

Ecclesiastes 7:7–14 | “Right Living Amid Adversity”
Preached on July 26, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 7:7–14. *[pause]*

We are working our way through the book of Ecclesiastes, and recently we have been seeing how we are to respond to hard times. *[pauseeee]*

Many of you have probably heard of Joni Erickson Tada. *[pause]*

When she was 17, she became paralyzed from the shoulders down after a tragic accident. *[pause]*

Listen to what she said about her situation...

She admitted, “Bitterness was a temptation for me in the early days of my paralysis...*[pause]*

As if that trouble wasn’t enough, God added a second hardship: several months into my hospital stay, I had an operation on my lower spine. *[pause]*

After the surgery, I was forced to lie face down for fifteen days while the stitches healed...*[pause]*

Then, the third distress came: I caught the flu. *[pause]*

Suddenly, not being able to move was peanuts compared to not being able to breathe. I was miserable!...*[pause]*

The pressure had gotten so strong that I was either going to give the situation over to him completely or allow myself to wallow in bitterness.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

Of course, we know that she handed it over to God, and has been a faithful testimony to each of us. *[pauseeee]*

A person who experienced such hardship could have easily let that lead them to give into bitterness, anger, or despair, but Joni wisely turned in faith through her difficulty.

And that’s what our passage this morning talks about: it shows us that we can either respond with folly or with wisdom to adversity. *[pauseee]*

I’ll READ the passage. *[READ 7–14]*

At the beginning of chapter 7, we saw that we are to not try to run away from hardship by trying to distract ourselves, for there are lessons to be learned.

But now, we will see that we must realize, though, that there are dangers that come along with hardship, so use wisdom. *[pauseeee]*

¹ <https://www.tyndale.com/stories/joni-eareckson-tada-talks-about-bitterness>.

The first thing we see is found in verses 7–10, which shows us that...

I. Adversity can turn us into fools, if we let it. (7–10)

In life, we see a lot of signs that warn us of danger. *[pause]*

There are road signs that tell us of a curve ahead or merging traffic, and we are wise, if we heed them. *[pause]*

There are wet floor signs set up sometimes, and we would be foolish, if we walked around them carelessly. *[pause]*

Well the author of Ecclesiastes wants to teach us that there are dangers linked to adversity.

So anytime that we enter hardship, we should think of a sign attached to it saying, “Danger Ahead!” *[pauseeee]*

In this passage, I see 5 temptations that we can experience during hardship, and the first one is to act foolishly when overwhelmed by wickedness. *[pause]*

Verse 7 says, “Surely oppression drives the wise into madness.” *[pauseeee]*

No matter how wise a person may be, when they are oppressed or see oppression all around them, it can really get to them.

And after a while, it can tempt you to start thinking foolishly. *[pause]*

You may wonder, “Where is God?” or, “Why is doing right not bringing about good results?” *[pause]*

It can even lead you to question, “Aren’t I doing the right thing here?” *[pause]*

For some people, the constant bombardment of evil they see can tempt them to start to make unwise choices like despair, join in the evil, or give into bitterness or revenge. *[pauseeee]*

This is what the prevalence of wickedness can do to a heart, if we are not careful—it can turn a wise person into a fool. *[pauseeee]*

What has the presence of evil in the world done in your life? *[pause]*

Has it led you to question God, or make some foolish choices?

Or have you remained steadfast in faith, trusting God? *[pauseeee]*

The second temptation is found in the second part of verse 7, where it says that, “A bribe corrupts the heart.” *[pause]*

The truth is that bribes are easier to give into when times are tough.

Maybe a person is experiencing some financial trouble or a complex situation, and now that bribe sounds appealing. *[pauseeee]*

The principle behind these bribes is that hard times can tempt us *to compromise*. *[pause]*

In order to avoid difficulty, people choose the path that seems to bring benefit or relief...

So lies are told in order to escape consequences, rules are bent, and even Biblical standards are lowered. *[pause]*

This is what we are seeing with so many churches: they are facing animosity from the world, and this tempts them to compromise the truth. *[pause]*

This is because hardship tempts you to choose the more comfortable path, and so your character can become corrupted. *[pauseeee]*

Have *you* compromised recently because of difficulty, or have you steadfastly held to what's right, even though it's hard? *[pauseeee]*

Next, verse 8 talks about the importance of being "patient in spirit," and so temptation #3 when we meet adversity is *to become impatient*. *[pauseeee]*

The impatient person wants to be in control of the timing.

