

Ecclesiastes 7:1–6 | “No Pain, No Gain”
Preached on July 19, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 7, and we will be in verses 1–6 this morning.
[pauseeee]

Last week, we saw that we are to eat, drink, and find enjoyment in our toil.

And if you stopped there, you could be led to believe something wrong, for you could think that a godly person’s life is just filled with laughter and smiles, 24/7. *[pause]*

But what we find here in the beginning of chapter 7 balances out the picture.

It shows us that the right way to live here ‘under the sun’ doesn’t mean that everyday will be smiles and laughter. *[pause]*

In fact, he will show us that the wise, godly person actually experiences sorrow and suffering, and doesn’t try to run away from them. [pause]

Let’s READ the passage. *[READ 1–6]*

On YouTube, you will often find that the titles of videos will try to catch your attention. [pause]

They will say something like, “A SHOCKING discovery,” or, “Six SHOCKING Moments Caught on Camera!” *[pause]*

They highlight or emphasize the word “shocking” in order to get you to click on the link. [pauseeee]

Now usually you end up disappointed by the video, but they still try to draw you in. *[pause]*

Well the author of Ecclesiastes seeks to draw us in by highlighting some things that are shocking and counterintuitive.

But unlike those YouTube videos, this is no “clickbait” that disappoints, but this is God’s Word that we must heed. *[pauseeee]*

The first shocking truth that we see in this passage is that...

I. Mourning can be better than feasting! (1–4)

Now that’s startling to hear! *[pause]*

It reminds me of that saying, “No pain, no gain,” that exercise videos will shout at you. [pause]

Often it’s the last thing that you want to hear as you’re drenched in sweat, exhausted, with excruciating muscle pain. *[pauseee]*

The reason why, “No pain, no gain,” is startling is because usually we don’t think that pain equals gain, but sometimes it does!

And so also, typically we don’t think sadness is better than feasting, but sometimes *it is*.
[pauseeee]

There are various statements that emphasize this ‘mourning better than feasting’ truth and the first speaks of the day of death being better than the day of birth. [pause]

Verse 1 says, “A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.” [pauseeee]

Ointment is nice, refreshing, and fragrant, but it’s also temporary, and not as important as a good reputation. [pause]

The ointment may be sweet, but think of the sweetness of a good name from a life well-lived.
[pause]

So also, the author says that this is like the day of death being better than the day of birth.
[pauseeee]

Now realize that this is not saying that you should long for death in some morbid way, but it’s helping us to see the big picture. [pause]

There’s certainly joy at the birth of a child, but if you have experienced the funeral of a godly person, it’s something sad, yet *powerful*. [pause]

Their life isn’t up in the air, as to how they will live, but it has been accomplished.

And now people can’t stop dwelling upon their good character, as it has been seared in their memory. [pauseeee]

One commentator summarized this verse, when he said...

“It is better to come to the end of life with a good reputation than to have a joyful and auspicious beginning which, because of folly, might result in nothing.”¹ [pauseeee]

There’s that saying that goes, “It’s not about how you start, but about how you finish,” and to ‘finish well’ is a sweet, good, and beautiful thing.

It’s so much better than the temporary sweetness of perfume, for it’s something that *lasts*.
[pauseeee]

¹ Donald R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 992.

We rejoice at the thought of the day of our birth, but we rejoice even more at the thought that someday, if we are faithful to the Lord, Christ will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”²
[pauseeee]

As a pastor, I have witnessed the joy of seeing babies born—what an awesome thing!

But I have also done countless funerals of faithful Christians, and there’s something truly powerful about it. [pauseee]

As I held the baby, I wondered, “What will be the course of your life?”

But when you stand before the casket of a faithful Christian, you don’t have to wonder that because *you’ve seen it*. [pauseeee]

In that sense, the day of death can be better than the day of birth...

Not because death itself is better than life, but because a faithful life brought to completion is a beautiful testimony of God’s grace. [pauseeee]

The second statement that emphasizes how ‘mourning’ can be better than ‘feasting’ is found in verse 2...

It says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.” [pauseeee]

If we could choose, I doubt that many of us would choose a funeral over a party, yet the author is telling us that in some ways a funeral is *better* than a party! [pauseeee]

Now you must not take this verse in a legalistic way, whereby you say, “OK, I must go to more funerals than parties in my lifetime,” rather, you must see the author’s point. [pauseeee]

Let’s say that you only ever went to parties, what would be the result? [pause]

You would only experience fun and laughter, but never be led to reflect upon your own death.

