

Turning Down the Noise
Week 5: The Noise of Comfort
Ecclesiastes 7:1-6

Coffee Illustration

1. Happy Mother's Day! I hope you're able to sit down and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Grab something from the Coffee Truck outside!
2. I got my love of Taco Bell from my mom, but my addiction to coffee from my dad!
3. Brewed it just about every way imaginable over the years...drip, espresso machine, French Press, pour over, which feels more like a chemistry experiment than making coffee, in a pinch, I've even gone with instant!
4. Several years ago, Alex Gurtcheff introduced me to the AeroPress. Probably my favorite cup of coffee. The extraction process works like an espresso, but you're also allowing the grounds to sit in the water for a little bit like a French Press.
5. Takes a little more work. I suppose you could just fill a mug with beans and pour some water over them, but which cup would you rather drink?

There's no question which one was easier to make. One cup required boiling water, grinding beans, waiting for it to bloom and steep, applying pressure to extract the coffee. It took some effort.

The other cup is just beans and water. No heat. No grinding. No pressure. No waiting. Nothing uncomfortable is happening here. But nothing meaningful is happening, either.

Like making a good cup of coffee, **I think God often does His best work in uncomfortable places.**

And that's not to say that all discomfort is meaningful, or that all suffering is good, or caused by God so He can do something in us. I don't believe that. What I do believe, and what Scripture teaches, is that God can, and often does, use discomfort and pain and difficulties in our life to produce something rich inside of us. Something that can't be developed apart from some discomfort.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this in Romans 5:2-5, **"And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but *we also glory in our sufferings*, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."**

James, the half-brother of Jesus, writes in his letter, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

And C.S. Lewis writes in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, “We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but **shouts in our pains**: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

All of these writers are just building on the wisdom of the teacher in Ecclesiastes. The text that Maggie read for us doesn’t make much sense to a world that is obsessed with comfort and convenience, and I’d say that’s us.

If you’re not sure about that, just look around you the next time you’re standing in line or waiting in a lobby. You’ll see just about everyone on their phone. We’re all so quick to distract ourselves from even the most minor inconvenience with the noise of comfort. For many people, their phone is like Linus’ blanket. It provides that sense of comfort or distraction.

And we’ve been doing this long before 2007. Humanity has a long history of trying to avoid pain. Avoid silence and awkward situations. We’re really good at trying to avoid grief and we go out of our way to avoid correction from others. We spend a lot of mental and emotional energy trying to avoid these uncomfortable places.

And yet, Ecclesiastes 7 says that some of the best lessons in life can only be discovered in the places we spend a lot of effort trying to avoid. Look at the text again...(READ Eccl. 7:1-6)

So, let’s outline this text to make sure we understand what the Teacher is saying...

Mourning > Feasting – Going to a funeral is better than going to a party?

Sorrow > Laughter – You’ve heard, “Laughter is the best medicine.” Ecclesiastes says, “Nope, it’s actually being really sad. That’s what’s good for the heart.”

Rebuke > Praise – Someone criticizing you is better than someone encouraging you? How many of us want to sign up for that?

Death > Birth – I’ve never done a funeral that was more joyous than visiting a newborn.

I gotta be honest...sometimes I read through Ecclesiastes and I just want to ask the author, “Hey buddy. **Are you okay?** Everything alright in your world?”

It would be easy to read this passage and be like, “Whelp, I guess God wants me to be miserable. Glad I came to church today. Happy Mother’s Day, mom. Thanks for bringing me into this wretched world!”

But remember what I said earlier. God often does His best work in uncomfortable places, and it doesn’t get much more uncomfortable than death, mourning, sorrow, rebuke. I think what the teacher is saying to those willing to listen is, “Don’t discount the places of pain in your life and constantly chase after the noise of comfort.”

The Teacher isn’t glorifying sadness for its own sake. I think he’s exposing the shallow illusion that comfort is always good and pain is always bad. His critique is against escapism, not necessarily comfort or joy. Healthy joy is Biblical. Chasing comfort to distract you from the realities of life...that can lead to some dangerous places.

Ecclesiastes is a part of the Wisdom Literature in the Bible. It’s a genre of books like Proverbs and Job that focus on practical living, ethical behavior, and our philosophical search for meaning. And so, Ecclesiastes is written for people who long for wisdom. And in chapter 7, the Teacher tells us, if you want to find it, you have to look in some unexpected places.

A life of wisdom is found, not by looking through the windshield, but the rearview mirror. Which is why the day of death is better than the day of birth. We know a whole lot more at the end of our life than we do at the beginning.