We think, "I want it to happen *now!*" but the difficulties we face often say, "No, not now," and this makes us frustrated. *[pauseeee]*

When you think about it, impatience is a form of pride, so no wonder the author contrasts patience with pride here. *[pause]*

Pride says, "I know best, so I should be in control of the timing," but patience says, "I'm not in control, God is, so I will trust His timing." *[pauseeee]*

Impatient people need to be reminded that, "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning." *[pause]*

In the beginning, there's still a lot up in the air, and impatient people *hate that*.

They want the fruit as soon as the seed is planted, but the end is better because then it's fully formed and complete. *[pauseeee]*

Often you won't know what God is doing, but know that God is at work, crafting a beautiful tapestry.

And someday all of the confusing, bad-looking beginnings will eventually arrive at a glorious, beautiful end. *[pause]*

Will you patiently wait on the Lord? *[pauseeee]*

Temptation #4 during adversity is *to become quick to anger*.

And we see this in verse 9: “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.” *[pauseeee]*

In difficulty, things aren’t going your way, and so you lash out because there’s this frustration within you that you can’t control your life. *[pause]*

Just notice when someone is very overwhelmed and stressed, they start snapping at you for every little thing, and this is the reason.

But Solomon is warning us that if you let that continue, it becomes more and more settled within you. *[pause]*

Now you are angry even when not stressed, and people are noticing that you are really becoming an angry person. *[pause]*

It’s because you didn’t put that anger to death, but let it go.

So let’s not be fools, but let’s be wise by seeing the danger of anger let go. *[pause]*

Ask God for help, knowing that you can’t control anger by yourself.

For the truth is, that we don’t have control, so look to the Lord, giving everything into His big and capable hands. *[pauseeee]*

The last temptation during adversity is a surprising one, and it’s the temptation *to become nostalgic*. *[pause]*

For the most part, we don’t think of nostalgia as a bad or unwise thing, but God is showing us that it can be. *[pause]*

Verse 10 tells us: “Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.” *[pauseeee]*

Now looking back at the past *can be* an innocent thing...

If you are gratefully remembering the past, there’s nothing wrong with that, but Solomon isn’t talking about that.

Rather, look closely at the question in verse 10: “Why were the former days better than these?” *[pauseeee]*

This statement shows an idealization of the past, whereby a person overlooks the bad parts.

But the truth is that there were both good *and* bad things in the past, as well as the present, we just weren’t always attuned to them. *[pause]*

So it's not from wisdom that you do this, but folly, for you are overlooking reality. [pauseeee]

Also, to say, "Why were the former days better than these?" makes a judgment call on history. [pause]

Are you really that bold to say that the past was *truly* better? [pause]

Are you God? Do you know everything that happened? Do you see the big picture? [pause]

Are you so bold to say that the present is unquestionably *worse*? [pause]

Don't you realize that God wants you right here, right now? [pause]

Do you forget that God is in control, and working His plan, even today? [pause]

Are you going to imply that He's doing a worse job at governing the world now than He was before? [pause]

No wonder the author says that this statement is not from wisdom, for we are not the objective determiners of 'better' and 'worse' when it comes to history. [pauseeeee]

This form of nostalgia is also unwise because it leads to discontentment. [pause]

When you are constantly comparing the past with the present, then you start to complain.

So instead of being content in where God has placed you, you are longing to be somewhere else. [pause]

But if you are dreaming of yesterday, how can you live for God today? [pauseeee]

The question shouldn't be, "Why was the past better?" The question should be, "How will I live *now*?" [pauseeeee]

Nostalgia can also be a form of despair. [pause]

Since you don't see any hope looking *forward*, so you look *backward*. [pause]

Today, life feels out of control and blurry, but the past feels more in control and clear.

But this despair-induced nostalgia is not done in wisdom, for don't we have a God who has promised so much good to us? [pause]

Where is our *confident hope* in our Lord?! [pauseeee]

The cure for this kind of unwise, unhealthy nostalgia is a confident trust in God.

He is just as good, just as in control, just as wise, just as sovereign today as He was months, years, decades, or centuries ago. [pause]

The God of the 1950's is the same God of the 2020's, and He put you right here, right now for a reason, so will you trust Him today? *[pauseeee]*

We must beware of the dangers that come with adversity. *[pause]*

Hard times can tempt us to do some foolish things, and we can even be tempted to compromise. *[pause]*

Impatience, anger, and nostalgic discontent loom nearby.

And we give into these temptations when we fail to remember that God is in control and still at work...

And so we try to take matters into our own hands to try to gain some sort of advantage. *[pauseeee]*

Those are the dangers of adversity, but now verses 11–14 will show us what we need...

