

The Washington Post reported this week that 61 year old radio personality (Diana Nyad) is training to swim 103 miles across the Florida Straights from Cuba to Key West early this summer....(that is over 60 hours of continuous swimming in shark infested waters that are also laden with deadly man of war jellyfish...)

She tried it once before back in 1978... but a light Northeast wind.... that was predicted to die down.... instead strengthened to produce nasty 8 ft. swells that pushed her so far off course she had to quit...

She swam for over 24 hours....and ended up losing more ground than she gained....

- Can you imagine the **frustration**?

Yet, isn't that sometimes what it seems you are up against in your Christian life?

As you seek to swim against the tide of popular culture... and the temptations of your own flesh...with **demonic sharks** circling you day and night....

Careless words stinging you like jellyfish.... sapping away what little strength you have...

You feel like you are making **no progress** at all....but instead losing ground...?

God wants to give you some encouragement and INSTRUCTION....for the rest of your journey....from Ecclesiastes 8....

In a message I have entitled: **Wise Guys Win!**

We have been talking about Wisdom all through our study of Ecclesiastes....

Wisdom = the cumulative effect of you thinking God's thoughts...., and seeking to walk in His ways...

Might say that wisdom... is the MIND of God.... on display in day to day life...

So a **WISE GUY**... is not someone sarcastic..... or a practical joker...

He (or she) is someone that **walks** in God's wisdom...

Pretty obvious.... that **many** of the people you interact with....on a daily basis... do **not** walk in wisdom.... because.... they are not following God.

Solomon describes them aptly:

Ecclesiastes 10:3

"Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool."

It is easy to tell when someone does not believe in or know God.... they announce it loudly by the way they act....

FOOLS believe that **Nice Guys Finish Last**.....and so they seek to trample on anyone attempting to conduct themselves in the meekness of wisdom.

But... GOD says... If you are a follower of Christ...walking in His ways... the best you can....

not only will you **finish** the race... but you will be VICTORIOUS over the things which now seem to be defeating you in the fight...

Wise Guys Win!

First thing I would like to ask you to believe this morning....in the midst of whatever degree of darkness you feel you are in.....

1. You Will Shine

God is light... and in Him is no darkness at all.... God is so pure and holy that everything about Him is like light compared to darkness.....

Yet, when he looks upon our world under **sin**..... whether it be 2000 B.C. or 2011 A.D.... most of what he sees in the lives of people he created...is **DARKNESS**.....

Now, that is not how people down here see it..... we call popular people **STARS**....

We say successful students and business people.... have **BRIGHT** futures....

But in God's view..... it is those who walk with Him in righteousness that truly **stand out**: They are the God's Wise Guys...

Throughout the history of Israel... God delighted to make His Wise Guys **shine**..

Abraham was a desert wandering shepherd.... but as a godly old man... the Hittites of Canaan recognized his wisdom and said... You are as a PRINCE among us....

Joseph went down into Egypt a slave...but God caused wisdom to shine through him to the point where he was made 2nd in command of the whole empire....saving both Egypt and the nation of Israel from starvation...

Daniel was sent to Babylon as a youth.... but God so showed forth His glory through Daniel's wisdom...that within three years... this is what was said:

Daniel 1:20

"And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of

them, he found them **ten** times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom."

Hebrews 11 is replete with examples of God's wisdom on display in the world...through ordinary people who followed Him by faith in Christ.....and of whom God said the world was not worthy of them.....

But perhaps we can find no clearer example of this truth than....**Stephen**... the deacon of the early church... full of grace and power....who disputed with certain Jews who sought to **DISPROVE** the truth of the gospel.... They were throwing everything they could at him....

Acts 6:10

"But they **could not withstand** the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking."

So they tried to have him **arrested**... and brought malicious witnesses against him... but the glory of God shone through Stephen as He stood firm on the wisdom of the Scriptures he had been taught...

