

# Ecclesiastes 7:1-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-7/ecclesiastes-71-6/>

*Some realities are difficult to accept but can lead to an awareness of the value of life. They provide an opportunity to gain wisdom and are therefore more valuable than trivial and temporary distractions.*

Throughout Ecclesiastes, the reality of death challenges Solomon and his quest of exploring what is good under the sun. But in the first section of Chapter 7, Solomon shows how this great obstacle, impending death, can also be viewed as an opportunity.

Solomon employs the style of the sage to set out a handful of “towb” sayings. “Towb” is the Hebrew word for *good*. In these evaluations, it is important to note that he is not saying one of these things is good and the other evil. This series of “better than” comparisons are not to be taken as absolute, either-or, choices. When we see the word *better*, it is an indication he is noting which of the two has a higher “towb.” Both have their value, but one contains a higher good—a greater “towb.”

The first of these is pretty straightforward. A *good name* represents influence and reputation. It is evidence of character. This is a better good than *ointment*, which is an allusion to things gained from material wealth. The *ointment* could represent a kind of perfume; it covers the ills and stinks of body odor. Which is good. But much *better* than material wealth or the ability to mask underlying stink is to actually have good character. Good character creates a *good name*.

The second of these towb sayings prefers the *house of mourning* to the *house of feasting*. It does not indicate if *feasting* represents something frivolous, like a keg party, or a substantial life event like a wedding. Either way, the *house of mourning* is stated to be superior. The reason is because death is the *end of every man*. As unpleasant as funerals can be, they force us to consider life and the choices we are making. Solomon is pointing out here something that is often emphasized in modern leadership training—to “begin with the end in mind.” Attending funerals is a good way to focus on the “end” of our lives. Ideally, funerals lead us to make the “dash” between the two dates on our headstone count for something. To see that life ends sparks action to live life well.

The phrase *the living takes this to heart* gives a clear picture of why *mourning* is *better* than *feasting*. Because *death is the end of every man*, facing this truth of our mortality helps us gain proper perspective. Death is the starkest of our limitations. It helps us better understand our lives and what to do with our time on Earth. Death, the inevitable end, can be an aide that spurs us toward contemplation and discovery.

*Sorrow* is *better* than *laughter* because even though the *face* may show a *sad* expression, a person's *heart* might be *happy*. This could be because although someone realizes the realities of life, including the sad aspects like death, the person might have an understanding that makes sense of it all. It could be that the *mind of the wise* will continually reflect on the reality of life's ending (his *mind* will be in *the house of mourning*).

On the other hand, the *mind of fools* will suppress this reality-based thinking by dwelling on what takes place in *the house of pleasure*, which likely includes *laughter*. Escape, pleasure-seeking, and distraction all lead to a foolish waste of the amazing gift of life on this earth. As we saw in Chapter 6, seeking fulfillment through satisfying appetites is *vanity*.

A *rebuke* from *the wise* person might hurt our feelings. But it is *better* than a *song (of fools)*. This does not mean a literal song, but is meant to be the opposite of a rebuke—something melodious and pleasing to the ear. Something you wanted to hear, such as flattery. The *fool's song* can be dangerous. It can reinforce foolish thinking, and rob us of true joy in life. It can be a part of chasing happiness by satisfying appetites. In this case an appetite for approval or acceptance.

Since the *fool* does not think about the reason for God's gift of life, his *laughter* and pleasure-seeking is like *the crackling of burning thorn bushes under a cooking pot*. The burning *thorn bushes* (or "thistles") briefly make considerable noise, but then quickly burn away before they can cook anything in the pot. Consequently, it is of little benefit. Amusement keeps us distracted for a time, but will burn away before providing anything truly useful. On the other hand, the truth contained in the *rebuke of a wise man* is of immense benefit.

#### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>1</sup> A good name is better than a good ointment,  
and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.**

**<sup>2</sup> It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting.**

**Because that is the end of every man,  
And the living takes it to heart.**

**<sup>3</sup>Sorrow is better than laughter,  
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.**

**<sup>4</sup>The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.**

**<sup>5</sup>It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to  
the song of fools.**

**<sup>6</sup>For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of  
the fool;  
And this too is futility.**