

Ecclesiastes 7:7-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eccl/eccl-7/ecclesiastes-77-10/>

There are distractions and temptations, but patience and appreciating the present are the wisest options. They reduce distraction and allow wisdom to be most effective.

The word “For” makes it clear these verses are continuing Solomon’s thoughts from the previous section. Solomon observes that *oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart*. The words *make* and *mad* in verse 7 are translated from the same Hebrew word; *halal* (see notes on 2:2). *Halal* is often translated as “praise” and has a root which means “*make clear*.” When it is used in a positive context, it can be translated “worship” and when negative “madness”—the context of what is being talked about reveals whether a thing is good or evil.

A literal translation could be “*Oppression clarifies a wise man’s clarity*.” Someone who is *wise* would clearly recognize good and discern good from evil. But when evil is experienced firsthand, it makes even the clear-thinking wise person see more clearly.

However, it appears Solomon’s next observation covers the instance when a person can be corrupted. Perhaps even the wise person. Solomon tells us that a *bribe corrupts the heart*. This literally says, “a gift destroys *the heart*.” A *bribe* causes someone to say, “I will do what is good for me while supporting something that is evil for others.” But since God made us in His image, we know good from evil in our *heart*. We don’t like the idea that “Yes, I am doing evil.” So we tend to rationalize in our *heart*, which *corrupts*. We no longer think clearly, that is to say, wisely. More broadly, financial incentives of any sort can cause clarity and wisdom about good and evil to go foggy.

Another bit of wisdom is that *The end of a matter is better than its beginning*. This is another *towb* (good) saying. Although the journey from *beginning* to *end* might be confusing, frustrating and difficult, we are *better* having been through it. When we begin things without following through and finishing them, we miss out on the best part of the opportunity. And, of course, without a *beginning* there cannot be an *end*.

As we travel through the journey of life, having a *spirit of patience* is *better* (towb) than a *spirit of haughtiness*. These two extremes suggest speed—slow and fast. It is *better* to consider the realities of life slowly and deliberately. This would fit with Solomon’s assertion that the *day of mourning* is positive. Deliberative and thoughtful approaches are *better* than relying on quick, easy, answers. Thinking we can figure it out quickly (or figure it out completely) is pride, a *haughtiness of spirit*. And that is not good for us.

The nature of *patience* is to slow down our emotions. We can develop a *spirit of patience* through gaining wisdom and making good choices. To avoid reacting. The acronym LIDD can aid in applying Solomon’s principle to have a *spirit of patience*.

When emotions flare:

1. Listen to your emotions. They are telling you “Something requires action.” Don’t suppress. Hear what your emotions are telling you.
2. Investigate. Ask yourself “Why are my emotions flaring? Which of my values is being violated, and what is the true means of violation?”
3. Decide. Decide what action to take, based on your investigation and your values. One legitimate action to take is to “Wait until later.”
4. Dismiss. Thank your emotions for doing their job, and tell them to look for something else to alert you to. You have this one in hand. Our emotions are excellent alarms, but not good decision makers.

Solomon follows his encouragement for *patience* with a command: *do not be eager in your heart to be angry*. He then provides a rationale: *For anger resides in the bosom of fools*. The word translated *eager* can mean “hasty,” “dismayed,” or “troubled.” We might say, “Don’t react.” In order to have a *spirit of patience*, we can’t really have a *heart* that readily reacts in anger.

Anger is often a way to attempt to exert control over others or our surroundings. Which, when we think about it, is ridiculous. We can’t choose for other people, and we certainly can’t cause circumstances to change through *anger*. Other people may decide to accommodate our *anger*, giving us the illusion of control. But if we are *eager in our heart to be angry*, and have *anger* that *resides in our bosom*, then we are choosing to live like *fools*. We only control three things as humans: whom we trust, what we do, and our perspective. Trying to control through *anger* represents a false perspective of reality. In truth, everyone makes their own choices.

A true perspective of reality is that our choices exist in the present. Just as we cannot control others or our surroundings with *anger*, we also cannot control what is in the past. Solomon instructs us not to long for “The good ol’ days.” He warns us not to say, “*why is it that the former days were better than these?*” Reality is that our memories are incredibly unreliable. We don’t actually remember details of the past. We remember an imagined story about the past. By “longing for the good ol’ days” we ignore the vast opportunities to impact our lives through making good choices in the present. We waste exercising good stewardship over things we control in the present by longing for the past.

Biblical Text:

**⁷For oppression makes a wise man mad,
And a bribe corrupts the heart.**

**⁸The end of a matter is better than its beginning;
Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.**

**⁹Do not be eager in your heart to be angry,
For anger resides in the bosom of fools.**

**¹⁰Do not say, “Why is it that the former days were better than these?”
For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.**