

Biblical Balance [Ecclesiastes 6 & 7]
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A. INTRODUCTION

1. A few weeks ago people were stunned hearing that Anthony Bourdain took his own life.
 - 1) It struck us hard because he had a dream job: paid to travel world and eat
 - 2) Some know, however, that he lived life with serious addictions (cocaine/heroin)
- c. We Christians do not handle addictions well.
- d. Amanda Porter, psychiatric nurse practitioner, is a friend of mine.
 - 1) She wrote the following about addictions,
"In church, addictions are right up there with affairs and homosexuality in terms of exclusion and shunning. Labeled the worst of the worst. And let's be clear, addiction clearly refers to the guy at the end of the pew, the one with the glassy eyes, tattoo sleeves, and three-day stubble. The one who's on Medicaid and SNAP. Addiction could not refer to the rest of us, swallowing one too many Starbucks or jonesing for another Facebook like."
 - 2) When grappling with if addiction is a decision or a disease, she said disease.
 - 3) I think it's doesn't incorporate a third option: it's our default.
 - 4) ALL OF US HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO BE ADDICTED. So we must understand it.
- e. How do we discover biblical balance?

B. TRANSITION TO TEXT

1. We're continuing our study of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes.
 - a. There are a few books in the Bible like this that need a warning label.
 - 1) I wouldn't want a brand new Christian to dive into this book because it's confusing
 - 2) The author is grappling with life, but from a challenging perspective
 - b. In the first part of this book, he claimed that everything on earth is meaningless
 - 1) But the author arrived here because of his addictive lifestyle
 - 2) It's in the second part of the book that the author offers solutions to addiction

ECCLESIASTES 6:12-7:2

¹²For who knows what is good for a person in life, during the few and meaningless days they pass through like a shadow? Who can tell them what will happen under the sun after they are gone? ¹A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. ²It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.

1. VS12: The sense of what is good, is not about righteousness/sin but HOW TO LIVE.
 - a. I used to teach a college class called Strategic Planning and Decision Making.
 - 1) Raise your hand: Are you good at making decisions? Some of you aren't . . .
 - 2) Decision making is easy if it is all about black and white decisions.
 - 3) What's difficult? Discerning between two choices (gray) that could go either way.
 - 4) We prefer a world where we don't need to think, but we don't have the luxury.
 - b. So when we seek advice, we tend to search for absolute advice. Why?
 - 1) The more certain the counsel, the more right we appear to be.
 - 2) This is why our country is so divided on politics. So many issues aren't black/white
 - c. Even the greatest wisdom can be misleading in advice for life.
2. So 6:12 asks what is good, and 7:1 answers: A good name.
 - a. *Finer than perfume* is quite a selling point, but *day of death better than birth* is weird.
 - 1) Births are always more joyous than deaths. So why would the author write this?
 - 2) It's written in an ancient time, when mortality rates were much lower.
 - 3) Children were not named in their early years because they could die tragically.
 - 4) Death actually meant a life lived and it could give it fulfilled reflection.
 - b. Interesting that good name and death are linked in this text.
 - 1) Watched the movie **CoCo**, strangest cartoon since Bambi.
 - 2) This Pixar movie on death is supposed to teach a lifelong lesson.
 - 3) When you die, all that's left is your good name.

- 4) When you die, your name usually gets better because people like you better dead.
- 5) Those once vilified in life, are often revered in death.
- 3. Although all these words challenge our perceptions of death, it's not a suicidal script.
 - a. The happiness in death is not perverse, but releasing.
 - b. The popular Stephen Covey quote, "begin with the end in mind."
 - b. When I realize that my life is limited, it impacts HOW I live from day to day.
 - 1) **Psalm 90:12** "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

TEXT: 7:3,4

³Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. ⁴The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

