

Week Four: *Braving the Storms*
Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. As we dig deeper into what it means to recognize and appreciate both the good and the bad on our journey, take a look at Ecclesiastes 7:13-14. When thinking about the plans for your life, what do you feel God has made “crooked”?
2. If you were allowed to make “straight” or have all your plans succeed, what are some things that come to mind that you may have missed out on if you had your way?
3. Last week we focused on enjoying the good times. What kind of mindset or character is needed to know that there is much to learn from bad times?
4. Why do you think that God allows us to experience bad times?
5. Read the words of Jesus in John 16:33. How can we have peace in the midst of the storm?
6. End your FIFTEEN by recalling all the ways God provides for you. Having a grateful heart keeps us from feeling that we are owed anything. Ask God to help reflect back to others the grace he has given you.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

7. Spend your FIFTEEN today examining Ecclesiastes Chapter 7 in its entirety. As you read, write down two or three main thoughts that stick out most to you.
8. Based upon what you choose to write down, examine these truths and reflect on where you have seen them play out in your life or the lives of others.
9. What spiritual disciplines can you practice to become more contemplative, sober-minded, and wise?
10. Pay special attention to verse 8. Here is how it is read from The Message. “Endings are better than beginnings. Sticking to it is better than standing out.” Reflect on a time where you have seen this to be true in your life. Did you see God’s hand at work in the middle of your journey, or was it made clear to you in the end?
11. Recognizing God’s presence through all circumstances in your life allows you to see with more clarity and sober-mindedness and also prompts you to celebrate his goodness. How will you plan to be fully present with God no matter your circumstance? (i.e. service to others, setting reminders, meditation...)

12. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, also incorporate a time later today to think about God's presence, promptings, and his Kingdom. Be deliberate in acting to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

13. Remembering that we are in Ecclesiastes and that for everything there is a "season," read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

14. In this passage, Paul is reminding the Thessalonians how they should behave in light of the anticipated return of Christ. Recall how you faced a "reckoning" of sorts. In other words, a time when things were going seemingly well, only to be awakened by a sudden jolt to your world.

15. What did you think about God in that circumstance?

16. Paul admonishes us to do a number of things as we live in this world which will be judged. Take time to closely identify those things in 1 Thessalonians 5 that we must do to live as children of the day.

17. Identify at least one characteristic above and examine ways to bring about a truer representation of Christ's Kingdom active in your life.

18. One of the benefits of a God-directed journey is that it is very, very personal. As you finish your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to give you openness to hear what he has to say to you and what may require your attention to align with his will.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

19. When the storms of life come in, we are most tempted to ask, "Why me?" Jesus was confronted with this question in Luke Chapter 13. Take some time to read Luke 13:1-5.

20. Some of the storms in life are a direct result of evildoers; some may be no one's fault but the result of living in a world feeling the effects of sin. What mistaken rationale is Jesus confronting when the people were asking for his thoughts on why these tragedies happened?

21. Jesus says that repentance is the only remedy for living in this fallen world. What does repentance mean to you?

22. Continue reading in Luke 13:6-8. What does the story of the fig tree have to do with repentance?
23. How is repentance related to how Paul admonishes us to live as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 on Day 3?
24. Finish your FIFTEEN by asking God to help focus you on the things that forward his Kingdom, remembering his grace poured out on your life through the cross.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

25. Take some time to recall a person that displayed tremendous peace and grace in their life despite the fact that the storms of life had descended upon them.
26. What do you think is necessary for a person to be so “anchored” during a time when life doesn’t make sense?
27. Jesus does give us a glimpse of how suffering has a purpose. Read the story of the man who was born blind in John Chapter 9.
28. Reflect on this story. In what ways were lives changed as a result of the healing given by Jesus? Think about all involved. How are “the thoughts of many hearts being revealed” as Simeon said in Luke 2:35?
29. God displays many times throughout the Bible that the bad events and circumstances of peoples’ lives can be redeemed and that trust and obedience are what he seeks. As you examine the cross of Christ, how is this true?
30. Finish your FIFTEEN today by praising God for his goodness and asking the Spirit to replace worries with reminders of all the ways he has provided for your needs, including the grace extended through his Son.