him to guide us through the "crooked" aspects of our life as opposed to trying to survive without His help and guidance.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment and ask, what if I already believe in God and what if I already am trusting in God to guide my life? Why should I read on? For starters, it is too easy to get our focus on our issues and forget that He is there. We all need those daily reminders that He is there guiding our lives. Next it is to remember the proverb, "Do you think God is big enough and cares enough that He can handle this situation?" Once we have that concept in mind, our issues usually become much easier to face through our day.
 - d) Meanwhile, I'm not even half way through the chapter yet.
18. Verse 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.
- a) For those of us who have lived a good while, we realize times come when the economy is going fairly well and there are no major problems in our lives. There also comes times in most of our lives where the "bottom has fallen out". The point to consider here is that God allows both such conditions to occur ultimately for His glory.
 - b) Let me explain this another way: When I read of horrible tragedies, I have to remember that this is God's world, and it is His business what happens here. We as humans can't tell God, "This isn't fair". Life is not fair. But if God created this world, it is also His world and we have to accept that fact no matter what happens. As I also like to say, if this life is all that there is, yes, life is very unfair. But if we live forever, one has to put our life in that perspective of eternity. We have to accept that God allows things to happen in this world for a reason. We don't have the privilege or the ability to understand all that happens, but we do have to accept reality, as well, reality. That in effect, is Solomon's point here in this verse: We don't know what is going to happen to us tomorrow, so we have to make the best of our lives and our situations and remember that this is God's world, period.
19. Verse 15: In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.
- a) Well, if the last verse didn't depress you enough, this one will make the bottom fall right out of our lives. Solomon is saying he has lived long enough to see good people die at a young age and has seen wicked people live a long and prosperous life. His point is again, if this life is all that there is, life is definitely unfair. When we see young people killed for no fault of their own, we realize how unfair this life is. When we hear of horrible dictators who live long and prosperous lives, we again realize how unfair life is.
 - b) OK John, suppose you are wrong. Suppose this life is all that there is. Shouldn't we make the best of this life, since it is the only one we have? First of all, yes we should make the best of our lives. However, there is too many fulfilled predictions in the bible that can't be explained if one knows their history. That is how we know God exists and He does know the "end from the beginning". Therefore, if we accept His existence, we must accept that there is more to life than what exists in our lifetime or the lives we read about in history.
 - c) My point is if we do live forever, that forever is the only way life can be fair. That is the only way, the "just" can be rewarded and the wicked can be punished for what they did.

- d) Let me ask another question: How is it fair to be eternally punished for wickedness done in one lifetime. Let me think of the worst sins one can imagine: Suppose one has killed millions of people. If forever is well forever, wouldn't say a billion years of suffering be enough punishment for that crime? Why eternal punishment?
 - i) Part of the answer comes back to "This is not our world. Therefore, we don't make the rules God does." My second answer is hell is not a place for punishment for sins, but it is a place one chooses to live. Hell is the answer to the question, "Do you want to spend eternity without My (God's) presence? Ok then, I (God) will give you what we want for eternity based on how one chooses to live now."
 - ii) I know that doesn't satisfy everyone, but that is the best reason I could give. God essentially asks people (I believe), "You want to spend eternity without Me, great, you will live as you chosen to live in your lifetime for all of eternity."
 - iii) On that pleasant note, Verse 16.
- 20. Verse 16: Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-- why destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool-- why die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.
 - a) At first glance, these verses appear to be talking about moderation. It is like when we are told, "that is nice you are a devout Christian, just don't over do it. It is ok to sin a little, but not too much. It's ok you go to church once a week, but also go to a mid-week bible study or have a time of family worship. Isn't that overdoing it? You will destroy yourself with all of that effort that one puts into your trust in God". Remember that Solomon here is trying to be the moralist in this section. That means it is not about doing God's will, but just to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do.
 - b) Let me explain these verses how I believe Solomon meant them and not based on typical human wisdom. The idea is to not effectively kill ourselves trying to prove we are right in every situation. Have you every met someone who has isolated himself from all people as he or she insists they have to be right all the time? It is like when someone says, "it is my way or the highway" meaning we have to go along with their plan, or they are leaving.
 - i) I was thinking of the classic children's illustration of the boy who brought the ball to play a game. The boy then says, "we have to play by my rules or else I'm taking my ball home." That in a sense is what Solomon is warning against in these verses. Be careful about always insisting one is right or else one is leaving. If we do that, and never want to compromise, eventually no one is going to want to be with us. That's the extremely way of living that Solomon is warning against.
