

**THE ECHO OF ETERNITY**  
**A Devotional Meditation from**  
**Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, 3:11-14, 12:1; Isaiah 53:4-6; Hebrews 5:7-10**  
**Albert J. McCarn**  
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The whole book of Ecclesiastes might be summarized by this statement:

Good judgment comes from experience.  
And experience? Well, that comes from poor judgment.

I do not know who gets credit for that bit of popular wisdom. I first saw it in a meme with a picture of singer – and notorious alcoholic – Dean Martin holding a drink in his hand. If we are honest, though, we see the truth in this ironically humorous statement.



We can also see its applicability to Solomon's commentary on life. The good news is that he concludes it well, writing:

So remember your Creator in the days of your youth: before the days of misery come, and years draw near when you will say: "I have no pleasure in them"— (Ecclesiastes 12:1 TLV)

The less encouraging news is that Solomon writes this as an old man, after a lifetime of seeking meaning and fulfillment in one thing after another. It's not that Solomon is exaggerating his misery; he actually had a rather good life. That's what makes the book so depressing. This man who had everything experienced the same twists and turns of life that we all experience. If he, with all his advantages, still went through seasons of talk-to-the-hand rebellion against his Creator, then what hope do we ordinary humans have?

But then that's also the beauty of Solomon's story, and of life. Consider Solomon's greatest attribute: his wisdom. Now listen to what he says about that –

I, *Kohélet* [the Preacher], am king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my heart to seek and examine by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a burdensome task God has given the sons of men to keep them occupied. I have seen all the deeds done under the sun; and behold, all is meaningless and chasing after the wind.

What is crooked cannot be made straight. What is missing cannot be counted. I spoke with my heart saying: "I have grown rich and increased in wisdom more than any who were before me over Jerusalem. Indeed, my heart has experienced much wisdom and knowledge." So I applied my heart to know wisdom as well as to know madness and folly. I learned that this too was pursuit of the wind. For with much wisdom comes much grief, and whoever keeps increasing knowledge, increases heartache. (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 TLV)

Can we get any more depressing? If the wisest man on earth says wisdom brings grief and heartache, then what reason have we to do anything more than seek whatever means we can find of alleviating our pain until we die?

That is the common answer, of course. Jimmy Buffet has been singing about this for decades. One of his earliest ballads, and still one of his best songs, is “He Went to Paris.”<sup>1</sup> Buffet drew his inspiration from his friendship with Eddie Balchowsky, a one-handed janitor and piano player in Chicago. Eddie lost his hand fighting against Fascism in the Spanish Civil War in 1938, but he never let that stop him from sampling life to its fullest.<sup>2</sup>



*Eddie Balchowsky in 1937 as a volunteer of the Spanish Republic's Abraham Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. (Photo via [The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives](#).)*

Eddie wasn't a good Christian by any means, but he seemed to flow through life without regrets. Sorrows, yes, but not regrets. That which didn't make sense in his worldview simply melted into the background in the great picture of life of which he was but a small portrait. Or so it seems in the character Jimmy Buffet describes in his song. That character is larger than Eddie Balchowsky, incorporating elements of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, and landing in the Caribbean setting so familiar to Buffet. He knows success, failure, pleasure, pain, happiness, grief, and so much more that a lifetime of extremes

deposited in his soul. Even the unspeakable sorrow Buffet sings about is part of the great picture – an indispensable part. Without it, the indescribable joy would be meaningless. That's why Buffet's character can say of his life, “Jimmy, some of it's magic, some of it's tragic, but I had a good life all the way.”

This is the testimony of one who may or may not have a hope of eternity. That's what makes it even more poignant, because it touches the foundation of our common humanity. All of us make bad choices from poor judgment, and all of us experience grief and pain beyond measure. How else do we know to advise our daughters not to go out with that boy because he brings trouble, or tell our sons not to hang out with that crowd because it will lead to a bad end? It's because we have lived that ourselves, and thus the heartache is multiplied when we see our children perpetuate the cycle of single mothers and absentee fathers.

And there are other griefs, which we know only too well. Is it because we are inherently evil that the cancer comes, or the dementia sets in, or the spouse walks out, or the economy collapses? No. It's because we are human. This is why our Divine Savior had to be human. Yes, He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and in doing so learned obedience – the kind of obedience to our Heavenly Father that makes it possible to carry His eternal Presence to the universe. And we are to learn from and follow His example.

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<sup>1</sup> Listen to “He Went to Paris” at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwaqJOsm9Lk>.

<sup>2</sup> Eddie's story has been told in many ways. One straightforward account is by Jessi Duncanson in “Eddie Balchowsky: Anti-Fascist of the Alleys,” *Narrating Memory: Students Remember the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, October 18, 2020 (<http://narratingmemory.com/index.php/2020/12/19/eddie-balchowsky-anti-fascist-of-the-alleyways/>).

How else do we learn the heart of the Father? After all, if we know grief and sorrow from the woes of this life, how much more does our Creator know from eons of human waywardness and self-inflicted pain?

This is why we seek wisdom. Not to find some magical insulation against the pain of this life, but to acquire the tools by which we can put that pain in context. It's the task of a lifetime – and beyond. Only with pain can we appreciate joy, and only through pain do we connect with the Father's heart. That is our purpose, and that is what Solomon's depressing book is all about. As he says,

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Moreover, He has set eternity in their heart—yet without the possibility that humankind can ever discover the work that God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and enjoy themselves in their lifetime. Also when anyone eats and drinks, and finds satisfaction in all of his labor, it is the gift of God. I know that everything that God does will endure forever. There is no adding to it or taking from it. God has made it so, that they will revere Him. (Ecclesiastes 3:11-14 TLV)

Eternity is in our hearts – even in the hearts of those among our sons and daughters, friends and acquaintances who do not acknowledge the Creator. All of them have the capacity to make sense of this life, but only those with connection to the Creator can live this life in the context of eternity. Perhaps the greatest blessing we can bestow is to live in such a way that everyone who meets us may hear the echo of eternity in their own heart.