

# The Surprising Virtue of Sadness and Discouragement

Dark Clouds, Silver Linings-part 3

October 19, 2014

## **DAY 1: Discouragement: is there anything really worth living for?**

1. We've looked at the surprising virtue of loneliness and emptiness. This week we'll look at the surprising virtue of discouragement.

2. One way to think about the "dark clouds" we're studying is that they are more than just "problems to be solved." They are also lights on a dashboard that point us to a greater problem *IN* us than the dark cloud *in front* of us!

*Ecclesiastes 1:2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*

<sup>3</sup> *What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*

<sup>4</sup> *A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.*

<sup>5</sup> *The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises.*

<sup>6</sup> *The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.*

<sup>7</sup> *All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.*

<sup>8</sup> *All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

<sup>9</sup> *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.*

<sup>10</sup> *Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already, in the ages before us.*

<sup>11</sup> *There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to happen among those who come after."*

3. "Preacher" here means, "one who calls the congregation together." Solomon IS the king, but he is using his "diary" (this book) to gather folks who will listen.

4. Read verse 2. This is the theme of this book of the bible. Sounds strange, doesn't it? "Vanity" means "empty," or "meaningless."

5. What do you think is his point?

6. Solomon is on a search for the meaning of life! He is looking at every nook and cranny he can. Well, almost. He is looking at every nook and cranny *on the horizontal plane*. His perspective is based on using his "wisdom" to figure out the meaning of life.

7. He's drawn a terrible conclusion because his perspective and his thinking is faulty, but there is a silver lining to his discouragement! It promotes a deeper search!

## DAY 2: Discouragement: from skewed perspective

1. Let's take a closer look at the verses we introduced yesterday. Read his observations about life and ask yourself, what conclusions is he drawing?

2. Underneath each verse, use any of the words below which you think represent Solomon's conclusions.

- \* Sense of futility
- \* Frustration
- \* No seeming rhyme or reason
- \* No apparent explanation
- \* Meaningless
- \* Disillusioned
- \* Empty
- \* Treadmill
- \* Left alone in the universe
- \* Hardship
- \* Injustice
- \* Why?
- \* Loss of control
- \* Nothing changes
- \* I don't get it!

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### DAY 3: Discouragement: "I can't make any sense out of this."

1. You may be saying, "Wow, Seth, this is a dreary week!" Yup. If life was *encouraging on its own*, we'd never see the deep problem of sin within us. We'd never turn to God as our only remedy. As many have said, "It's not until we feel the heat that we see the light."

2. One silver lining of discouragement is that it prompts a deeper, *vertical* search about God and the real purpose and meaning of life *from His perspective*, not ours.

3. Unfortunately for Solomon, his renewed search is fueled by a *horizontal* perspective and the belief that man's greatest meaning comes from personal fulfillment.

*Ecclesiastes 1:12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.*

<sup>13</sup> *And I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with.*

<sup>14</sup> *I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

<sup>15</sup> *What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.*

<sup>16</sup> *I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."*

<sup>17</sup> *And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.*

<sup>18</sup> *For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

4. Go back and underline every word or phrase that represents Solomon's belief that **he could figure it out** on his own, by a horizontal look, only.

5. Circle words that indicate his arrogance that he can figure this out on his own.

6. After applying himself to "wisdom," what ironic and tragic conclusion does he draw at the end of his search? (Eccl. 1:18)

7. What do you wish you could tell Solomon?

8. Do you find yourself making observations about life *primarily from the horizontal perspective*, and then drawing conclusions that are discouraging?

## **DAY 4: Encouragement: Solomon FINALLY looks up!!!**

1. Discouragement can just drill deeper and deeper holes, until we again look at life from God's point of view.

*Ecclesiastes 3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

<sup>2</sup> *a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*

<sup>3</sup> *a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

<sup>4</sup> *a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

<sup>5</sup> *a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

<sup>6</sup> *a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

<sup>7</sup> *a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

<sup>8</sup> *a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

<sup>9</sup> *What gain has the worker from his toil?*

<sup>10</sup> *I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with.*

<sup>11</sup> *He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

2. Solomon had made observations that life was meaningless, just random. He now sees rhyme, rhythm, order and patterns that suggest meaning.

3. What strikes you the most from this passage in Eccl. 3?

4. What reasons does this passage indicate as to why Solomon suddenly had such clarity about life?

5. Ecc. 3:11 is most intriguing to me. He draws some magnificent conclusions.

a. *"God had made everything beautiful in its time."*

1. What does this verse say about God's purpose, His work, and His involvement in our lives?

2. What does this verse say about time?

b. *"He has put eternity into man's mind..."*

1. Solomon suddenly has, not only a vertical perspective but an eternal perspective!!!

2. What strikes you about today's study most?

## DAY 5: Meaning is rooted in God

1. Solomon sees meaning in the big picture **and** in daily life!

*Ecclesiastes 3:12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;*

<sup>13</sup> *also that it is God's gift to man that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.*

<sup>14</sup> *I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him.*

<sup>15</sup> *That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.*

2. What meaning does Solomon see in daily life? (Eccl. 3:12-13)

3. Underline the words in Eccl. 3:12-13 that are the opposites of discouragement! How does God enable us to be encouraged and rejoice in the things of daily life?

4. Let's unpack the last two verses.

*"I know that whatever God does endures forever..."* (Eccl 3:14a)

\* Instead of the seeming randomness of life, Solomon sees that God's work is to make important things permanent, right into eternity!

*"... nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him."*

\* God's work will be seen as comprehensive and total. Whatever needed to happen will have happened.

\* God works in this life in such a way that man should recognize their need of God and to follow His ways (the fear of God)

<sup>15</sup> *That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away."*

\* What which needs to be done, God has done in the past.

\* God will persistently work to bring about what needs to be done, no matter how long it takes.

5. Life will ultimately make sense only when we see life from God's point of view.