But funerals do that—they cause you to reflect upon the deep, serious realities of life and death, so that you live differently. [pauseeee]

Since death is “the end of all mankind,” then we would be wise to “lay it to heart.”

It does no good ignoring your mortality, but actually, it hurts you in some ways because then you aren’t prepared to live and die well. [pause]

Funerals can teach people to do this, while parties don’t. [pauseeee]

² Matthew 25:21.

So many people are so focused on avoiding pain, discomfort, and death, that they never consider whether they will die well.

That is, will they be faithful to the end, enduring suffering and death with faith and grace?
[pause]

If you never allow yourself to reflect upon death, then you will never consider that question.
[pause]

Funerals can help us by prompting us to remember that death is coming for all of us, and so I must lay it to heart. [pauseeee]

A recent trend among some people is to not even have a funeral or service. [pause]

Now there may be various reasons for that, but when people do not have a service, they do a disservice to others. [pause]

As we see here, people miss out on a poignant reminder of their own death, which can provide important lessons for them. [pause]

The Bible is showing us here that we shouldn't avoid the discomfort and pain that these types of situations bring, for they can do something good for us, who are living. [pauseeee]

Next time that you grieve the loss of a loved one, or go to the funeral, think about this verse...

Do not try to skirt around the thoughts of death that pop into your mind because they are unpleasant, but lay them to heart. [pause]

Think, "Someday I will die, but am I ready?" [pause]

"How will I live my life? [pause]

"What will I have done with my life? Will it be wasted?" [pauseee]

As Psalm 90 says, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."³ [pauseeee]

The house of mourning is better than the house of feasting because it causes you to focus on significant, eternal realities.

And it's not often that we approach a funeral in that way. [pauseeee]

The next statement that emphasizes how 'mourning' can be better than 'feasting' is found in verse 3.

It says, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad." [pauseeee]

³ Psalm 90:12.

Once again, we are shocked by a counterintuitive assertion: sorrow can be better than laughter?

Yet here is wise Solomon showing us that that can be the case. *[pauseeee]*

Now this verse isn't condemning all laughter, for if we eat and drink to the glory of God, there will be fun and laughter.

But this is talking about frivolous laughter, the kind of laughter that is about trivial, shallow things of life, and those kinds of things rarely change us. *[pause]*

This is the kind of laughter that tries to laugh away the pain of reality.

But sorrow can have a growing, stretching, transforming role in our hearts. *[pause]*

Sorrow can cause us to be happier in the end. *[pauseeee]*

Haven't you ever gone through something sorrowful, but you have grown through it?

And now on the other side, you have been made more glad, more gracious, more godly. *[pauseee]*

Without sadness, you would have never experienced that. *[pause]*

If life was all laughter, you would never be where you are today in your spiritual maturity. *[pauseeee]*

Think about some of the most refining, transforming moments in your life—don't they typically revolve around hardship, rather than laughter? *[pause]*

This is why James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds," because it produces something good and lasting in us.⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Don't ignore what God can do through your sorrow. *[pause]*

Don't be so quick to dry the tears, and skip the discomfort. *[pause]*

This is not to say that we should *look* to be made sad, but it's to say that when sadness meets us, we shouldn't overlook the fact that God may very well want to do something in us. *[pauseeeee]*

Verse 4 continues this line of thinking by saying, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." *[pauseeee]*

Serious reflection on deep, eternal matters is not merely for certain "really serious people," but for all of us. *[pause]*

So the divide isn't between the serious, reflective people and the carefree, fun-loving people.

The divide is between the wise and the foolish. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ James 1:2–4.

Let's take the wise first...

We are told that “the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.” *[pause]*

This doesn't mean that this person is constantly attending funerals everyday, but his *heart* is in the house of mourning.

So he is regularly reflecting upon the reality of death, and letting it shape how he lives. *[pauseee]*

This is a person who considers: what matters for eternity? *[pause]*

Trivial things are seen as trivial, and there's a certain *depth* to them. *[pauseeee]*

This doesn't mean that they don't laugh, have fun, or enjoy life, for we learned that we are to eat, drink, and find enjoyment.

No, they know how to have fun, but they also keep things in perspective. *[pauseee]*

They dwell upon what's true, what's most important, and what lasts. *[pause]*

Much has been laid to heart through their hardship, and they haven't missed the class on the value of soul-shaping trials. *[pauseeee]*

This helps them to endure hard times because they are prepared for them.

