

**LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING**  
**By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison**

Ecclesiastes 7:8-13

January 10, 2021

A pilot on a Hawaii-bound airliner was asked how the flight was going. He cheerfully replied, *"Well, the bad news is we're lost. The good news is we're making very good time."* People tend to be long-term thinkers or short-term thinkers. I believe most people are short-term thinkers. These two groups think differently about money, health, relationships, raising children, business, and career. In fact, they think differently about everything.

Ecclesiastes 7 is a great corrective for short-term thinkers. Read the whole chapter. Psalm 126 describes "sowing in tears" but look at the result. Jesus told a story about two different foundations for building a house and another about a successful farmer in Luke 12, but the man's "success" needed an asterisk beside it. Jesus referred to him as a "fool," not as a model to follow. Hebrews 12 reminds us of Jesus' perspective. Let's follow Him.

We are grateful to close the books on one of the most challenging years in our lifetimes. Asbury has a mission statement: Helping Others Follow Jesus. Our personal mission statement should be based off this. If we begin with the end in mind, we will truly think, long-term (eternal), and not just for 2021.

**APPLICATION:** *Atomic Habits* has some practical advice about living a more effective life. First, what are your GOALS in life? Pride blocks our vision and keeps us from changing to be more effective. Anger keeps us from patience. Sloth keeps us from moving toward a goal. What changes do you need to make? Can anyone help you with this? Who can you help, too? Second, HOW will you reach those goals? Ask God for wisdom in what you should do. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."* (James 1:5)

I mentioned last week we should put a sign outside our church that says, "We Know Stuff."

**The Gospel in 5 words slide:** Creation – Fall – Israel. Jesus. Church We read from "Israel" now –the Old Testament. So many critics object to Christianity based on OT issues – *"Why do you eat pork – it says in Leviticus not to eat pork."* That's the Old Testament – we are no longer under the Jewish Law. What's the difference between the OT/NT? Jesus. He changes everything. So, we read the OT in the light of the fullest revelation of God – the NT. Let me illustrate. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says: The Book of Ecclesiastes is a treasure – so many wise sayings.

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your **might**, (This is being proactive) for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in **Sheol**, to which you are going.*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of verse 10 is troubling. It mentions "Sheol." The Greeks called it "Hades." *You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matthew 16:18). "The gates of hell" in the Greek language = "the gates of Hades." Sheol was the dark, shadowy place of the dead. This is a major difference between the OT/NT. God was in heaven in the OT, but the thought wasn't developed. The much shorter NT has nearly as many references as the OT. Jesus talked more about the Kingdom of Heaven than anything else. KOH was the desired destination for the early church. Sheol has no attraction.

***Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*** (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Habit #1 = "Be Proactive"

Habit #2 = "Begin with the End in Mind" – (or Look Where You're Going) Because followers of Jesus have a heavenly destination, not Sheol, we should use our time in redemptive ways.

Jesus was diligent about keeping to His mission. Distractions were as prevalent then as they are now, but He let none of them deter Him from preaching and teaching God's Word. Though He spent only 33 years on this earth, Jesus changed the world forever because He redeemed the time.

In our text today, we concentrate on the first clause. Note how many topics you find.

*Ecclesiastes 7:8-13 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. <sup>9</sup> Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. <sup>10</sup> Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. <sup>11</sup> Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. <sup>12</sup> For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. <sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?*

*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.* In "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," you attend a funeral service with 4 speakers: a family member, a friend,

a co-worker/volunteered, a pastor (“Live so the pastor doesn’t have to tell lies at your service”). Then realize it’s YOUR funeral. What would you like to be said about you? Were you patient or angry? Were you humble or proud, wise or foolish, generous with your money or wasteful, a person of knowledge or a fool? Forget the funeral years from now (you won’t be there, anyway). How are you TODAY? For those parenting, what values are you passing on to your kids? 1<sup>st</sup> Habit = Be Proactive. Lead your family. He describes the difference between “leadership” and “management.” Leadership casts a vision. Parents need to lead their kids. Covey says, “Leaders are the proactive ones who climb the tallest tree and survey the scene and then call out – ‘We’re in the wrong jungle.’ Parents need to cast a vision to their kids about where they are headed. Managers are those who just want to be efficient. We tend to be long-term or short-term thinkers. I think most of us are short-term thinkers. These two groups think differently about money, health, relationships, raising children, business, career, and everything.

**7 Pillars of Parenting** Look where you’re going. What’s the goal of parenting? To have fully functional adults. To be following Jesus. Parents, “Helping Others Follow Jesus” starts at home. Kids who are 12 are 2/3rds through High School. It happens very quickly. We would like to see 7 simple things can happen with parents and kids. (The “What?”). These are ATOMIC HABITS – tiny things stacked up over time produce results.

- 1) **COME** (bring your family to WORSHIP) Stats show that families who worship together have the best chance of retaining the faith of their children.
- 2) **PRAY** (teach bedtime prayers, grace at meals, the Lord’s Prayer)
- 3) **PLAY** (do something fun as a family each week)
- 4) **EAT** (have shared meals weekly)
- 5) **GIVE** (teach kids about stewardship)
- 6) **READ** (the Bible...but other good books, too)
- 7) **SERVE** (Yesterday we had 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday)

*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.* That’s true...if the story ends with “And they all lived happily ever after.” It’s fun to start....you’ve no idea what to expect. Anticipation. Optimism. Ignorance. Like moving to 6767 S. Mingo.

We only say the end is better than the beginning if we have a good ending. Jesus, on the cross, told the thief next to him, “*Today, you shall be with me in Paradise.*” *Better is the end of a thing than its beginning* if you know where you’re going. Acts 7:59-60 describes the death of the first Christian martyr. ***As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."***

***When he had said this, he fell asleep.*** (Acts 7:59-60). This happened to my dad, too. As he was dying at Hillcrest Hospital in 1986, in the middle of the night, this bedfast man, who could not raise up, suddenly sat up, looked up and had a conversation with Jesus. Then he laid back down. My sister's husband was in the room and described it as remarkable. *Better is the end of a thing than its beginning....if you know where you're going.*

Do you know where you are going? Are you being effective or just efficient? Be proactive. Life is about our choices. We are different than the animals because we make choices that matter.

We can be patient or angry; humble or proud; optimistic or a pessimist; wise or foolish with our money, time, relationships, influence. We can follow Jesus and help others follow Him to or do our own thing and eat, drink and be merry. We can be forgiven or live with anger, guilty and bitterness; we can have an eternal purpose or just drift from one thing to another; we can live within the community or faith or manage life alone; we can follow the scriptures or do whatever we want to do; we can have the Holy Spirit, or have a secular spirit; we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven or go down to Sheol. It's our choice. I hold before you life and death – choose life so you may live...here and now...and eternally. This is our invitation to receive His grace into our lives.