



Bringing Wisdom to Work

Pursuing Wisdom...Under the Sun Part 3
Ecclesiastes 8:2-8

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Years ago, the devotional magazine, “Our Daily Bread,” illustrated the need for the Christian to face their problems and challenges in life with greater trust that God is at work behind the scenes.

During World War II, a family in Sussex, England, sent some money to a missionary society and enclosed a letter saying that they wanted to give more, but the harvest on their farm was being threatened by the lack of rain.

They were also fearful of German bombs being dropped in the area, putting their farm and crops at risk, not to mention their own lives. He asked the staff of this mission to pray that no bombs would fall on their land.

The director of the missionary society wrote back and wisely responded that while they did not believe they could pray that exact prayer, they would indeed pray that the family would trust whatever God’s will was for their lives.

Shortly after, a German missile landed on their property. No family member was hurt; and the livestock, home and barn were all fine.

But that bombshell went so far into the ground that it liberated an underground stream. That new stream yielded enough water to irrigate their entire property as well as neighboring farms.

“Our Daily Bread” ended this illustration by writing, “Sometimes, even bombs are blessings. They fall from heaven, make a lot of noise, and liberate within us a new stream of trust and faith in the provision of God.” God has a way of using every inconvenience, every trial, and every difficulty to make us wiser and draw us closer to Him.



Have you ever had a “bomb” moment in your life like the one Stephen describes here? When have you feared the worst, and God has used that to create a blessing?

Perhaps one of the most difficult areas of life to navigate with wisdom is life on the job. Maybe you have some explosive problems; some unreasonable demands; some difficult assignments.

How do you take wisdom to work with you? What does wisdom look like on the job? How do you respond to those in authority over you, from 9 to 5, so to speak?

God, through Solomon, is now going to address this issue and provide some inspired advice on navigating that world with godly wisdom.

We’re reading now just the **2nd verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 8.**

I say: Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him.

Ecclesiastes 8:2

Now since Solomon is a king, he’s going to illustrate how to wisely respond to that level of authority — from the king on down.

He starts at the top, with the highest power in the land.

And that’s a great place to draw some insights, because if you know how to respond to higher authorities in the land, you will know how to respond to all the other authorities in the land. Everyone is at any time surrounded by authorities, whether is governing officials, or parents or teachers or coaches or supervisors or CEO’s.

The first principle he lays out here for us is:

The principle of obedience to authority

And Solomon raises the fundamental issue that the King’s command — literally translated, ***the mouth of the king*** — is to be obeyed. Why? Because of — Solomon writes — ***on account of God’s oath to him***; in other words, the king’s authority is delegated authority from God.

We’re obeying the king’s commands because ultimately, God is commanding that king. It might not look like it, but Solomon writes in ***Proverbs 21:1, the heart of that king is in the hand of God***, ultimately performing God’s eternal plan.

It might seem like you’re obeying an earthly supervisor, but you’re not.

In actuality, Paul wrote to the ***Colossians, while serving your earthly masters — your earthly supervisors — know that you are serving the Lord Christ (Colossians 3:22).***

That doesn't make it easy, or convenient.

You might be summoned for jury duty when you planned a vacation; you might have to pay more taxes than you expected; you might face zoning restrictions and ordinances that are costly.



Do you obey authority even when you disagree, or when it might inconvenience you? How can you remind yourself that all authority is instituted by God Himself?

We're meeting here today, on this campus and in buildings, because we complied with a thousand different building codes and city ordinances:

- the doors had to be so thick;
- hallway doors had to be wired to close automatically in case of fire;
- windows had to be a certain thickness;
- classrooms on the second floor could not be used for children under the age of two — they have to be on the first floor;
- parking spaces had to be a certain width;
- a certain number of trees and plants had to be planted;

- the church sign out front could only be so tall and so wide — which is why our church sign out there is absolutely useless and people still think we're a college.

Paul writes, ***Let every person be subject to the governing authorities*** — and here's the principle Solomon delivers as well — ***for there is no authority except from God (Romans 13:1)***.

You say, but these are terrible days. I would agree, genuine Christianity is experiencing an ever-increasing hostile culture.

But we're not yet where the early church was 1,900 years ago when believers were covered with tar and used as torches to light the garden parties of Nero.

