

## DISCUSSION GUIDE :: EPISODE 5

**WRESTLING WITH LIFE'S REALITIES**  
**THE VALUE OF MODERATION**  
**ECCLESIASTES 7:1-14**  
10/15/2017



### MAIN POINT

There is great wisdom to be found by doing everything in life in moderation.

### INTRODUCTION

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

**Is there anything you have a hard time handling in moderation? (Think: that bag of potato chips, buying shoes, or spending money on concert or sporting event tickets)**

**Why is moderation an important approach to things in life, especially where money is involved?**

Everyone has a weakness, that thing they have a hard time handling in moderation. It could be that tub of ice cream or bag of potato chips, or it could be spending money on hobbies, shopping sprees, or even toys for our kids. We are often reminded in Scripture that money is not evil or unnecessary, but we should accept with gratitude and patience whatever God gives us. Moderation is key to enjoying the gifts God gives while also stewarding them well.

### UNDERSTANDING

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

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 7:1-9.**

**In verses 1-4, Solomon draws several contrasts between excess and death. What conclusions can be made about the value of moderation from these examples?**

In verses 1-4, Solomon made several contrasting statements that remind us of the brevity of life and the wisdom we can gain through a suffering. Things like money and excess are not evil in and of themselves, but death is a constant reality and reminds us that the things of this world are not lasting. When we place too much stock in the things of this world, we forget about the urgency of the mission God has given us to follow Him and make His name known.

**Verse 5 is the key verse of this passage. How would you rephrase that verse in your own words?**

**What have you learned from the feedback of a wise person?**

**Why is the way we respond to appropriate criticism a good gauge of our level of spiritual wisdom?**

These verses teach us an important lesson: The painful experience is better than the pleasurable one in the quest for wisdom. Rebuke is not a pleasant experience (Heb. 12:11). Correction is a form of discipline that points out our mistakes and wrong choices. Rebuke from a wise person, however, has much to offer. Such a person will help us see our weaknesses—see our true selves. If we are wise, we will accept such criticism and change for the better. The person who is not wise prefers to listen to the song of fools. The prideful person desires compliments, not criticism. Our response to criticism indicates if we are wise or foolish.

**What other characteristics of a foolish person show up in these verses?**

**On the other hand, what additional characteristics of a wise person are evident?**

In verses 7-9, Solomon describes a fool as someone who uses bribes or threats to get what he or she wants (v. 7), has a proud spirit and refuses to wait for God's discernment and direction (v. 8), and acts in sinful anger (v. 9). The wise person, on the other hand, avoids the temptation to use bribery and extortion, has a patient spirit, and exhibits self-control.

**How can the wisdom of these verses help us bring glory to God and represent Him well?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ECCLESIASTES 7:10-14.**

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**What does Solomon teach us about wisdom in verses 10-14?**

The temptation to ask, "Why were the former days better than these?" is both ancient and contemporary. Solomon declared such thinking is not wise. We are inclined to long for the past when the present circumstances of our lives are disappointing. Yet, Solomon encourages us to accept the bad times as well as the good times, because God is sovereign over both.

**Why did Solomon say longing for the past is not wise?**

**How does focusing on the past keep us from dealing with present problems and from enjoying present blessings? On what should we focus instead?**

What is the harm in longing for the past? First, our memories of the past are often selective and distorted. We remember the good times, but too often we idealize these moments, thinking they were better than they really were. Second, we have a tendency to forget the negative aspects of the past. Some remember a time in youth when life seemed better, but they fail to remember the difficulties that were also present at the time. Third, longing for "the good ol' days" can prevent dealing with present problems. We cannot retreat to the past, and wishing we were in the past is a waste of time. If we are wise, we will learn from the past but have no wish to return to it. Instead, we should focus our energy on dealing with today's concerns. Furthermore, dwelling on the past also prevents us from enjoying present blessings. If we are too busy remembering the past, we are not able to digest—and enjoy—the present.

**In verses 11-12, Solomon noted that wisdom expands the limits of money. How have you seen this true in your life?**

## APPLICATION

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

**This chapter talks at length about distinguishing wisdom from foolishness. What is foolish about living in excess? Why is moderation wise?**

Is there an area of life where you need to choose moderation?

What are some blessings that might accompany God-given wisdom, and how might you use such blessings in God's service?

## PRAY

As you close, pray Ephesians 1:17-20 over your group. Pray that your group members would continue to grow in spiritual wisdom and would be more attentive to God's work in their lives this week. Pray that your group members would have a renewed desire to study Scripture for the sake of growing closer to God and growing in His wisdom this week.

## COMMENTARY

### ECCLESIASTES 7:1-14

7:1. There is something far greater than riches. Material prosperity can buy things like precious ointment, but they do not last. A good name lasts. In our day and age we are mainly interested in externals. Fame and popularity have replaced genuine heroism. The phrase the day of death is better than the day of birth has been understood in different ways. But the idea that a person's character and conduct are made clear at the end seems to fit Solomon's progression of thought (cf. Eccl. 8:10).

7:2-4. Much can usually be gained from thinking about the sobering realities of life such as death. Our mortality causes us to reflect on our lives and hopefully to make changes that will reduce the number of regrets we might have on the day of our death.

It is not that Solomon believes all laughter to be wrong. Again, context determines meaning. Here he is speaking of a frivolous laughter that is not anchored to truth. Much better than such ungodly merriment is the sorrow that comes from honest reflection on the totality of life. Ironically, it is this person who is really the "winner" in life. Externals, such as the boisterous laughter of an extrovert, are of little value. But the quiet, sorrowful musings of the reflective are highly prized. The wise thinks about what he learns from the house of mourning, while the fool is only concerned to remain where laughter resides.

7:5-6 Fools can neither give nor take good advice. The song of fools stands for a life of carefree merrymaking. The pain of a rebuke is better than the encouragement to party that fools offer. Also, fools receive wisdom with smirking laughter. The image of thorns under the pot indicates that fools are prickly to those who try to deal with them but ultimately are useless, just as thorns are good for nothing but burning.

7:7-9 In these three maxims, the main focus is on how the wise person confronts political reality. First, corruption is pervasive and can bring anyone down; one should beware of it. Second, one should not judge by first appearances; those who are winning now may someday come to ruin. One should be patient and understand that virtue is proved right in the end, and so flee temptations to bribery. Third, abiding anger over a current situation in life shows you are a fool.

7:10 People see the evil in their own times and wrongly presume that earlier times were better.

7:11-14 Ecclesiastes acknowledges that people do need money. In discouraging the pursuit of riches, it does not say that money is unnecessary or evil. At the same time, we should accept with patience whatever God allots to us.

## READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17