

LIVING ON THE RAGGED EDGE: Coming to Terms with Reality

Wise Words for Busy People
Ecclesiastes 7:1–14



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've reached the halfway point in Solomon's journal. By now we have a pretty good handle on the man's mental perspective as well as his method of pursuit. But something has been conspicuous by its absence—wisdom. This comes as a surprise because Solomon had considerable, God-given wisdom. That's true except for a strange period in his life when he tossed restraint to the wind and acted out a role altogether unusual for a man of his heritage, his position, and his stature.

Had Solomon lived in our generation, perhaps we would explain his escapades as the result of a midlife crisis. Things that were once important and dear to him, he began to view with cynicism, especially the simplicity and purity of a walk of faith. Wisdom took a back seat as rebellion took control, grabbed the steering wheel, and jammed the accelerator to the floor! And even though lasting satisfaction eluded him, he kept taking every corner on two wheels. Funny thing about us humans—we tend to speed faster when we have lost our way. And when we do, wisdom steps back and waits, refusing to keep pace with our frantic, maddening race to find happiness.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Brief Review and Preview

- *What's behind us?* In the first six chapters in his journal on life, Solomon recorded his maddening search for meaning and purpose “under the sun.” But he found only futility and emptiness in his life apart from God.
- *What's ahead?* In chapters 7–12, Solomon's focus shifted from the grinding, dreary futility of life without God to an awareness that wisdom *must* take over if we hope to find meaning in life.

2. Counsel for Those in the Crunch (Ecclesiastes 7:1–14)

In Ecclesiastes 7:1–10, Solomon set forth seven comparative proverbs that illustrate for us things in life that are “better than” others. Here are a few that demonstrate Solomon's wisdom:



Quotable

*We dare not
make one major
decision without
asking for
the wisdom of God.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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- An excellent reputation and integrity are better than the adornment of perfume (Ecclesiastes 7:1).
- A stroll through the graveyard is better than an afternoon at a buffet, because when we view life from the vantage point of the end, we gain insight about true significance (7:2).
- Sorrow is better than laughter, because it causes us to think about life’s purpose (7:3–4).

In Ecclesiastes 7:11–14, Solomon explained the greatness of God’s wisdom:

- Wisdom preserves us from the human pitfalls of pride, doubt, and disillusionment.
- Wisdom provides our lives with divine perspective.



A CLOSER LOOK

Proverbs

A *proverb* has been described as “a pithy saying, especially one condensing the wisdom of experience.”¹ It’s a brief, practical generalization of truth that helps us approach life wisely—a “sound bite” of wisdom for living. We must remember, however, that Hebrew proverbs are meant to be general truths, not necessarily promises. Proverbs, like most Hebrew poetry, are characterized by parallelism,² of which the three most common types are summarized below:

Type of Parallelism	Description	Key Words	Examples
Contrastive	Second line contrasts with the first	<i>but;</i> <i>nevertheless</i>	Proverbs 13:1, 10
Completive	Second line completes the first	<i>and;</i> <i>so</i>	Proverbs 14:10, 13
Comparative	Second line compared with the first	<i>better . . . than;</i> <i>like/as. . . so</i>	Proverbs 25:24, 25



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LET'S LIVE IT

In light of Solomon's words of wisdom, there are two thoughts we need to ponder. In a busy world like ours where decisions are made at a moment's notice and often without reflection, we need to keep in mind:

- *Regarding decisions:* We dare not make a major decision without asking for wisdom from God.

- *Regarding perspective:* We cannot see the whole picture without drawing on God's wisdom.

Where do you turn first when you face a problem? When you ask God for wisdom, do you patiently wait for it, or do you forge ahead, relying on your own knowledge?

ENDNOTES

1. D. A. Hubbard, "Proverb," in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., ed. J. D. Douglas and others (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1987), 988.
2. Nicholas H. Ridderbos and Herbert M. Wolf, "Poetry, Hebrew," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, K–P, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and others (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 892–94.



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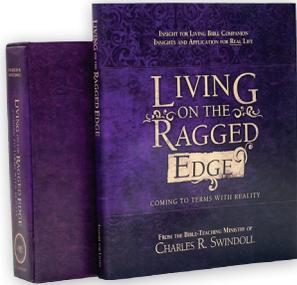
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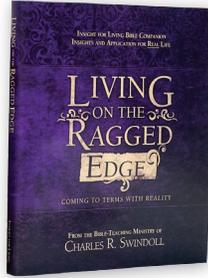
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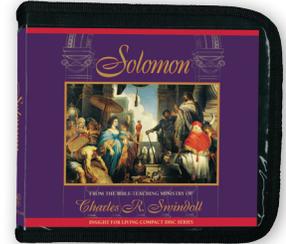
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