

Topic	How to Handle Adversity
Reference	Ecclesiastes 6:10 – 7:14
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This text is a whole bunch of proverbs put together. What we are going to try today is not to examine every single proverb on its own and I think there is much meaning in it to do that and every proverb in itself has much meaning to it, but what we are trying to do today is that we are going to try to look at it as one piece to see what is the most common meaning that we can extract from this combination of proverbs. What did the author intent to share with us? What wisdom was he trying to impart to us by lumping these proverbs together and then adding some wisdoms and pros to it as well. So how to handle adversity is ultimately what he is trying to share with us and here are four points that we are going to look through together today.

- Know that God is in control (6:10-12 / 7:14)
- Know that suffering is real (7:1-7)
- Know that suffering has purpose (7:8-12)
- Know that suffering will end (7:13)

GOD IS IN CONTROL

When dealing with that verse he let us know that God is in control. Here in chapter 7 the author writes this

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

Now he didn't say that the day of adversity be sorrowful. He is saying that when you are facing adversity know this; God has created both your bad days and your good days. What he is ultimately saying is that we should know that God is in control of every day, whether we are having troubles, whether we are having joy and especially in troubles be reminded of the fact that God is in control. Now it would be something that we would have to really contextualize and see what does the author really mean if this wouldn't be so clear all over scripture.

This is not the only place in the scripture where God through his authors has told us that he is in control of both good and evil. There is a whole bunch of scriptures from Old Testament and New Testament that show that this is the message of God.

- “is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and bad come?” (Lam 3:38),
- “shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10),
- “does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?” (Amos 3:6),

- “he who works all things in accordance with the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11).
- Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? (Romans 9)
- "There is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand." (Deuteronomy 32:39)
- The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. (1 Samuel 2:6–7)

All over scripture from Old Testament to New Testament God is telling us that He is in control. He controls the good, he controls the bad. Now many of you might say, when God created this world He created it good and that's absolutely right. We read that in Genesis 1 and then the reason that we have all this bad is because of the fall, because humans sin and therefore we have evil and that is correct too, but one thing you must read when you read in Genesis 3, the consequence of human sin was judgment. Calamities does not suddenly appear, God put this between man and woman, God created pain in childbirth, it was His judgment, God was in control of that. It is not something that mysteriously happened. Now He is a judge and He has every right to do so but He was in control of that. Now we have many reasons why we start arguing with this and many of us have a problem immediately going to problem like how can a good God create such evil and bad things. I think that's the number one question that would come into our hearts and the author address that right in the front. He says this in chapter 6

10 Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.

He is saying that God has created everything. He has created the heavens and He has put the stars in heavens, He knows them all by name. He has named everything, He knows you before you were even born, everything has been destined before the creation of the world, who are you to argue with Him. Now the reason the author is saying here, why we should not argue with him is this.

11 The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? 12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

What is man from his temporary view point, from this short experience that we have here to tell what is good and bad, to argue with God, because ultimately when we argue with God, saying how could you create so much evil and calamities and claim to be good and omnipresent and all-knowing and all powerful, when we argue with that ultimately we are saying God if I would be God I would know how to do it better and that's why he calls it vanity. It is pride if we say that. We are saying God you are not a good God and if I will be in control I would have better solutions and the answer of the author here is this, who are you, you are nothing but a shadow. In the language of James, life is nothing but a mist, it is nothing but vapor. We are here for a

short time then we go. From the view point that we have how do we really know how things will play out. How do we really know what is good and what is bad? Let me try to illustrate that with a story.

There was a man who had a horse and one day his horse went away and his neighbor came over and said, “what bad fortune your horse ran away”. By the next day the horse came back and it brought 10 more wild horses with him and the neighbor came over again and said, “it was good fortune, if your horse wouldn’t have run away then the 10 wild horses wouldn’t have come”. The next day the son trying to tame one of the wild horses fell down and break his leg and the neighbor came over again, “Oh, it is actually bad fortune, because if your horse wouldn’t have run away then the wild horses wouldn’t have come, your son wouldn’t have tried to tame and then wouldn’t have broken his leg”. The next day a bunch of thugs came to town trying to find every abled young boy and force them to be part of their group and when they came to the house they saw the boy’s leg was broken, they passed over to the next house. The neighbor came again and said, “actually it is great fortune. If the horse wouldn’t have run away, the wild horses wouldn’t have come, your son wouldn’t have a broken leg and now he will be a thug”.