 - ii) On the other hand, the balance is to not give up all the time either. There are those who desire so much to be loved by others that they never do what they want to do as they want to be loved at all cost. I'm not talking about when one put the needs of others as a priority over our needs. I'm talking about the person who will never do the right thing because they want to go along with the crowd. The desire to be loved is so strong, they won't do the right thing.
 - iii) Again, we are back to the moralist. This is Solomon saying, don't strive to be right all the time and don't give up so easily that one always goes along with what the crowd wants. He is encouraging us to strike a balance between doing the right thing and not always insisting upon having our way. It reads like good practical advice on how to live, which is the key to understanding this chapter.
 - c) With all that said, let me now come back to the argument about not taking Christianity so seriously. That is not what Solomon is teaching nor is it what Jesus taught. Living out the Christian life is all about realizing that God is in charge, He desires to guide our lives and He desires we use our lives to make a difference for Him. How we fulfill that is between God and us. The issue is not moderation, but always desiring to do His will, whatever it is at that moment in time.

- d) What if one says, "I can't focus on God all the time?" My response is who asked you too? The human mind can only focus on one thing for so long. That is why it requires a daily effort to pray and seek Him and have Him guide us. In summary it is up to Him, not us. What God desires of us is a willingness to submit our lives to Him and then we let Him guide us His way and on His timing. Remember we can't get more saved or more loved by God based on what we do. It is up to Him to guide us and not for us to impress Him based on what we accomplish without His help.
- i) That little speech does lead me back to these verses. When it comes to moderation it is important that we don't try to kill ourselves trying to be right all the time and at the same time don't always give up in order to fit in with the crowd. With that thought in mind, living the Christian life is all about doing what God wants us to do at any given moment and we trust in His guidance to make decisions like that and not our own ability to decide when to insist upon our way.
 - ii) OK, suppose I am confused about what to do next. Suppose I do pray about it and I am still confused. If one believes God is guiding us and we're trusting in Him to make the best decision and a decision has to be made at that moment, then go and make the best decision possible with the information at hand. We too easily forget that the three answers to prayer are "Yes, no and not now". Remember if we don't have a sense that our decision is the right thing to do at that moment, that may be God's way of saying, "not now".
 - iii) With that said, I believe I've beaten these verses to death and it's time to move on.
21. Verse 19: Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.
- a) Remember what is Solomon's goal in this section: To teach us that moral living is better than just living to fulfill whatever selfish desire pops in our head. In many ways Solomon is right about this topic, but he is still missing the key ingredient of living life in order to please God. In other words Solomon is saying, "be moral for moral's sake and not just to be pleasing to God with one's life."
 - b) With that fact stated, let us focus on Verse 19. My loose translation is: it is better to make oneself wise than to go seek ten "really smart" people in order to make the right decision.
 - i) Let me illustrate this one. Suppose again we have a really tough decision to make. We could either get the wisdom to make the right decision or go have a bunch of people we consider to be really smart make it for us. The problem with those ten other people is they may do what is right for them, but it may not be what is God's will for our life at that moment. Disclaimer time: There is nothing wrong to seek out good counsel to make a tough decision. The point is, when it comes to making that decision, ultimately it comes back to us. That is Solomon's point about having the wisdom to make the right decision as opposed to having other great leaders go make it for us.
 - c) OK, so if I need this wisdom, where do I get it? The short answer is life itself. Go reread the opening bunch of verses to this chapter. Solomon is saying if one wants to be wise, it is better to spend time doing "this" than doing "that". Suppose one believes that one does spend their time doing the right thing and one does seek God daily. Then how do I make that tough decision I have to make? Prayerfully. I also like the prayer when one has to go make for tough decision now: "God, bless it or block it". When we truly let go of a tough situation and put the results in His hands, it never ceases to amaze me how the results do always work out well in the end.
 - d) With that bit of advice stated, let me warn us that Solomon is going to change the focus a little in the last part of this chapter. Instead of saying, "here is how to act wisely, he's now going to say, I have not found a lot of wise people in my life". His point is that he realizes that no one is perfect including himself and one has to be careful of the advice that others give him as opposed to trusting in Godly wisdom. With that said, Verse 20.

22. Verse 20: There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. ²¹ Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you-- ²² for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.
- a) The short version here is that no one is perfect. If we meet someone and think there goes a really righteous person, that just means we don't know him or her very well. When we seek the advice of others, this is our reminder that no one is perfect and we have to keep that thought in mind when we ask the opinion of others.