- 1. So the writer of Ecclesiastes is still seeking this concept of WHAT IS GOOD.
 - a. In VS3 he makes a connection between a sad face and a healthy heart.
 - 1) Again, can you believe this is in the Bible? Have you ever heard this preached:
 - 2) "This week, you need to go out and be SAD for Jesus. Cry a lot and stuff."
 - b. But this isn't what the write of the book is getting to here. He's saying: live transparently
 - 1) We mask our troubles by "putting on a happy face." Or FAKE IT until you MAKE IT.
 - 2) With this approach, we don't ever wrestle with the problems in our lives."
 - 3) Some of the most outgoing, high personality people are the most troubled.
 - 4) Instead of grappling with the difficult things, they default to forced joy
 - 5) Their reality: **Proverbs 14:13** "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief."
- 2. So Wisdom/Folly and Joy/Sadness are closer than we think, because they're EXTREMES
 - a. What illustrates this to me? Some of the greatest movie dramatic roles are comedians.
 - b. Will Farrell/Adam Sandler/Mo'Nique/Bill Murray in the following movies:
 - 1) Stranger than Fiction, Punch Drunk Love, Precious, Lost in Translation
 - 2) Those who are really funny can easily access dark places.
 - c. The connection between extremes is closer than you think.
- 2. Godly wisdom is understanding that life if full of extremes
 - a. Things in this world can change very quickly.
 - a. The ability to find the middle ground (live in the gray) will help us navigate life.

TEXT: 7:15-20

¹⁵In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness. ¹⁶Do 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? ¹⁸It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. **Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.** ¹⁹Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city.²⁰ Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.

- 1. The author is once again showing us the extremes of an unjust world
 - a. Where's justice when the good die young and the evil live long lives?
 - b. The author tells us to avoid extremes, but it's a little confusing.
 - 1) Don't be too wicked. That's simple advice for life, YES? BAD IS BAD. Don't do it
 - 2) BUT we're also told not to be too righteous or wise.
 - a) Can you imagine yelling that to your kid getting on the school bus?
 - b) "Hey Katie, enjoy school, don't be too smart of kind today!"
 - 3) He's saying you can be TOO righteous or wise here. Why?
 - c. It can lead to self-destruction
 - 1) Don't think that the Bible is telling you that you can sin whenever you can.
 - 2) What this means is that your opinion of your own goodness can destroy you.
 - 3) And the author points out in VERSE 20: NO ONE is righteous.
- 2. So when we look at the nature of the world, the author has simple advice:

- a. THE FEAR OF GOD MEANS AVOIDING EXTREMES.
- b. Find balance and you'll do well. That's what brings us to addictions.
- c. Addiction is where I take something that CAN BE good and I overindulge.
 - 1) By the way, thinking about drug abuse, what is that: unfettered pursuit of euphoria
 - 2) The Scriptures teach that we can be happy, but there's a potential cost
 - 3) When we pursue only our own happiness, we're out of balance.
 - 4) In the middle lies my opportunity to help others find happiness. It's not as attractive
 - 5) Our addictions not only impact our lives, but keep us from helping others.

CONCLUSION

1. I'm going to take one last turn here, so stick with me.
2. You may not remember professional golfer Payne Stewart
 - a. In 1999, Stewart left Orlando in a private jet with 4 others to a golf match
 - b. The plane went off course, flying straight but not responding.
 - 1) Eventually, USAF fighter jets were scrambled to see what was wrong
 - 2) They observed that the windows were frosted over.
 - 3) This meant that, somehow, cabin had depressurized. Everyone inside was dead.
 - c. Since the plane was on autopilot, it kept going and eventually crashed in South Dakota
 - d. Passengers had likely died due to lack of oxygen and extreme cold.
3. An author used this horrible event as a point in her book about LIFE AT THE EXTREMES
 - a. Humans, she noted, constantly live in the extremes like skies/space/underseas/Antartica
 - 1) WE DO IT but with technological help.
 - 2) Without it, extraordinary humans may survive but regular people struggle.
 - 3) Human beings were not designed to easily live life at the extremes.
 - b. Addiction is life at the extremes. VS18 Those who fear God will avoid extremes
4. But the Extremes is where we gravitate:
 - a. We have moments where we've had enough and let faith go flat
 - b. We have moments where we think we need to be RADICAL Christians.
 - 1) You can't jump out of airplanes everyday . . .
5. Jesus exemplified a well-balanced life. Read this in **John 1:14**
We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
6. And this quote from Augustine: "For my heart is restless until it finds its rest in you"