In this story, we quickly illustrate one thing, we have no idea what is ultimately good or bad. We don’t have the advantage point? We don’t have that knowledge? It is vanity for us to believe that we truly know what is good and what is bad. The creator of all things has put things into place. He is good always and he has a plan and He is in control or even the good and even the bad. Now why is this author telling us, it is good for us to remember that in the mid of adversity. I mean, what’s good for me to think God is in control even over these bad days. What kind of comfort does it provide to me? One thing, consider the other option, consider God is not in control. This would mean that your pain, your adversity, your suffering is merely a sign of evil winning, it is merely a sign of God not being able to protect His children. It would mean that your suffering, your pain, your calamities is absolutely meaningless for it is just a sign of Satan’s success. But if God is in control of all our calamities, of all adversities, of all our sufferings it means that all our suffering has purpose and has meaning because God ordained it. Now we think how can God ordain evil things. The most evil thing that ever happened on this earth was man crucifying God on the cross and that surely was ordained by God. Knowing that God is in control helps us know that suffering has purpose.

SUFFERING IS REAL

Everybody knows that suffering is real. We all have experienced suffering in our lives. Some of us might have physical suffering, we get sick, we get hurt. We have intellectual suffering; we deal with stupid people in our office or we have difficult mathematical exams to do. We have emotional suffering, people hurt us and we are disappointed. Usually this comes from relational suffering because that is something wrong with our loved ones or our friends. We also have spiritual suffering, we don’t understand why God has put us in a situation and we pray and nothing is happening, it seems like God is not answering. We have spiritual suffering. So we

have all different kinds of suffering and yes they are real to us, so what is the author here really trying to say. We come into this proverb and we try to look at this proverb and try to see a general meaning here and he is telling us that something is better than the other thing. Now you have heard throughout Ecclesiastes here that there is day and time for different things. There are seasons for different things, but here he is telling us which of those times are better than the other times. So what is better. He is saying this,

- Death is better than birth. Going to the house of mourning is better than going to the house of feasting.
- Sorrow is better than laughter.
- It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

He is saying it is better for us to immerse ourselves in the realities of the brokenness of this world than to try to escape it. Because when we know that God has ordained suffering and adversity we should know that it has purpose and when it has purpose we have two options, we can either embrace it or we can try to escape and escape mode is a natural mode that we go into. We try to numb the pain with different things, we try to escape. There are different forms of escape, you have trouble at home you escape to work. You have trouble at work you escape to the bar. It is self-pity. We do anything to avoid the reality of the brokenness and this author is telling us, no submerge yourself in it, understand that we live in a broken world. It is the reality of the world; it is good for us to be reminded that we live in a broken world because when you realize that we live in a broken world we realize that this world is not the way it is supposed to be; it is supposed to be different. We live in a broken world; it is all around us. People misuse others for their own purpose. It is easy for us to try to escape the realities, but the author is saying deal with it, realize the reality that we are living in because when we realize that we live in a broken world we realize that we ourselves are broken because the brokenness of this world comes from our inner brokenness. All of us have contributed to this world in our own broken ways and when we realize this it shows us one thing that we need a savior, we need somebody beyond ourselves to help us out of this situation. When we ignore the realities of this broken world we are in trouble.

There is a little girl who suffers from a condition called CIPA. She feels no pain. At first glance I thought it is great, no back pain, no back aches, but her life is really hard. As a baby she kept on putting her finger in her eye until almost she got half blind and she did not know that she was hurting herself. As she is walking every day she has to go and check her body because she might have stepped into a nail and she would not know and she might bleed out. When she has abdominal pains, appendicitis she would not know, she does not feel the pain, she could be walking and she could just drop dead because there is nothing in her that was pointing her to brokenness of her body. Her mom prays every night, "O Lord, let my daughter feel pain, let my daughter suffer".