 - b) Let me explain this another way: If we could listen in to the conversations of others who do know us well, we would be surprised to hear the negative things people say about us. We tend to have this overly rosy picture that all our close friends love us and don't have any negative thoughts about us. Consider how much we complain about how our friends act and remember that they can and do think the same of us. In summary, we are not as great as we think we are.
 - c) OK, so people are not perfect and they probably think more negatively about me than I'm willing to admit. So what? The point is we often seek the advice of others we trust and there is nothing wrong with that. We just need to remember that people are not perfect and we need to take even the best advice with a grain of salt.
 - d) In effect, this is another reminder that God is perfect and we're not. With that said, let me discuss Godly wisdom another way: If we have a thought about a big decision we have to make, how do we know if that thought is from God? To state the obvious one should first ask if one did pray one's way through that situation. The next test is to ask whether or not that decision biblically sound. With that said, once we have thought out what is the best decision to make and we believe it is God's timing, go forward. Remember the "bless it or block it" prayer: If our decision is not God's will, I have found that God does block it His way or make the results come to nothing on His timing. In other words, God sometimes teaches us by making us realize, "the way we just did it was not what I want for your life at this moment."
 - e) Meanwhile, Solomon is warning us in these verses not to be overly dependant upon the advice of others as opposed to trusting God with the decisions we have to make in life.
23. Verse 23: All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"-- but this was beyond me. ²⁴ Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound-- who can discover it?
- a) It would probably help at this point to recall a few facts about Solomon's life. When he first became the King of Israel, he prayed to God for him to have wisdom. (See 1st Kings Chapter 3, Verses 9-12). In those verses, God responds to Solomon's request and the text states that God gave Solomon wisdom. This scene from Solomon's life probably occurred when Solomon was young and now he is older and questioning that wisdom.
 - b) To paraphrase Solomon here, "Yes God I know that You told me that You have given me wisdom and I was determined to be wise as a king. However, now that I have lived out most of my life, I am confused by exactly what is wise? I am coming to the conclusion that I don't know what is the wise decision to make in every situation."
 - c) Again, think about Solomon as the moralist. He is trying to figure out what is the right thing to do in a situation without consulting God for the answer. What conclusion he is coming to here is that wisdom without seeking God regularly is not possible. To state it another way, we can't ask God for wisdom once, assume we have it and then not bother to talk to God any more in our life. What God desires of us is a relationship with Him. That means to seek him regularly and that means daily. Now that Solomon has lived out most of his life, he is realizing the mistake he made of not seeking God regularly in order to figure out what are wise decisions to make at any moment in his life. Solomon wrongly was thinking, "God gave me this wisdom, I now have it and now it is up to me to figure out what is the right and wrong thing to do in any situation without asking His help".
 - i) That is the great mistake that Solomon is making in this section of the book.

- d) So what does Solomon do at this point? He makes the determination to figure out what it is he has to do in order to be "wiser" than the wisdom that God has already given him. The mistake Solomon makes is he looks "left and right, but not up". He is going to try to get wisdom by looking around him and not asking God. Maybe Solomon figured he already asked God once and doesn't want to bother Him again. Maybe Solomon is thinking, I can figure this out by myself by just trying hard enough. He is forgetting the basic rule that God does His best work when we let go of a problem and let God deal with it. While you and I may know that, Solomon hasn't figured it out yet and thus we have five more verses we have to deal with on this topic in this chapter.
24. Verse 25: So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.
- a) In effect, Solomon is back to the start of the book. He is saying in effect, I tried living out a life where I collected lots of things, I tried living a life where I focused on accumulating a lot of wealth, I tried building a lot of great projects and I even tried living a life where I had fun all the times. Yet after all of those years and having unlimited funds available to accomplish all of those things, I have realized what a waste of a life that is. Therefore, I just now want to focus on the value of having great wisdom.
- b) To explain this concept another way, yes I have the God given gift of wisdom. I just spent most of this chapter giving examples of how to acquire wisdom. Now that I know what not to do with "wisdom", what do I do? That is why I have decided it is best to go live out a good moral life. However, Solomon will figure out even that is not enough, which is why there are still five more chapters to go in this book. Before we can get to those last five chapters, there are still four more verses to bring up in this lesson and this chapter.