A life of wisdom is more easily discovered in a house of mourning than a house of feasting. Eugene Peterson puts it like this in the Message, “You learn more at a funeral than at a feast. After all, that’s where we’ll end up. We might discover something from it.” (Eccl. 7:2, MSG)

This verse didn’t make a lot of sense to me when I was younger, but I’ll tell you, every time I preach a funeral, I go home and hug my wife a little more tightly. Put down my phone and give more attention to my girls. I think some of the clearest thinking and reflecting we do in our own life is at funerals, which is why the Psalmist says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

The wise person doesn’t want to *live* in the House of Mourning, but they’re not afraid to visit it from time to time. Most people just want to avoid it all together and make the House of Pleasure their permanent residence. Always keep the party going. Distract yourself from feeling discomfort. Don’t sit long enough for the pain of reality to catch up to you.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the Teacher says there is a time for everything, even a time to weep and a time to laugh. And in chapter 7, I think he’s showing us that **there is a sadness that heals and a laughter that hides.**

Some of us grew up in a home where you never talked about the hard things, only the happy things, and now you don't know what to do with your sadness. It feels wrong. Maybe it even feels unfaithful. But the Bible teaches us how to lament. How to bring our sorrows to God and process through them with Him.

We can try to avoid pain and escape reality by turning up the noise of comfort and laughter to distract ourselves from it, but that's all it is...noise. It's loud, but it doesn't produce anything of substance inside of us. But, there's a kind of sadness that cleanses our hearts. Tears that bring clarity and healing. The Teacher is saying, "Don't be afraid of those."

God often does His best work in those uncomfortable places. Places of heat and grinding, pressing and waiting. The honest words from a friend who loves us enough to tell us what we *need* to hear, not just what we *want* to hear. Moments that make us reflect on our life and think about what the people we love will remember about us when we're gone.

The way of comfort says, "Avoid anything hard." But the way of wisdom says, "Some things can only be formed in us through hardship."

Ecclesiastes 7 is written for those of us who try to escape the realities and pains of life by filling it with the noise of parties, feasts, laughter, and pleasure. It's written for those of us who *reach for the safety blanket* when we feel even just the slightest discomfort.

Those things aren't bad, they're just empty. The Teacher ends this section by saying, "This too is meaningless." It's chasing after the wind. It's what's left over when a bubble pops, or what you get from a cup of beans and cold water. Comfort isn't bad, it just doesn't typically produce anything meaningful inside of us.

So, the question I'm challenging you to ask yourself today is, "Where do I run when life gets uncomfortable?" What's your escape. Your pressure relief valve? Your safety blanket? And again, I'm not even saying it's necessarily a bad thing, but do you find yourself turning to it before you turn to the Lord? Do you run to it more than you run into the arms of Father?

Could it be that the noise of comfort you are seeking from that...thing, whatever it is...is actually keeping you from hearing the wisdom of God that can only be found in the places you're trying to avoid?

I'm not saying that you need to run to the house of mourning or pain or discomfort. I'm just saying, don't be afraid to walk into it. To linger for a little bit. Because it's usually in that place that God does His best work in us. And we can shortchange that work by filling our lives with noise and distractions and comforts, but our Heavenly Father has so much more for us. **We settle for relief when God wants to restore us.**

So, my challenge this week is to turn down the noise of comfort in your life. When you feel tempted to run from discomfort, lean into it. Keep your phone in your pocket while you wait

in line. Turn off your radio while you drive to work. Spend some time praying through the pain you're trying to avoid. Don't settle for relief when maybe God wants to restore something inside of you.

As I've thought about that this week, I can't help but think about Jesus. Jesus had lived for all eternity in the comfort of Heaven, but He gave that up to enter into the brokenness of our world. And through it all, He taught us how to run to the Father when life gets loud. How to grieve when someone we love dies. How to mourn that pain we all experience. How to take this life seriously without taking ourselves too seriously.

More than anyone who has ever lived, Jesus knew that God often does His best work in uncomfortable places. And so He trusted Him in the Garden, and at His trial. Jesus trusted the Father as He was beaten and stripped and crucified on a cross. Instead of settling for relief, He knew that God had sent Him on a mission to restore what sin had broken.

And three days after His death, the Father turned mourning into dancing and replaced tears with joy. He raised Jesus from the dead and now, all who trust in Him can find new life and the hope of eternity with Him.

If God can do that, imagine what He can do in your life when you turn down the noise of comfort and run to the Father who promises to do more than just give you relief. He wants to restore you in those trials you face and make you new.

Response Time