We're not yet in the place of the Anabaptists 500 years ago who believed that baptism by immersion was to take place only by those who personally trusted in Christ — and so the city officials said, "Well, if you want to be immersed that badly, we'll drown you," and many of them were.

Several hundred years ago, in Scotland, believers led by John Knox the Reformer, suffered because of their faith; they had their ears cut off, or their hands cut off; some were killed and their bodies were impaled on church steeples as a warning to other protestant believers.

There are some countries to this day where being a Christian is a matter of life and death.

One of our problems as believers, especially in a free country, is that we forget we're in exile here; we think we're home. We're trying to get comfortable in the wrong living room. We are citizens of heaven, assigned to the embassy of earth, for the time being. We're not settlers, we're pilgrims.

And more than ever, we need wisdom in order to correctly and biblically apply this principle of obedience to authority.

Secondly, there is:

The principle of patience in the process

Notice the first phrase in verse 3;

Be not hasty to go from his presence.

Ecclesiastes 8:3a

Solomon is referring, more than likely to the culture of respect and patience shown by the subordinate as he patiently endures his authority.

When he says, ***be not hasty to leave his presence***, he is not telling you how fast you should leave that place of authority where you have been called in.

He's not telling you how fast you need to walk away from the White House — or in my case, the principal's office.

Rather than rushing out of there; rather than leaving in a huff or maybe even

resigning, Solomon essentially says here, "Slow down, stick it out, bide your time."



When you find that your anger is stirring, do you take the time to slow down and ask God to guide you?

Solomon isn't talking about moving slowly, he's talking about responding slowly.

Thirdly, there is:

The principle of loyalty to the office

Notice the last part of verse 3;

Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?"

Ecclesiastes 8:3b-4

Solomon is essentially reminding us here that on a very practical level, if you don't like the word of the king, don't be tempted to talk back.

Show respect for the office of that authority — that coach, or teacher, or governing official.

And Solomon writes here as well — ***don't take up an evil cause***. In other words,

don't strike back at sin by doing something sinful. You don't fight evil by doing evil.

When your supervisor says or does something unkind, don't look for an opportunity to undermine them. When your neighbor yells at you, don't yell back. When someone throws mud at you, don't throw mud back.

This is the way the power brokers of the world launch their agendas and compete for more power.

Solomon warning to those under authority here is, if you fight authority, it will probably backfire.

I was reading recently on the political battles that have taken place over the past 200 years in our own country.

When Grover Cleveland, from Buffalo, New York ran for president in the late 1800's, it was discovered that he had fathered a child out of wedlock. His opponent, James Blaine, quickly made this front-page news and even nicknamed Cleveland "The Beast of Buffalo."

Cleveland's party retaliated by creating a little poem to insult Blaine. It went: Blaine, Blaine, continental liar from the state of Maine.

Blaine's party retaliated by creating their own little poem that referred to Cleveland's immorality; they would chant it at him and plaster it on posters — it asked the question: "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?"

But then Cleveland won the election and his party got the final word by writing one more line to that chant and it said: Ma, Ma, where's my Pa? He's gone to the White House, Ha, Ha, Ha!"

The way of the world has always been to strike back and yell louder and throw more mud.

Now Solomon reinforces his comments about a wise person responding correctly, by adding a couple of prohibitions.

The prohibition of sinning against God

Notice verse 5:

Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing.

Ecclesiastes 8:5a

Here is this fundamental principle of obedience to the commands of your authority, the boundary line for obedience: obey the command of your authority so long as their command does not require you to violate the command of God.

The Apostle's respectfully informed their leaders in **Acts 5:29**, "**We must obey God rather than man.**"

There are believers who have lost their jobs because they would not violate scripture. They wouldn't compromise their standards.



Have a conversation with your family, or reflect alone, about where you will draw the line? What are the things that you know will disobey God, and that no man or power can make you compromise on?

Relationships were ended; careers and promotions were dissolved because a believer simply would not violate the scriptures.

The prohibition of speaking out of turn

Notice here at the last part of verse

5:

The wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavily on him. For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be?

Ecclesiastes 8:5b-7

In other words, look for the right time and the right place and the right way to speak, if you are to speak at all.