The reality of suffering is so important, it shows us that we are broken and it points us to the fact that we need a savior. So immerse yourself in the suffering but embrace your suffering and your pain, it is doing something for you.

SUFFERING HAS PURPOSE

Tim Keller wrote this, *“Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine.”*

Again here the author is continuing with the betters and we are going to look at this segment as a whole and we will try to see what is the essence that he is trying to show us with adversity here and there are couple of words that pop out.

- Patient in spirit
- Be not quick
- Wisdom.

So he is connecting adversity and things that produce wisdom, things that make you patient and this theme of adversity and patience and wisdom goes again throughout scripture.

James 1: 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. **4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Suffering and adversity has purpose it is creating in your perseverance so that eventually you would be a person that lacks nothing.

Romans 5: 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

We know that in our own lives, the greatest hardships in our lives has shaped us to be a better person. The overcoming of the difficulties in our lives has really shaped who we are today, to have more wisdom so we can advise other people, to have more patience, to have more knowledge, more endurance. Suffering creates character, it produces hope. It helps us express things, it creates the greatest expression of love, faith and hope. Without suffering we could not experience the greatest expression of love, faith and hope.

LOVE: Romeo and Juliet, one of the greatest love stories ever written. It is about two people willing to suffer and die for one another. It is not just in the theaters that this thought is coming through in poetry, even in popular culture. Bob Marley once said, *“The truth is, everyone is going to hurt you. You just got to find the ones worth suffering for”*.

What he is trying to say here is this, we are willing to do a lot for a lot of people but we are only willing to suffer for a few. The people that we are really willing to suffer for are the people that we truly love in our lives. Parents are willing to suffer for their children because they love them. We only suffer for the people we truly love. So the greatest expression of love that we could possibly give to somebody is that, I am willing to suffer for you. If somebody says that, you know that person loves you.

What is the pinnacle of human experience of us experiencing somebody who is willing to suffer for us? It is Christ on the cross. The scripture says

But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

The pinnacle of experience of love in earth ever was the fact that Jesus was willing to suffer and die for us. If it wouldn't be for suffering, we could have never experienced the greatest expression of love.

FAITH: It is easy to have faith in our life when everything is going right. It is easy to have faith and believe that God is good and trust Him and everything is going well, but when adversity hit it gets rough. The text says this, when oppression comes it drives us to madness and our hearts are easily fooled and easily bribed, we quickly want to escape. When adversity hits that is when our true faith. The Bible says in 1 Peter 1:6-7

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It says that your genuine faith is proven when it has been tested through trials, mean that trials is a great expression of genuine faith and it is a trial tested faith that ultimately brings the most glory to God. If you know the heroes of the Old Testament, especially in Hebrews 11 we see all those heroes. They are all overcomers of great adversity.

- Noah overcoming a great flood.
- Moses in exile, pharaoh, being persecuted, wilderness, parting the red sea. Overcomer of great adversity.
- Daniel.

Great adversities show our great faith. The greatest expression of living faith that ever existed on earth is Christ and here in Peter we read this

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

The greatest example of suffering and faithful suffering is Christ. The best expression of faith is that we are willing to have faith and able to have faith in the midst of suffering, the greatest experience we ever witnessed on earth is Christ suffering and he showed us in this text how.

22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. **23** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. **24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

Suffering is the greatest expression of faith, best exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ.

HOPE: Just like faith if everything is going good in our life we do not need hope. Hope only exist because there is brokenness and because there is calamity. We could never express hope if there wouldn't be suffering because hope is trusting and believing that time will come where things will be better, without calamities we could not express hope, but to really understand how suffering can produce hope, because the text that we talked about earlier on already shows that suffering produces endurance produces character produces hope, but how it produces hope. We have to understand a different combination which is how suffering produces glory. It seems like a very countercultural thought, how suffering produces glory, but actually it is something very-very common in our everyday lives. Scripture backs that up not just in temporary values but into the eternal values.