Acts 6:15

"And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

God will likewise cause YOU to stand out from the crowd.... He will cause you to SHINE like light in darkness.... as you walk in and proclaim His wisdom to this generation...

Solomon **already** knew that to be true.... in his day:

Ecclesiastes 8:1

" **Who** is like the wise?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face **shine**, and the hardness of his face is changed."

Just like the wise men I just showed you.....

As you ask the Holy Spirit to help you **UNDERSTAND** and rightly INTERPRET the truths of Scripture.... how they all point to and flesh out what it means to KNOW God....to WALK with God and to HOPE in God...

As you give your **affections** and your mind to GLORIFY Jesus in the way you think and live...

Helping others do the same.....

His WISDOM will begin to **change you** from the inside out.....

He will first melt the **calluses** of a HEART hardened by sin and **scarred** by pain..... with the overwhelming **goodness** of His....UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.... in Christ Jesus....

Then, he will show you how He is working out HIS eternal PLAN for you... even in ways you do not understand... how He is working even your **mistakes** together for GOOD....

Little by little that continual **SCOWL** you have worn so long... will begin to brighten...into a countenance of One who is beholding the glory of their RISEN King!...

ALL **so that** He can say about you.....

- Check her out!..... You there!unbeliever who is searching for truth.....SHE is a trophy of my grace.... and she knows it!.... **Watch** what she does when she stumbles she looks to my cross... receives forgiveness... and then begins again to walk in **MY light!** She's shining!
- Check **him** out..... Satanyou think you have this whole neighborhood bowing at your feet..... but I have preserved for MYSELF people a man like Him who follows me from the heart... who refuses to put SMUT before His eyes...

Who aims to live with his wife in an understanding way..... being devoted to her in sanctity...

and.... over there.....

- Check out that young guy at school.... who **FEARS** Me more than he fears being **ostracized** by the COOL people.....

In His heart he wants ME to shine in that pit of darkness he is in.... more than he craves acceptance...

Amidst all THIS.....amidst the MASSES of people you will see today....

- Consider Who is like **the WISE**??

No matter whether you feel like you are winning or losing the battle right now... in your Christian life....

To the degree that (by faith) you stand upon the truths of the gospel.... finding your **surety** in the promises of God.....seeking to proclaim His majesty to those He gives you opportunity to....

You **Are** Shining..... (whether you realize it or not)

And your future is even brighter:

Proverbs 4:18

"But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day."

Whatever glory is being seen through your life **NOW**... God promises that (while you will have trials and tribulations)... His glory will SHINE all the more through you in the days ahead... as He **purifies** you and makes you more like His Son...

Until ONE day... on that FINAL day.... you will SHINE perfectly in the IMAGE of the ONE in whom you have been created....

Matthew 13:43

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Some of you need to get your eyes off of the scoreboard of what others are saying about you... and about how you FEEL about yourself....

And look **exclusively** to what God says is going to happen in the end.... and is already beginning to happen now... even though you may not perceive it.....

Wise Guys Win!

Second truth I would like to point out from Eccles. 8....

Wise Guys Win (because)..

2. **Abusive Authorities are not Ultimate**

Abuse of every sort.... is not a new phenomenon. Ever since sin entered the world... people who find they have POWER over another... have been oppressing them to their HURT...

Paul teaches us... (in the full flower of the NT)... that GOD is the One who has established EVERY authority..... not just the good ones.....

Romans 13:1

" Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."

Human society... at every level is **BROKEN**....

Yet... within that brokenness..... God still chooses to establish authorities.... so that our lives will have degrees of protection and ORDER....

That includes:..... parents..... who act sinfully towards their children.....

It includes self centered, self-serving husbands.... who rule over their wives with an **iron** fist....

It includes crooked bosses..... who coerce employees into doing wrong... for the sake of their own gain....

It includes Kings and Presidents.... Governors... Mayors.... School Teachers.....

MANY of which who are MORE wicked than those under their authority.....

Bible says: **ALL** of them have been instituted by God....

Especially if you are currently under someone who abuses their authority over you for sinful purposes.....