Stabilized by truth, they take the hard, sorrowful times to heart, learning from them, and so they aren't ruined by them.

And now they can help others, also, through *their* mourning.⁵ *[pauseeee]*

Compare this with the fool whose heart “is in the house of mirth.” *[pauseee]*

Once again, the Bible isn't against having fun, but this is talking about people whose hearts are all about entertainment and pleasure. *[pause]*

Instead of taking difficult things to heart, the fool tries to avoid them.

They are the type of people who refuse to go to a funeral because of the feelings that it would bring up in them. *[pause]*

When met with sorrow, they try to whisk it away as quickly as possible, so as not to deal with it. *[pauseee]*

Difficulties are ignored or covered up with fun.

They distract themselves with the fleeting pleasures of this life. *[pauseee]*

⁵ See 2 Corinthians 1:4.

Jokes and laughter have become a coping mechanism, so that they don't have to feel the weight of sorrow.

And the bandaid that they have found for any kind of pain is to party. *[pauseeee]*

The fool is just about having a good time, but it's a shallow, trivial way to live.

They don't focus on what lasts, but on what's temporary. *[pause]*

As a result, they aren't prepared for the hard times—they certainly don't learn the lessons in them.

So instead of having stability in life, they are like an emotional roller-coaster. *[pause]*

And how can they help others through *their* sorrow? They have done everything they can to avoid *their own*. *[pauseeee]*

The Bible is saying that if you never let yourself be impacted by the hard realities of sorrow and death because you distract yourself with fun, laughter, and entertainment, then you are a fool. *[pause]*

But you are wise, if you see and learn the lessons found in difficult times. *[pauseeee]*

Mourning *can be* better than feasting, if we would learn to see the jewels of wisdom hidden within the rough exterior of hardship. *[pause]*

In that way—sorrow and death can be a great “counselor” for us.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

In verses 5–6, we see another shocking reality...

II. A rebuke can be better than a song! (5–6)

Sometimes the most attractive things are worse for you, than the least attractive things. *[pause]*

I think of food...

That piece of cake, piece of candy, or bag of chips looks amazing, but eating a lot of it will be detrimental to your health. *[pauseee]*

On the other hand, veggies and healthy foods are not always the most appealing, but they are better for us. *[pause]*

The less attractive food is often the one that's better for you. *[pauseee]*

⁶ The following commentary uses the term ‘friend’ instead of ‘counselor,’ but I got the insight for this sentence from: David Gibson, *Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 95.

Well like healthy food, what we find is that a rebuke may not *look* appealing, but it can be better than a song. *[pause]*

Verse 5 says, “It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.” *[pause]*

How can that be? It comes down to the contrast here...

This verse doesn’t say that ALL rebukes are better than ALL songs, but a rebuke from the wise is better than a song of fools. *[pauseeee]*

To understand how this rebuke is better, let’s break this down...

Think about a wise person’s rebuke, what’s implied by that? *[pause]*

Well it means that the rebuke will be *wise* since it comes from a wise person—this is no foolish or flippant rebuke. *[pauseee]*

Not only that, but the rebuke will be *truthful*.

It’s not like they are throwing around lies or embellishments, but it’s grounded in truth. *[pause]*

Put together then, this rebuke is wise and truthful, and therefore it will be *helpful*. *[pauseeee]*

When a wise person gives a loving rebuke, they are doing it for the good of another person.

It may hurt, but it helps. *[pauseeee]*

A rebuke like this isn’t pleasant, for it’s a *rebuke*, but know that it will be good for you.

It can help you to stop going down the wrong path, or to grow, mature, and change for the better. *[pause]*

We all need that at times, and so God blesses us with wise rebukers, but will we *listen*? *[pauseeee]*

In our day, we think that if something hurts, then it must not be good, but sometimes what hurts in the moment is what grows us.

So we need to get it in our minds that what’s true, lasting, and ultimately good is what is truly good, *even if it hurts*. *[pauseeee]*

So this rebuke of the wise is better than the song of fools, but what is the “song of fools”? *[pause]*

Since this ‘song’ is contrasted with a rebuke, then it most likely means things like flattery. *[pause]*

Think of how someone may ‘sing your praises.’ [pause]

These songs of fools are things that are pleasant to hear, but devoid of truth. [pause]

Since they are sung by fools, then they will be *foolish*.