II. Wisdom and trust in God helps us to endure adversity rightly. (11–14)

What do you think you need the *most* when hard times come? *[pauseeee]*

For some people, they think that they just need to get out of it—that's what they need. *[pause]*

They search and search for man-made solutions, but when they come up empty-handed, they despair. *[pause]*

Others think that what they need most during hard times is just to be stronger or to try harder. *[pauseeee]*

David Brainard is a good example of someone, who knew that the answer wasn't in his own strength nor any man-made solutions. *[pause]*

Brainard was a missionary to the Indians back in the 1700's, and he faced a lot of difficulty and hardship. *[pause]*

He writes in his diary, "[I] was greatly exercised with inward trials and distresses all day." *[pause]*

He goes on to say, "Appeared to myself exceedingly ignorant, helpless, and unworthy, and altogether unequal to my work."² *[pauseeee]*

He knew that in himself, he didn't have the strength or capability, nor was the answer in men.

²<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/diary-of-david-brainerd/from-his-first-beginning-to-instruct-the-indians-at-kaunaumee-to-his-ordination/6CDC24595982026472DBA225C136D9FC>.

So what he did was he humbly and wisely looked to the Lord,³ and that's what Ecclesiastes shows us here. [pauseeee]

First, we see that in order to be sustained through adversity, we will need *wisdom*. [pause]

Verses 11–12 talk about how wisdom brings advantage, for it provides protection like money does. [pauseeee]

Now we already heard the author teach us that we are not to be all about money.

So this doesn't mean to love money, but it means very practically that money can be *helpful* in this earthly life. [pauseee]

If you want to pay the bills or have a roof over your head, you need money. [pause]

You pay your insurance, and now if something happens, the insurance will help cover it.

Most things cost money, so money can give you *some* protection in this life. [pause]

The word translated as 'protection' is literally 'shadow.'

It's like the protection of a tree's shade from the sun—it gives you temporary relief. [pauseeee]

In that way, money *can be* an advantage to people, but he says that wisdom is *even better*, for it "preserves the life of him who has it." [pauseeee]

Finances can be a blessing from God, but we also understand that wisdom helps us to make wise choices, so as to live the way that God intended, and not go down a ruinous path. [pauseeee]

In adversity, wisdom will be what's needed because you'll be pressured to conform, to bend, or to throw in the towel. [pause]

In adversity, situations are often more complex, so you'll need wisdom to sift through the weeds to see the right path to walk on. [pauseee]

So value wisdom, and live by it.

Don't let yourself fall back into folly because the times are tough...

But let the tough times push you into the arms of "God, who gives [wisdom] generously to all without reproach," if only we would ask in faith.⁴ [pauseeee]

That's where true wisdom leads: to God. [pause]

³ Brainard writes in his diary, "We are dependent on God for the being and every act of grace."
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/diary-of-david-brainerd/his-experience-and-religious-exercises-until-the-time-he-was-licensed-to-preach/5D390C34104477FE775A77F933879E43>.

⁴ James 1:5–8.

Wisdom leads us to trust God, which is an essential thing we need to live rightly amid adversity...

Verse 13 says, “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?”
[pauseeee]

Think of the strongest man in the world bending a pipe so that it’s crooked. [pause]

You want it to be straight, but you try your hardest to bend it back, but you can’t, no matter how much you try.

That’s the image here, but on an even more grand scale. [pauseeee]

If God has brought a curve into your life, you cannot straighten it to your wishes, no matter how hard you try. [pause]

You cannot fix everything in your life.

You cannot change every circumstance to be how you want.

This is no dream world of your own making—you are not in control! [pauseeee]

We need to often knock ourselves down from our pedestals to remember the sovereignty of God, and the powerlessness of man. [pause]

I can try my hardest to never get sick, but I can’t do it.

I can’t prevent my life from experiencing loss or disappointment. [pause]

There are many injustices that I see around me that I can’t change, and the content of my prayers are a glaring example of my limitations. [pauseeee]

In reality, there are way more circumstances *beyond* your control than there are circumstances *in* your control. [pauseeee]

So if God has determined to do something, then it’s done. [pause]

If He says, “I want that to be crooked,” what can I do when the God of the Universe has determined to put a curve in something? [pause]

Psalm 135:6 says, “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.”

So this should lead us to “stop and consider the wondrous works of God”!⁵ [pauseeeee]

Think about your life...

⁵ Job 37:14.

You probably had a certain “straight” path that you envisioned, but along the way, there were crooks, bends, twists, and turns.

