

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 7:11-14, 19

Sermon Title: "Wisdom for Life" (Misuse of Funds Series)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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There was a small village in Africa that decided to build a bridge. This little village was set next to a wide river, and that river was difficult to cross with any animals or carts carrying goods. Some Americans in the area developed plans for making a sturdy bridge to cross the expanse: a simple structure of rope and wood. The villagers were happy to back the plan. But then the government heard about the project, and wanted to put in their two-cent's worth. The bridge should be strong enough to support light and heavy vehicles, government officials said. The bridge isn't supposed to support vehicles but donkeys and carts full of produce, said the villagers. You must build a strong bridge, or we won't approve the project, government officials said. The villagers gave in, and decided to make the bridge of steel and concrete. However, those resources were limited. How could they acquire them? Enter a rich chief of the area, who gained his money through illegal activities. He could supply the materials, if the villagers submitted to a few

of his demands. The villagers felt caught between all these people who wanted to turn their simple bridge into a major construction project. What should have taken months took years to build, but everybody was satisfied with the end result. The tall steel and concrete structure looked ridiculous next to a small village, but it could support vehicles and donkey carts.

The sturdy bridge lasted until one rainy season, in which the floodwaters rose over the banks and the swollen river transported tree trunks and heavy debris downstream. The bridge was swept away. This unusually wet season would occur every ten years, but nobody remembered. It would have taken out their simple bridge, but the villagers could have reconstructed it much easier than a tall steel bridge. Their path across the river was gone, and nobody took up the project for another bridge again.

The Preacher who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes knew how important wisdom was, and is today. This Preacher calls himself a king of Israel – King Solomon was a very wise king – and he tells us that he set his heart “to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven.”<sup>1</sup> At one point in the Book, the Preacher says that it is better to be “a poor

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:12-13

and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, old dogs must always learn new tricks, because the young dogs are learning every day, but also because wisdom begets wisdom. We are always on the road of wisdom, to learn more and to apply what we learn. We cannot stay stuck in our old way of thinking, because that old way always needs polishing with new ways.

“Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,” the Preacher says in Chapter 7, “an advantage to those who see the sun.” Yes, it would be a wonderful thing to have a rich relative leave us a couple million dollars in his will, after he dies. We would have to pay an estate tax of 35% or higher to the government, but we would take our chance if we inherited millions of dollars. But the Preacher tells us that although having wisdom and an inheritance is a wonderful thing, but wisdom is the most profitable. Wisdom is a defense just as money is a defense against unforeseen circumstances, but “the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.” That is a crucial key: to have wisdom that gives life.

Wisdom gives life: it gives direction, it gives perspective, it gives the ability to move forward, and in

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<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:13.

all of that is life. One thing that sucks the life from anybody is money problems. If the cash is not there, our attitudes go through the floor. Money problems drag down our hope, our ambitions, our courage. They can tear apart marriages. They can drive us to the brink of poverty and possibly homelessness. In our current economy, money is first and foremost on everybody's minds: where is it coming from, and how do we use it?

In various places in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher speaks about money, and how it influences us. In Chapter 7, he indeed acknowledges that it would be great to have large treasuries of cash as well as large treasuries of wisdom, but he doesn't lift up cash above wisdom. Wisdom trumps cash; it is far greater than gold and silver. We probably don't have large treasuries of cash, as the Preacher once did, but we do have control over the ways the cash is handled, no matter how small or big the pile is.

Back in Ecclesiastes 5, the Preacher talks about money increasing, but as cash grows so does the misuses of it. "When goods increase, they increase who eat them."<sup>3</sup> No matter how many goods we have, the desire to use them grows. The cash is there, so spend it. We watch the commercials, and they tell us

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<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:11.

that we don't have the bodies we should have, we don't have the education we should have, we don't have the right cell phone or TV or car, and we don't have, we don't have... So we spend our money unwise. We blow it on things we do not need. Our appetites grow for having stuff, but the cash reserves will never be big enough to satisfy them all. I took an Economics class away back in college, and the main thing I learned was a little thing called scarcity. Everybody should know what scarcity is: unlimited desires, but limited resources. We cannot have everything: this is living wisely. The Preacher says that wisdom trumps money. Living unwise is watching the money we have go for the wrong things.

