

“Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries, but Mind the Pits”
(Ecclesiastes 6:10–7:14)(3.12.23)

Ecclesiastes 6:10–7:14 (NIV84)

¹⁰ Whatever exists has already been named,
and what man is has been known;
no man can contend
with one who is stronger than he.

¹¹ The more the words,
the less the meaning,
and how does that profit anyone?

¹² For who knows what is good for a man in life, during
the few and meaningless days he passes through like a
shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the
sun after he is gone?

7 A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of death better than the day of birth.

² It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of every man;
the living should take this to heart.

³ Sorrow is better than laughter,
because a sad face is good for the heart.

⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

⁵ It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke
than to listen to the song of fools.

⁶ Like the crackling of thorns under the pot,
so is the laughter of fools.

This too is meaningless.

⁷ Extortion turns a wise man into a fool,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.

⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.

⁹ Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.

¹⁰ Do not say, "Why were the old days better than
these?"

For it is not wise to ask such questions.

¹¹ Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing
and benefits those who see the sun.

¹² Wisdom is a shelter
as money is a shelter,
but the advantage of knowledge is this:
that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

¹³ Consider what God has done:

Who can straighten
what he has made crooked?

¹⁴ When times are good, be happy;
but when times are bad, consider:
God has made the one
as well as the other.

Therefore, a man cannot discover
anything about his future.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries, but Mind the Pits"**

INTRODUCTION:

Yesterday morning, Carol and I left the house at 6 AM for Philadelphia International Airport. She is going to visit our son Joshua and his children. We are on the expressway, and she asks me how my sermon is going.

I explain that I have plenty of material, but I have not actually started writing it yet. I still needed to make sure of the meaning to the lyrics of the song, "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries." It was composed in 1931 and was performed in vaudeville, even right here in Atlantic City. The Rudy Vallee version spent five weeks in the top-10 pop music charts.

There are several versions of the song's last verse and that was my problem verse. Carol pulled out her phone and starts searching the Internet for me and sharing what she finds.

Very shortly after passing the Farley Service Area on the Atlantic City Expressway, I realized there was a problem ahead. There were a few vehicles in various positions across the roadway. I hit the brakes.

The accident must have happened a minute or so before we got to it. As I slowed down, I saw a minivan in the center lane that bore the worst of the crash. To the right was a lot of debris. There was a good Samaritan that was trying to direct traffic.

I have no idea what happened, or how it would end. What had been their plans for the day? Were they on their way home from work? Were they on their way to work? Maybe, one of them was on their way to the airport too. What I do know is that their day was dramatically different than what they had planned.

Carol was going to enjoy a bowl of cherries, but these poor folk were going to have a day in the pits.

BODY:

Why am I talking about this 90-year-old song? Because it reflects many of the same thoughts in our scripture. In fact, much of what Qoheleth, the teacher and preacher, who is speaking in this scripture, addresses in Ecclesiastes, is addressed in "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries." Some commentators call Qoheleth the

Searcher, because he is searching for meaning. And so goes the human race in every generation. **And** we struggle to find meaning today too.

Here are the lyrics of the song:

LIFE IS JUST A BOWL OF CHERRIES

People are queer, they're always crowing, scrambling and rushing about;

Why don't they stop someday, address themselves this way?

Why are we here? Where are we going? It's time that we found out.

We're not here to stay; we're on a short holiday.

Life is just a bowl of cherries.

Don't take it serious; life's so mysterious.

You work, you save, you worry so,

But you can't take your dough when you go, go, go.

So keep repeating it's the berries,

The strongest oak must fall,

The sweet things in life, to you were just loaned

So how can you lose what you've never owned?

Life is just a bowl of cherries,

So live and laugh at it all.

Life is just a bowl of cherries.

Don't take it serious; it's too mysterious.

At eight each morning I have got a date,

To take my plunge 'round the Empire State.

You'll admit it's not the berries,

In a building that's so tall;
There's a guy in the show, the girls love to kiss;
Gets thousands a week just for crooning like this:
Life is just a bowl of. .. Aw, nuts!
So live and laugh at it all!

Remember that this song was during the Depression. Imagine a period of time that is defined as a state of depression for a whole country and culture. This song also got its start in Vaudeville where people went to be entertained, to have a few laughs, and to forget for a short time what they faced in their daily walk.

The Stock Market Crash of 1929 was not a one-day event. There were several subsequent quake-like tremors that followed. The Roaring Twenties, the pursuit of wealth and merriment, led to a decade long time in the doldrums of depression. One source said that this song represented the philosophy of the Depression that helped people cope.

Even the end of the song has a mocking quality. The singer is making fun of himself that he is making a very good living singing about this crazy world. We cannot make sense of it no matter how hard we try.

The part that confused me was "At eight each morning I have got a date, To take my plunge 'round the Empire State." This is a reference to people jumping off of buildings (like the Empire State Building in New York City) to commit suicide.