The wise heart will choose silence, not simply to remain silent, but to ask the Lord for the right moment to speak — to have the right message when you speak;

and to be moved by the right motive when you do.

And that comes from an understanding of what Solomon reminds us here in **verse 7** — **that we do not know what God is planning to do in the future.**

No matter how bad it looks, we have no idea what the Lord is setting the table to do. “Lord, the worst thing in my life right now would be a bomb falling on my farm.” And it falls, and a stream of water emerges which God had planned all along!

Solomon now ends this discussion by reminding everyone that no matter how powerful someone might be — they are still small and limited in their power.

Solomon rattles off four limitations here; each of them beginning with the Hebrew negative “no” or “not”, even though it’s a little obscured in the English language.

Here’s the first limitation:

No one can control the wind

Notice the first phrase in verse 8:

No man has power to retain the wind.

Ecclesiastes 8:8a

The word **wind** in the Hebrew language is the same word for **spirit**. Since many assume this phrase goes with the next phrase about death, then it must be a reference to someone’s inability to control their death.

That would be true as well, but that's the next proverb, and these are separate numerical proverbs, therefore, this is a reference to the wind.

So, here's the point: how powerful is that boss or that teacher or that supervisor who may very well be driving you toward insanity?



Who is more powerful than God? No one.
So when it feels like someone else is in power over you, do you keep their power in relation to God's in perspective?

Remember, they can't move one cloud in the sky!

One author suggested that Solomon is referring categorically to the weather.

In other words, the most powerful person on earth can't make the breeze blow or a hurricane stop.

No one can determine their lifespan

The next phrase reads:

[No one has] power over the day of death.

Ecclesiastes 8:8b

No matter how powerful someone was in life, death is not something they can command.

Only God has the authority over life and death – they are entirely in the hand of God.

When King Louis XIV was dying, he called his son into his room and his last words to him were, "Son, profit by my errors and remember this: kings die like every other man."

No one can get away from the battles of life

Solomon writes here in the middle of verse 8:

There is no discharge from war (from the midst of battle).

Ecclesiastes 8:8c

You could render it 'No discharge from the midst of battle.'

That can refer to a battle, or simply the battles and challenges of life.

Solomon essentially says here that even for those who have everything, there is no escape from the difficulties of life.

No one can get around the consequences of sin

Solomon writes in the last part of **verse 8**:

Nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it.

Ecclesiastes 8:8d

Literally translated – wickedness will not deliver its masters.

People in power can become masters at wickedness, but as much as they bluster and brag and sin against God and against others, they will not be able to get around the consequences of sin. There is a day of judgment coming.

And by the way, the only hope for any of us is the forgiveness of our sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who paid our penalty and offers us the free gift of salvation.

And He gives us not only the gift of salvation, but James chapter 1 tells us He gives us the gift of wisdom.

Wisdom to take to work — wisdom to respond to those in your life who are your authority.



Take a moment and ask God for wisdom
in your work this week.

Wisdom to know that even if a bomb falls into your life, God has reasons. He might be opening new streams of deep water; new depths of character and trust and wisdom.

I close with the lyrics of a song Laura Story sang — a song that reminds us of our shortsighted prayers and God's deeper plans:

*We pray for blessings, we
pray for peace
Comfort for family,*

*protection while we sleep
We pray for healing, for
prosperity
We pray for Your mighty
hand to ease our suffering
All the while, You hear each
spoken need
Yet love us way too much
to give us lesser things.*

*'Cause what if your
blessings come through
raindrops
What if Your healing comes
through tears
What if a thousand
sleepless nights are what it
takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are
Your mercies in disguise.*

*We pray for wisdom, Your
voice to hear
We cry in anger when we
cannot feel You near
We doubt your goodness,
we doubt your love
As if every promise from
Your Word is not enough
All the while, You hear each
desperate plea
And long that we'd have
faith to believe — that:*

*All the while, You hear each
spoken need
Your love is way too much
to give us lesser things.*

*'Cause what if your
blessings come through
raindrops*

*What if Your healing comes
through tears
What if a thousand
sleepless nights are what it*

*takes to know You're near
What if trials of this life are
Your mercies in disguise?*

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