Bad days can suck the life out of us, too. We don't plan for bad days, but they seem to jump out and surprise us. The trip to work on the highway, the way somebody rubbed us wrong, the project that didn't come out the way we wanted to. We plan to go to a meeting, and it's cancelled, and we drove 30 miles to get to it. We expect somebody to do something for us before the end of the day, and they just never got to it. Even the rain can suck life from us: cloudy skies, too cold or too hot weather. We don't plan for bad days, but they surprise us nonetheless.

How do we counteract a bad day? Some people spend money. They make excuses for why they need this or that, and they blow their money, thinking it will make them happier. Sure, at the moment it might make them happy, but the next bad day surfaces when a huge bill comes in the mail and they don't have the money for it, because they were unwisely trying to make themselves happy the other day.

“In the day of prosperity be joyful,” the Preacher tells us.<sup>4</sup> But in the day of adversity, complain? In the day of adversity, spend as much money as you can because they will make you feel you are in control? No, the Preacher tells us to “consider.” Pay attention, be watchful, be observant, be expectant. The Preacher knew that there is a time for everything, so there are good days and there are bad days. We may become upset and frustrated and angry about what is happening to us, but we must quiet our hearts and become observant. What do the bad days do to us inside? Do they make us feel worthless? Do they make us feel we don't measure up, that nobody likes us, that we did something wrong to deserve it? Will money make us worthy, compared to the love of God? Does money make us measure up just as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins does? Bad days will come,

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<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:14.

and when they do we must contemplate on God. We must consider that the cash in our pockets or purses will do nothing for us, but our Lord and God can. God gives us meaning. God gives us purpose. God gives us life. We can know this, believe this, in the good times as well as in the bad.

Wisdom gives life. Wisdom gives the ability to live amid the frustrations, the bad days, the disappointments. Yet the life we receive through wisdom doesn't come directly from wisdom. Wisdom itself comes from God. It is through wisdom that God gives us life.

In Job 28:28 it says, "God says to a person, 'The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to shun evil is understanding'." Fearing the Lord means that we acknowledge that God has life in his very hand. Nothing lives unless God gives it permission to live. God could easily snuff out all life by merely closing his hand, but God chooses not to do so because of his great love for us and creation. God keeps his hand open so that life continues to be. God keeps his hand open, so that we might receive the things God has to offer us, such things that give us life.

If money problems is a thing that can suck life out of us, then God gives us wisdom to manage our

money. God is interested in money: not in accumulating as much as he can from us, as some televangelist would have us believe. God is interested in money, especially how we handle it. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes says that it would be great to have a large inheritance, but he says that it is much better to have God's wisdom in handling whatever treasures we keep, no matter how big or small. God wants us to use our resources wisely, not on the latest gadget, not on the newest fashion, not on endless enjoyment. God knows that bills need to be paid, children need food, and we all need a shelter, so God shows us how to use the money wisely to spend on those things that really matter.

God may be telling us to keep a budget, a concise record of what we take in and what goes out. Some of us might not have a budget, and so we don't have a handle on what reserves we have in our possession. God gives us wisdom not to get ourselves trapped in financial purgatory. We aren't the US government: we cannot pretend the money will always be there, and then live in cavernous holes of debt. We cannot spend money on what we like, so we classify where money ought to go, and use it with God's help. The commercials subtly tell us that we can spend money whenever we feel like it; and when we do, the



commercials assume we will live the good life that we ought to have. God's wisdom tells us that life is good with God, and God alone. Abundant life is found in Jesus Christ, so receive him as your Savior.

God wants us to have life, and part of that life is not worrying over the money. Part of that life is being happy with what we have and using it on what matters.

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider." Take a good hard look at our lives with God, and ask God what we should do next. Reflect on how things aren't going the way they should be, and ask God to redirect us. Face head-on the ominous clouds on the horizon, and request that God give us strength to remain solid. God is more than happy to help, especially when we ask. God is happy to give us his plan for our lives, whether it involves money or food or possessions or whatever. When life seems to be draining from us, God breathes new life into us, and we are alive.

### **Assurance of Pardon:**

In Christ, we are offered a new design for living: open hearts, abundant forgiveness, yearning to serve others, desire to be one with God. The old is gone, and a new life has begun. Accept Christ's sacrifice, and be healed of your sin. Through him you and I are forgiven - thanks be to God. Amen.