

Fact Sheet for **“Fine and Pleasant Miseries”** **Ecclesiastes 7:1-6**

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“A Fine and Pleasant Misery” by Patrick F. McManus
“Camping was a fine and pleasant misery.”

Older camping gear, campfires, cooking, smoke, rain, and yellow jackets

Ecclesiastes is a book of high wisdom. In this book Solomon looks at life with the wisdom God gave him and has written down his observations and conclusions. Some of those are uncomfortable and go against modern culture. All of us would like to enjoy life at all times, but life doesn't work out that way. It never will. There are good times, and there are bad times. It works out that way even if we make all the right choices because God has designed life that way (Eccl. 7:14).

Here's the real question... in the unpleasant times are there opportunities for us to grow in wisdom, to make great commitments, and to respond to life's challenges from a position of strength. Obviously... yes! The tough times can be described as fine and pleasant miseries. If we don't think with wisdom tough times can point out our spiritual immaturity.

ESV ¹ **A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.**

"A good name" – reputation, what people remember you for

"precious ointment" - oil mixed with perfume

See Amos 6:4-6 and “finest oils”

Consider the women with the alabaster jars of perfume.

Parallel passages: Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12:1-8

An earlier similar event: Lk. 7:36-50

Nard is an aromatic amber-colored oil derived from a flowering plant which grows in the Himalayas. The oil has, since ancient times, been used as a perfume.

ESV ¹ **A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.**

In other words it is better to come to the end of life with a good reputation than to have a celebrated birth which, because of your own foolishness, may result in your poor reputation. Developing a good reputation requires a lifetime of work and diligence. Solomon himself fell prey to the foolishness of worshipping idols in later life, and this has forever tarnished his reputation (1 Kings 11). Consider what he says in Eccl. 10:1.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 now sets the tone for much of what follows.

² **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.**

"house of mourning" – these words describe the mourning for someone who is has
just died

"house of feasting" - party time!

Several versions rightly translate the last line as "the living **should** take this to heart." Funerals and memorial services are always times to take stock of your own life. You're here, then you are gone. Life goes by all too quickly. Reputation, good or bad, is built every day.

³ **Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.**

Sorrow can be reflective of a serious mood that is good for the heart. It can also be reflective of a resentful and vengeful spirit. However, it can often be the birthplace of personal wisdom. (Compare Solomon's words with Ps. 90:12 and James 1:2-4.) Times of sorrow can be opportunities to grow in wisdom. They can also be times that only point out our spiritual immaturity. It all depends on how we respond in those times.

⁴ **The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.**

NLT **Ecclesiastes 7:4** A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time.

This is a thought that runs counter to our culture. We want to have a good time and to enjoy ourselves. If there is sorrow in our lives then we are not achieving what we want to achieve. We are missing something. The people who have made it enjoy life all the time. They are rich. They are healthy. They win. They are appreciated. That's the good life. Then we look at our own lives and feel we often have missed out. Life is not unfolding as we would desire. What are we doing wrong? But Solomon says that God has designed life with adversity as well as prosperity. We are wise if we consider our lives, their brevity, and what is wise and good to do. Sadness can be a wonderful opportunity to grow in wisdom.

⁵ **It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.**

Learn to listen to the rebuke of those who have a measure of wisdom. Consider long and carefully what they say, then make your decisions. Don't just look for someone who says, "Yeah, go for it!" That may not be the best advice.

⁶ **For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.**

These tough times in life can be described as fine and pleasant miseries.

Each and every week of the year there is a sadness that I encounter. I consistently encounter people who either need to get saved, or who need to get serious about their Christianity, but aren't interested in making any changes..

My words not only fall on deaf ears but they are often spurned. I am frequently reminded of Solomon's words...

ESV **Ecclesiastes 1:15** What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

Why? Because their choices are theirs, not mine. However I can reflect on my own life with each sadness and ask, "Is there any area of my life that I have been resisting the voice of God in? The choice to do something about those areas is mine.

Times of sadness can be fine and pleasant miseries, and can be the fertile ground for great spiritual decisions. Value Solomon's wisdom here.