There is no way you are going to believe God put them there.... unless you simply take Him at His Word.....by faith that He is good.....and WISE....

But... let's say by the grace of God.... you DO believe God's Word...

- HOW can we possibly LIVE and WORK and LEARN under authorities... who are abusive....

Solomon gives us some golden insights as he describes a court official who is **burdened** down under the oppression of a wicked despot but the same principles apply to ANY abusive authority in your life...

Ecclesiastes 8:2-6

"I say: Keep the king's command, because of God's oath to him. Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way. For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him."

We watched a **documentary** the other night called something like Inside the Presidency.... It showed just how basically... the President of the US... does essentially whatever he wants to do....

One former white house executive said... If he says he wants to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge at Noon today.... it is our job to figure out a way to get him up there and make it happen...

How much MORE...was and is that true... in a Kingdom where the King has ABSOLUTE authority?

Yet... God says here.... "**Keep** the King's command...."

Translation: **Obey** the laws of your country and the directives of your superiors...
All of them.... Even the ones you don't agree with...

UNLESS they are asking you to DISOBEY God..... then you are free....

(delicate: if anyone wants to talk about specific situations you are troubled with...I am happy to do that at the end of the service)

Why? Why should I obey this BULLY?

Because of God's oath to him.....(in other words) because that King... that President.... that Congress... that Governor....

Even if they are murdering babies...and stealing money... and having affairs.....

(all of which they will stand accountable for on the day of judgment)...

They have been placed in that position... at this particular time.... by **God Himself**.

In dealing with some of them.... you are going to have to practice **DISCRETION**....

You are going to have to be what Jesus calls : Wise as a serpent and innocent as a Dove...

Ecclesiastes 8:3

"Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases."

Because he is in authority over you... **don't SPEAK up** every time you disagree.... don't storm out of the room when he is saying something that hurts your ears...

- **Respect** his God given authority... RESPECT his position.... even when you can't respect who he is...

Ecclesiastes 8:5

"Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way."

Just like God gave Paul wisdom in dealing with the Roman governors... the Holy Spirit will give you discretion to know how to react when your authority is practicing evil. You will know the RIGHT time to speak... and the way to handle it...

What is essential.... is that you ask Him for grace to simply **obey** what your authority asks you to do.... unless it is sin....

Romans 13:2-3

"Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,"

I can't imagine the PAIN that some of you have endured under wicked authorities.... in your life....

Some of it is unspeakable... and God is **abhorred** by ALL of it..... He **hates** every perversion of His good gifts....

Especially when men HURT those they are supposed to be a blessing to....

I want you to find comfort today....that God says that He **KNOWS** your burden... and He has a plan to make you shine even out of the pit of your suffering....at just the right time...

Ecclesiastes 8:6

"For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him."

A more literal translation is "although man's **EVIL** lies heavy on him.." He is talking about the results of abusive authorities in people's lives....

It is a WEIGHT...a burden.... and it is HEAVY....

But God says... **TRUST** MY way.... listen for My timing..... and find grace to believe that I am providing a WAY to make you shine through this...

Just like I did for Joseph..... Just like I did for my own SON..... who bore a MUCH heavier burden of evil than you ever will....

Skip down to

Ecclesiastes 8:9

"All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man **to his hurt**."

Abusive authorities.... that wield power over people to their HURT.... are **not permanent**....nor are they **ULTIMATE**...

For the one thing they do not have power over is the day of their DEATH....

And once God causes them to perish..... they will reap the FURY of His wrath for their actions..... and their name will be remembered no more.

It is natural to ask.... But why ME God?

But (why do bad things happen to good people?) why did God decide I should have a wicked authority in my life?

Solomon says... it is something we CAN **not** figure out in this life.....

Ecclesiastes 8:14

" There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity."

It's MESSED UP! It is BACKWARDS....so it seems.... Solomon says it is EMPTY.. beyond searching out...

And it is okay to say..... I don't KNOW..... but I trust God... His ways are HIGHER than mine... and they are BETTER.

