

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: EPISODE 6

WRESTLING WITH LIFE'S REALITIES
WISDOM IS PRUDENT
ECCLESIASTES 8:1-17
10/22/2017



MAIN POINT

God alone knows what He is doing and we must be content to let Him rule.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some appropriate ways to express your political opinions? How should believers express their views?

How should we respond when our methods do not work?

Underneath the often puzzling language, Ecclesiastes is a book that deals with the most practical of life's situation. Chapter 8 is no different. It shows us how to live under ruling authorities even or particularly when it is difficult. It addresses the response we make to leaders when their conduct is bad. While we are to use wisdom and humbly address those in power, we recognize that the ultimate power resides with God, and He will handle all things in his time and in His way.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 8:1-6.

When Solomon wrote about addressing a king, he did so through a first-century lens where rulers had absolute authority. Most of us do not live in systems of government that operate this way, but the central point still remains. We should speak out when we see injustice, but we should do so with wisdom.

How are we to respond when we do not agree with government policies and authorities? How can we honor these authorities when we don't agree with them?

What would God say is our responsibility to aid persecuted believers all over the world?

What restrictions does this passage place on working for justice?

We must patiently confront injustice in appropriate and legal ways, understanding there are no guarantees, merely the

possibility of change. But when we confront we realize that the office of a leader is to be respected and honored by believers. We cannot dismiss it because the Bible calls us to live in submission to authorities. The lesson from these verses is that we should take our God-given wisdom and apply it to the ways we address, humbly confront, and submit to our leaders.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 8:7-9.

These verses are a counter balance to the previous six verse. While we should be measured and thoughtful as we deal with those in authority over us, we also realize that all human authority has limits. No one but God controls our souls.

Read Psalm 2:1-6. What authority does God hold over the nations? When all the world seems to be unstable, how does this truth give us confidence?

Do you ever watch the news and worry about what you see, either in the leadership in our country or another? Why is this type of worry counterproductive and often sinful?

Read Luke 24:49. When the disciples saw that Jesus had died on the cross, they likely thought the purpose of God had failed. How does the resurrection prove that God has the ultimate control?

The word translated “wind” in verse 8 could also be translated “spirit.” The idea here is that while leaders are in charge of a great many things, they are not in control of our souls. They do not have authority over life and death. Only God does. He is the one in control, and we can rest because He knows what He is doing. Jesus was charged and murdered by human authorities, but God raised Him in victory over sin, death, and every human institution that worked against Him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 8:10-17.

These verses anticipate the “problem of evil,” or the question: “If God is good and in control, why do so many bad things happen.” This is an immensely practical question and one that Solomon considers.

Imagine a world where every transgression received immediate recompense, a world where every reckless driver was ticketed. Would that be a perfect world in which to live? Why or why not?

What victories is evil winning in our world? How can you renew hope in the face of these injustices? How have you seen justice and God’s righteousness prevail?

Knowing that only God can truly set things right, what is the appropriate way to respond to injustice?

The so-called problem of evil is not really “Why doesn’t God deal with evil?” but “Why doesn’t God deal with it now?” Solomon observed that earthly judgment on evil behavior is often not carried out quickly. As a result, more people are tempted to take the path of evil. God’s Word assures us that the unjust will ultimately be judged, and the righteous will be vindicated. Knowing that, we rest in His judgment.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-2 and Romans 13:1-3. What responsibility do all believers have for those in authority over them? How well do you embrace this, particularly for leaders with whom you disagree?

Is there any area where you are discontent with God’s rule? Has today’s Scripture and discussion encouraged

you? What changes do you need to make in light of these truths?

How can we compassionately help others understand that divine judgment is coming, and God will make everything right?

PRAY

Praise God that He is the only one in control and reigning on the throne. Ask that we would be a people motivated to action, but also a people who are committed to trusting God's good and sovereign will.

COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES 8:1-9:1

8:1-6. A wise person respects authority and knows how to approach an authority figure tactfully and at the right moment. No matter how bad things seem (even though man's troubles are heavy on him), approach a person in authority in the right way and at the right time.

8:7-8. We mortals are by nature frail, limited in our understanding, and incapable of predicting the future. Ultimately, everything is in God's hands.

8:9-9:1. This passage focuses on God's governance of the world; it struggles with the question of why evil sometimes seems to triumph. Examples of this include: cruel people rising to power (8:9), wicked people being honored in public (8:10), wicked people avoiding punishment (8:11), and good people suffering while the wicked do well (8:14). Against this, Ecclesiastes affirms that God does set things right (8:12-13) and asserts that a person should enjoy life and not always brood over evil (8:15). More than that, we must acknowledge that God alone knows what He is doing and why He does it, and we must be content to let Him rule the world (8:16-9:1).

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20