And these were things that were out of your control. [pauseeee]

Ecclesiastes is teaching us that these “crooks” should humbly remind us of who is *really* in control, and guess what: it’s not you. *[pauseeee]*

The Lord is in control, sovereign over all things, and providentially working His will.

When He determines to make something crooked, then it’s going to be crooked, but here’s the thing, what He does is always good. *[pause]*

As Romans 8 teaches us: God works all things together for good.⁶

Therefore, since God is in control, it leads the author to say in verse 14...

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.” [pauseeee]

Since God is in control, then when the day of prosperity comes: be joyful! *[pause]*

Don’t say, “This is luck,” or, “This is just the calm before the storm,” but sincerely enjoy the good things that God has given to you. [pause]

On the other hand, knowing the providence of God, the day of adversity doesn’t have to shatter me.

But I can remember that He is in control, and so I don’t have to worry nor fear. [pause]

The world is not spinning out of control, no matter how much it feels that way.

God has made both the day of prosperity and the day of adversity. [pauseeee]

This means that when you know and trust that God is sovereign, you can take both the good and bad days in stride.

So may we be like Job, who lost so much, yet could still say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”⁷ [pauseeee]

These various days of prosperity and adversity are given to us by God for a purpose, and this means that my days are purposeful, not chaotic! *[pauseee]*

The purpose is “so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.” [pauseeee]

If we knew exactly what would happen in the future, we wouldn’t be led to trust the Lord.

⁶ A reference to Romans 8:28.

⁷ Job 1:21.

So the uncertainty of tomorrow causes us to depend on God today. *[pauseeee]*

So let me ask you: does the uncertainty of the future lead you to trust God's control, or be consumed with anxiety or despair? *[pause]*

The key is to remember the sovereignty of God over every day, both easy and hard. *[pause]*

So when you are tempted to despair, consider God and His work. *[pause]*

Life won't always be as straight as we expected, but we have a "God [who] draws straight with crooked lines," as the familiar saying goes. *[pauseeee]*

Wisdom and money have advantages, but also, limits—they can't fully prevent you from all adversity, so we must trust the Lord each and every day. *[pause]*

Likewise, wisdom and money may provide some limited, temporary security, but ultimate security is found in the hand of God. *[pause]*

When we live by wisdom and genuinely trust the Lord, that's how we can live rightly amid adversity. *[pauseeee]*

This passage shows us that...

We can respond to adversity with folly or with wise trust in God.

Without a doubt, we all face adversity in our lives. *[pause]*

Some of you are in it now, and it's so hard. *[pause]*

Some of you have just gotten out of it, and others of you will face it someday in the future. *[pause]*

The question isn't *whether* we will face adversity, but how we will respond to it when it comes.

Therefore, since adversity will come, we need to beware of the temptations that come along with it. *[pause]*

Will we compromise, become impatient, angry, and overly nostalgic?

Or will we live today with wisdom and faith, knowing that God's in control, no matter what? *[pauseeee]*

When hardship comes, folly says, "Be angry at God," or, "Just give up, it's hopeless, look around you at all that has happened."

But wisdom says, "God's in control of the good times and the bad." *[pause]*

So true wisdom worships even amid the pain, even amid the uncertainty, and even amid the adversity.⁸ *[pauseeeee]*

Adversity and our lack of control reminds us of our helplessness, apart from God, to save ourselves. *[pause]*

We needed the Lord to step in...

For we sinned against God, and there's no way for us to do the Law perfectly or attain a certain standard of righteousness on our own to merit Heaven. *[pause]*

But the good news of Jesus Christ met us in our helplessness and lack of control by reaching down in sovereign grace. *[pauseee]*

Jesus Christ did what we couldn't, living a perfect righteous life, then died the death that we deserved, and rose again.

And now when we place our faith in Him, we are counted as righteous before God, trusting only what He has done, not our own works. *[pauseee]*

We were helpless and unable to control our salvation, but that's why we needed Christ, who did it all for us.

And now, through faith in Him, our lives have been eternally preserved. *[pause]*

He has turned our relationship with God from crooked to straight, and we can't help but be joyful! *[pause]*

For us, our former days of darkness and death have given way to wondrous days of light and life, due to knowing Jesus Christ, and we look forward in faith to the future days of living with Him forever. *[pauseeee]*

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, then that means that the adversity and helplessness of your life has led you to wise trust in Christ for salvation. *[pause]*

So if you have wisely trusted Him with your soul, then know that you can *and* should wisely trust Him today.

⁸ In Job 1:20, Job worships even amid the loss. (See Job 2:9–10 for a great example of someone responding with folly and another person with wise trust in the Lord.)