Likewise, they are shallow and unlikely to be true. [pause]

A song of a fool is something that tickles the ear, but it doesn’t benefit you like a wise rebuke does—it’s empty, shallow, and fleeting. [pause]

The author in verse 6 tells us that it’s like thorns crackling under a pot...

The crackling gets your immediate attention, and so also does the song and laughter of fools, for it sounds pleasing at first. [pause]

But like thorns under a fire, it’s short-lived and has no substance.

It doesn’t bring you benefit or help, but it’s just a wisp in the air. [pause]

When we hear things said to or about us, we need to consider, “Yes, it sounds nice, but is it *true*?” [pause]

It may feel good to hear, but is it helpful in the long run? [pause]

Realize that just because something feels good in the moment, or sounds good in the moment doesn’t mean it’s good. [pause]

There’s a big difference between being lovingly rebuked by someone close to you, compared with being flattered by someone who knows nothing about you...

One has depth and meaning and benefit, while the other doesn’t. [pause]

The wise, yet hard-to-hear truths from others are *better* than the shallow, untrue, flattery of fools. [pause]

This means that we need to be willing to listen to wise rebuke. [pause]

I understand that it’s hard to hear and unpleasant, but consider how it can be good. [pause]

Don’t merely seek out things that you *want* to hear, seek out things that you *need* to hear. [pause]

The thing nowadays is to simply walk away, cut off people, and get mad when someone challenges you, but by doing so, you have chosen the path of folly. [pause]

This text also challenges us on what we say to others. [pause]

There is a tendency for some people to think that since rebukes are mean-sounding, then they shouldn't rebuke others. *[pause]*

They are fearful of coming across as unkind, so what they do is they don't say anything—but what did we find?

You have chosen the worse route—the empty, shallow path that does not benefit another person. *[pauseeee]*

Many do not rebuke when they should, thinking they have chosen the more loving path, when in reality, they have chosen the *unloving* one. *[pauseeee]*

People can be loved, helped, changed, and grown through wise rebukes spoken in love.

It's so much better than empty flatteries that sound pleasant, but do no good! *[pause]*

As Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy." *[pause]*

We are not to affirm someone in their sin, but assert what the truth is in love. *[pauseeee]*

If you know or see someone doing something wrong, it's time to remember a passage like this.

Think, "It is *better* for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools." *[pauseeee]*

Though the person may not respond how *they* should, you did what *you* should—you chose the better, wiser, right path that God has laid out. *[pauseeeee]*

Mourning and rebukes—not the most pleasant things to go through, let alone talk about—yet what we find is that...

Sometimes the hardest things are the most helpful things.

Often we avoid the things that hurt and seek out the most convenient, comfortable, pleasant, and easy path. *[pause]*

We tend to think that hard equals bad, and that easy equals good, but it's not always the case.

Sometimes the most uncomfortable moments are the ones that mold us more into the image of Christ. *[pauseeee]*

When you constantly run away from the hard, you do yourself a great disservice. *[pause]*

Little do you realize that that funeral may be just what God uses to wake you up to what's most important. *[pause]*

That rebuke may be just what you need to prevent you from going down the wrong path.
[pauseeee]

Do not despise all hard, uncomfortable things, for God often uses them for good. [pause]

As Paul says, “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”⁷

So we can be people who “rejoice in our sufferings,” for we know the good that God can produce in us through them.⁸ [pauseee]

It’s like discipline, for as Hebrews points out...

“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”⁹ [pauseeee]

The cross of Christ is a prime example of how one of the most unpleasant, gruesome, hard, brutal things in the world accomplished the greatest thing in the world. [pause]

The Son of God came to this earth, and was killed on the cross.

It was a horrific sight—He *died* there. [pause]

But through His death, He accomplished redemption on our behalf. [pauseeee]

The day of Christ’s death, filled with mourning, has become the place of forgiveness and life.
[pauseeee]

You see, the cross rebukes us for our sin, as we see what our sin deserved and we are led to a place of mourning over our sin, displayed in repentance.

But this place of mourning leads to a place of joy, for in Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins.

And we see Him risen from the grave, our redemption fully accomplished, and now our sorrow has turned into joy! [pause]

Our hearts have been made glad because of Jesus. [pauseeeee]

Sometimes the hardest things are the most helpful things.

So do not despise the hard, uncomfortable, unpleasant things of life, but see what God may be doing through them. [pause]

You may very well find God’s grace is waiting for you there.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:17.

⁸ Romans 5:3–5.

⁹ Hebrews 12:11.