Take Encouragement from this.....

Wise Guys (alone) will Win.... (because)

3. God KNOWS Who Fears Him.

Solomon had a **bird's eye view** of people coming to the temple.... wearing their long robes... smiling... acting as if they were the most pious men and women of the land...

People thought WELL of them... praised them...right in the community where the wickedness had been carried out....

Then... at their FUNERAL.... everybody said how wonderful they were....

Solomon says... this too is MESSED UP!

Ecclesiastes 8:10

" Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity."

What about the WICKED in our day.....who go to church and make everybody believe that they are GOOD.... when in fact they have no fear of God whatsoever??

You who are WISE... understand and believe that while man looks on the outward appearance... **God** looks on the heart.....

Nothing is hidden that will not be uncovered....on that final day....

No matter how much you are pretending right now...the praise and admiration of men is soon to end...

God is calling you to REPENT of your wicked ways.... and turn to Christ...so that you might walk in the FEAR of the Lord....in the goodness of His forgiving love...

The FEAR of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom..... not church attendance.

God **KNOWS** who fears Him.... and who does not....

The FEAR of the LORD is the only thing that will **restrain evil**.... in your own life... and then in your parenting... then in society....

Ecclesiastes 8:11

"Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil."

The reason that parents should discipline their children... is the **teach them** the fear of the LORD....

The reason that the sentence handed down by a court of law... for someone guilty of a CRIME in society must be carried out speedily is so that the rest of the population can SEE and LEARN the consequences of what happens when you don't **FEAR the Lord.....**

Because any temporary judgment here on earth..... spanking.... loss of a privilege....jail time.... or even capital punishment....

Is meant to TEACH people to **FEAR** the One who can not only take their earthly life... but is able to cast them into hell.

The REASON God wants you.....to fear Him.... is so that it can go **WELL** with you...

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it **will be well** with **those who fear God**, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God."

KIDS... you can say your parents are **mean**.... or oppressive.... or lame....

But if they **LOVE** you...and they want it to go well with you... both here on earth and for eternity.... they are going to do their best to teach you the FEAR of the Lord....

So that you can be **WISE**.

The wicked are NOT so.... they will not stand in the judgment.

Last truth.....

Wise Guys Win.... (you need to understand)...

4. You are **Limited** by Design.

Harold Camping is not content to believe that Jesus is coming back for His people....

For whatever reasons... He thinks he should be able to KNOW and be the chief instrument in the world of publicizing the **exact DATE** of that return.....

Harold may claim to be wise.... but he does not yet understand... that he is LIMITED by design....

Like you and I.... He is a created being..... NOT the Creator....

It is SIN to want to rise to the place of God....

Satan's first temptation to mankind... was that they could **KNOW** what God was holding back from them.....

God has made each of you who are trusting in Jesus' payment on the cross for your sin....a **NEW** Creation....

A born again believer designed to be **INCREASINGLY** dependent on GOD....

As you walk with Christ and get more and more of His wisdom.....
..... the more you will realize how much you.... **DO NOT** know....

The more you will become content with the reality.... (through your increasing trust in God).... that there are some things you WILL **NEVER** FIGURE out.....

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17

"When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out."

Wise men and women.... know their **LIMITS**.....

they understand they can not CHANGE other people..... God does that...

They realize there are puzzling things about their lives..... the lives of their kids..... and the world in general.... that God does not intend for them to KNOW....

For their **GOOD**.....

So that one day in seven.... they can REST in their Creator.....

Instead of striving 24/7 to make something out of themselves.....

Wise Guys Will Win.....

As you trust in the Lord with all your heart..... and lean not on your own understanding....

But in ALL your ways..... acknowledge that **HE** is God.....and He will direct your path....

He will make your righteousness to SHINE like the noon day sky.....and you will be one among millions who together are PROOF that...

Wise Guys Win.

Psalm 149:4

"For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation."

Psalm 16:3

"As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."