Life is hard, it can be the pits. Each day may be your last. The crooner is saying that you might consider suicide

every day but DON'T. Life is just a bowl of. .. Aw, nuts! So live and laugh at it all! Adjust your perspective. Enjoy the appeal of that bowl of cherries and their sweetness. Don't bite down too hard though because you must mind the pits.

The commonly held belief today that there was a sudden rash of suicides due to the stock market crash is a myth. In fact, in the fall of 1929, after the crash, saw a lower suicide rate in New York City than the summer before.

So, how did this myth arise? I believe it came out of an attempt to come to grips with death by using humor. Yes, suicide rates were high during the Depression but not directly tied the 1929 Crash. But times were very hard. This is an excerpt from a newspaper article:

"Dark humor may have also contributed to the myth. The day after Black Thursday, many Americans read the [following quip from humorist Will Rogers](#) in their newspapers: "When Wall Street took that tail spin, you had to stand in line to get a window to jump out of, and speculators were selling spaces for bodies in the East River." Vaudeville comedian Eddie Cantor, who lost most of his money in the Crash, [soon after joked](#) that when he requested a 19th-floor room at a New York City hotel, the clerk asked him: "What for? Sleeping or jumping?""

Qoheleth is sharing his investigation into the meaning of life and for life. He is pushing back against the conventional wisdom of his day and sometimes he is agreeing with it. We must remember to keep in mind the whole book of Ecclesiastes and not take particular

segments out of context. Also, Qoheleth did not have what we have, the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Preacher circles back around to previous thoughts and examples and explores them from a slightly different angle. In this portion of scripture, the key verse is at the end: When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. We must take the good with the bad. God made the sweet appealing cherry; but God made them with the pits in the center.

God is SOVEREIGN. God is the ONE that no man may contend with. God is the One who knows what no man can know. We cannot tell the future and we cannot control the future; even though we try to do both.

Isaiah 46:9–10 (NIV84)

⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago;

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me.

¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning,

from ancient times, what is still to come.

I say: My purpose will stand,

and I will do all that I please.

Of course, it is easy to understand why we want to try to know and control our future. Psalm 144:4 (NIV84) "Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow." How do we face the certainty of death and what benefit is

there in doing so? Psalm 90:12 (NIV84) "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Qoheleth often compares the wise and the foolish. In an earlier chapter, he tells us that the fate of the fool and the wise man is the same – death. This is a mystery, a chasing after the wind. Then he goes on in another place to say, "Nevertheless, **it is** better to be wise than to live like a fool."

One aspect about this argument that came as an "aha moment" for me is this: On the human scale, we might see one person as wiser than another. But compared to the wisdom of God, no man is wise. 1 Corinthians 1:25 (NIV84) For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

As Qoheleth points out, when you can tell that there are too many words being used, it should be a red flag: "the more words, the less meaning." That is probably true for preachers too! We do not have time now to explore each of the proverbs in our text. We will do that during this Tuesday's Bible Study.

"Warren Wiersbe gives practical words of why we want to be wise instead of foolish: *Wisdom gives us perspective so that we aren't discouraged when times are difficult or arrogant when things are going well. It takes a good deal of spirituality to be able to accept prosperity as well as adversity, for often prosperity does greater damage....*

God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble."

Here is a real-life example of how to respond to tragedy in life: It is from an article by Laura Buchanan, titled – "Finding the Resilience to Overcome Disaster."

"In the darkness of night on December 10, 2021, an F4 tornado and its 190 mph winds battered First United Methodist Church in Mayfield, Kentucky. Huddled in the basement seeking secure shelter, the Rev. Joey Reed and his wife held onto each other while the 100-year-old building collapsed above them.

"I was thinking to myself, this may be my last few minutes on earth," said Reed.

The Reeds were able to walk away unharmed from the ruins of the building. In the days following, Reed provided guidance, encouragement, leadership and comfort to his congregation, the Mayfield community and a much larger audience, as national news outlets, including [CBS News](#) and [CNN](#), asked him to share his account of the storm."

Let's watch the video interview.

CONCLUSION:

The Shaping of a Disciple By Dale Martin Stone

"This helps us understand how God lovingly uses the pain in life to mold us into what He knows we ought to be."

When God wants to drill a man,
And thrill a man, and skill a man,

When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part,
When He yearns with all His heart
To build so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Then watch God's methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects;
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him,
Making shapes and forms which only
God Himself can understand,
Even while His man is crying,
Lifting a beseeching hand...
Yet God bends but never breaks
When man's good He undertakes;
When He uses whom He chooses,
And with every purpose fuses
Man to act, and act to man,
As it was when He began;
When God tries His splendor out,
Man will know what He's about!

Life is a bowl of cherries, but there are always pits. Don't break your teeth on the pits, but remember that God is always with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Jesus' parting words, **"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Amen and amen. Let us pray.