25. Verse 26: I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.
- a) It is important to state first off, that Solomon is not talking about all women here. He is specifically focusing on either prostitutes or women who use their looks to entrap a man. One has to understand the culture that Solomon lived in. Women did not have the same opportunities to rule, make decisions or even get the education that a man had. Just like today, a lot of women used their sexuality to achieve their goals in life. Also remember that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He either wrote this before he started collecting all of those women or wrote it afterwards (my guess) and looked back at his life and realized how he himself fell into that trap a lot.
- b) If one reads the book of Proverbs, also written by Solomon, there are chapters that focus on the dangers of falling into the trap of prostitution, and this verse has a similar tone to those chapters in that book.
- c) So are you saying that women who use their sexuality is wrong unto itself? My point is just that it is a fact of life and wisdom in life is to rise above it. It is the classic joke that we need to "think with our head and not with a lower part of our body". I'm guessing that if Solomon were a woman, he would be complaining about men who try to attract women with the promise of say intimacy and not be sincere in their desire.
- d) So what is the connection? Why did Solomon jump from discussing wisdom to talking about women who try to trap men? Again, Solomon is just trying to give us examples of how to act wisely in life. He is giving advice to say in effect it is hard enough to go make one spouse happy, let alone 1,000. Remember that we have faults and our spouses also have faults. There are no perfect people. The key to finding a good spouse, is to do it based on Godly wisdom, someone who shares the same values (key word) that you do and truthfully, one that we work well with in life so that together the two of us can live to make a difference for God in this world. To the married, pray for one's spouse and know that it is God's job to "fix" them and not ours. Meanwhile, time for Verse 27.

26. Verse 27: "Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: "Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things-- ²⁸ while I was still searching but not finding-- I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.
- a) Solomon is still making the mistake of "looking left and right, but not up". At this point he has figured out that living a good moral life is best, but not what to do about it. After looking around some more, he has discovered that only one man out of a thousand has taken the trouble to figure out how is the best way to live a life. What is worse is that (my guess) he looked at his collection of a 1,000 women and said, "I don't get any of them".
 - b) First, I have news for Solomon. One can work all of one's life and not truly understand what one woman wants at any time, let alone a thousand. That's because men's brains and woman's brains are "wired differently". I am convinced that is one reason why God created the idea of marriage between a man and women so they can compliment each other. When I hear of homosexual marriages (both sexes), I believe it, because I get the idea that it is easier for a man to get along with another man and a woman to get along with another woman than it is for a man and woman to get along together.
 - c) Coming back to Solomon's search for "moral living", I believe he has figured out that it is better to live out a moral life, but he hasn't figured out yet who to share it with. He has struggled to find one man who thinks like he does and of course he can't find one woman who thinks like he does. Solomon figures out that everyone is different. The problem is that Solomon doesn't know what to do about it. That is why I titled this lesson, "Solomon looks left and right, but not up". He is still trying to figure out the best way to live out one's life without God interviewing in it every day. He figures out that living out a moral life is better than an unmoral life, but now he doesn't know who to share that life with.
 - d) My personal view is that if Solomon spent more time with God fearing men and women who regularly went to synagogue or church, he might find those who would answer the puzzle that Solomon made for himself: Yes one should live out a moral life, but what is the purpose of living out that moral life? We will answer that question over the next five chapters of this book. In the meantime, we still have one more verse to go here.
27. Verse 29: This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes."
- a) John's loose translation: God has made man for the purpose of serving Him, but people (most of them) go looking for happiness without living a God centered life.
 - b) Let me address my fellow Christian here for a moment: What if I am trying to live out a God centered life and I already get the idea that living a good moral life is better than to not live out a good moral life? What do I get from this lesson? My answer is to remind all of us to regularly "look up" as opposed to just focusing on our issues of the moment. The problem each of us have is we spend way too much time focusing on our issues and we tend to forget that there is a God who wants to guide our lives. That is why each of us need that regular reminder that He is there, He does desire to guide us and we can seek Him regularly and daily for His help with our lives despite whatever mess we may be in at any given moment. On that thought, it is time for my closing prayer:
28. Father, Help us to not just "look left and right" but remember that not only are You there, but that You desire to guide our lives for Your glory. Help us to remember that our life is short and You desire that we use our time to make a difference for You. Help us like Solomon to live out a good moral life, but to be dependant upon You to live that way and not based on our own strength. Help us to seek out others so that they can make a great difference in our lives and we can make a great difference in theirs as well. Help us to work as a team to make a difference in Your world for Your glory. In Jesus name, amen.