2 Corinthians 4: 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

These momentarily afflictions are producing, creating, making, forming for us an eternal weight of glory. In comparison of the glory that they are producing for us our sufferings are momentary and they are light. According to the weight of glory that we will experience they will see light. Suffering is producing glory.

Roman 8:16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

That our suffering, our adversities, our dealing with it is producing for us a deliverance into glory, our suffering has meaning, our suffering has purpose, it creates character, it helps us become patient and wise, it helps us express love, faith and hope.

Romans 5: **1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

How has the Holy Spirit been given to us?

It is because when Christ died He didn't stay dead; it is because He rose again. When He rose again he ascended into heaven so that Holy Spirit could come to us. It helps us to express faith, hope and love. That is the fact that we have hope because Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again showing to us that glory will be produced for us, making it evidence for us that there is glory to come and he has overcome death and sin and brokenness. So the greatest experience of hope is through suffering, greatest expression of hope is through suffering and the one thing that witness to it here on earth is the resurrection of Jesus. Suffering points to the life, to the death and the resurrection to Jesus. Suffering is the greatest expression of love, faith and hope, it points us to death, life and resurrection of Jesus, which ultimately lead us to experience grace, presence and glory. It saves, it renews, it delivers, it justifies, it sanctifies, it glorifies. His love is the cause of our faith, our response. When our sufferings and his sufferings meet the result is glory. Suffering is the agent of the gospel, suffering has purpose, it creates character, it expresses hope, faith and love and it points us to the gospel.

After all this explanation, you might still have the question of, why me Lord?

Sometime your suffering is not about you, sometimes your suffering is for others.

2 Corinthians 1: **5** For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. **6** If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

When we experience brokenness, when we saturate ourselves in that sadness and brokenness that we have and then we finally find comfort in Jesus Christ we are able to go to other people who suffer brokenness and tell them there is comfort in Jesus.

When dealing with adversity let us acknowledge that God is in control that he has made all things, the good days and the bad days, that suffering is a reality that we must immerse ourselves, not escape but deal with it because it shows us that we are broken. It just doesn't leave us broken, it changes us, it gives us character, wisdom, knowledge, endurance, patience. It helps us express faith, hope, love, it produces glory, it helps us comfort others, it has purpose.

SUFFERING WILL END

The author in this passage asks

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

In scripture we have answer to that.

Proverbs 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

Jesus just didn't rise from the dead, he just not ascended into heaven, he will return and he will usher in a new heaven and a new earth, all brokenness will cease to exist. There will be newness, there will be renewing, everything which is broken, everything which is crooked will be made straight, every last tear will be wiped. This is the promise of God, a son of man will come on his throne, raising and reign as a king and he will make everything straight again.

The reality is this many of us are still dealing with suffering today, for some of us it seems that it is never going to end, it seems like an eternity and when we look at the great overcomers of faith they all had testimonies in their lifetimes, we read about them in scripture and they give us much hope but in Hebrews 11 it just not just talk about people who overcame it also talks about the other people too, people who did not overcome in their lifetime. Some of us will not overcome our suffering in our lifetime that is the reality of the brokenness of the world that we live in. Some of us will have to continue enduring. In Hebrews it says this in chapter 11

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—**38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. **39** And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, **40** since God had provided something better for us.

God is somewhere producing glory for us. He is preparing a better place for us. All of us one day will give testimony, some of our life testimonies the world is not worthy of it but there is a place that is worthy of our testimonies, heaven. We will be sitting on a banquet feast and as we are sitting there we will be telling each other the stories of our hope, our faith and our love in the midst of adversity. Stories that world was not worthy of but heavens is and they will produce glory to God. So hold on pain ends and it will bring great glory to God.

Annie Johnson Flint is someone who dealt with great suffering and adversities and pains in her life. She is somebody who was orphaned and then she was adopted then they found that she had rheumatoid arthritis that left her all twisted inside her body, she couldn't move her hands, her body, then they found out that she had abdominal cancer. Eventually she grew half blind and by the time she wrote this hymn she was covered with boils from top to bottom, eight pillows just

next to her just to give her some comfort so here is this lady half blind, with cancer, who cannot move because of arthritis, covered in boils this is what she wrote

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.*

*His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.*